

# THE FUTURE OF GAZA IN A CHANGING MIDDLE EAST



REPORT

Gaza, 2-5 February 2012

This report summarizes prospects for Gaza in light of the “Arab Spring” and increasing threats of a regional war. It is based on a visit of an international delegation, with a central focus on a two-day workshop and a series of private meetings.

While this report was under preparation, on 9 March 2012 an Israeli airstrike targeted and killed Zuhair al-Qaisi, head of the Popular Resistance Committees in Gaza. A series of reprisals and attacks were sparked, which left more than two dozen Palestinians dead (including Ayoub Assaliya and Nayif Qarmout, boys aged 13 and 15 respectively) and scores more injured. No fatalities were reported on the Israeli side, though there were reports of some injuries. School children throughout Southern Israel were kept home and the population once again lived in fear of incoming rocket attacks. In a meeting in the Knesset, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu pronounced, "Gaza is Iran." The winds of war blow harder.

The situation is urgent. The everyday people of this troubled region want and demand better lives.

3 April 2012



# The Future of Gaza in a Changing Middle East

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## Summary of Main Points

- Conditions in Gaza are harsh and unsustainable. Basic needs are not met, and a new generation is growing up in an environment that will foster radicalization. The occupation is viewed as the primary reason for the lack of quality of life for Gazans.
- The winds of war in the Middle East leave Gaza ever more vulnerable, as Israel and others consider Hamas to be “proxies” of Iran. If there is an attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities and any retaliation, Gaza will most likely suffer further attacks from Israel. The Gaza leadership finds this frustrating, as they say they are not involved in “any axis.”
- Reconciliation between different Palestinian parties is moving forward, despite perceived opposition from Israel and the USA. A challenging dialogue is underway between Hamas, Fatah, and to a certain extent also the Islamic Jihad, as they seek ways to overcome the legacy of internal struggles and power imbalances. In the context of moving forward on reconciliation, they are addressing key questions about the future Palestinian State and its governance. This is a healthy process, though its results are far from clear.
- The extent to which Hamas and other parties can accept reliance on non-violence as a strategy was discussed at length. While some Hamas leaders outside Gaza have been supporting a non-violent strategy, seen from Gaza the perspectives may appear different. In Gaza there is often an exchange of fire with the Israelis, causing many casualties and fatalities, mainly among the Gaza population. There are, however, those who believe that non-violence may be a more useful strategy. In any case, an agreed and verifiable ceasefire is always an option.
- Negotiations with Israel are viewed as a failure. While there is commitment on all sides at the highest levels to a future Palestinian state, based on 1967 borders and with Jerusalem as its capital, there is a near unanimous belief that Israel has been negotiating only for the sake of “buying time” and that it has not been acting in good faith. Fatah has paid a heavy political price for this lack of progress. Now Palestinians across the spectrum are looking again at some of the fundamental precepts of the 1993 Oslo agreement, and are reconsidering whether there are alternative ways forward, including

a new structure to replace the Palestinian Authority and a possible one-state solution if there is no progress on two states.

- Changes in the Middle East and the increasing political role of Islamic movements in various countries have provided new hope for Palestinian leaders in Gaza. There is expectation that Egypt in particular will be more proactive in its support of their cause and will help Gazans to have easier relations with the external world. By allowing an almost unrestricted movement of people across the border, Egypt's new policy has already changed many things in Gaza.
- There is disillusionment with the role of the Obama administration, and a frustrated acknowledgement that the political calendar makes it unlikely that there will be any change from the US during coming months.
- It was repeatedly pointed out that Gazans would welcome an increased role played by Europe (including Turkey)—through enforcement of some existing agreements and through creative diplomacy. This could include, for example, opening trade terminals with Egypt and facilitating transit of goods to and from Gaza.
- There are a lot of opportunities for business people to engage with Gazan businesses. The economy has suffered greatly, and leaders there hope for further easing of what some consider unjustified and random restrictions on certain items.
- Gazans consistently expressed interest in further discussions. There is a sense that if a wider group of people better understood the conditions they are living under, governments would be pressured to take more positive steps to relieve the situation.

## REPORT

On 2-5 February 2012, the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs took a small international delegation to Gaza to discuss the future of Gaza in light of regional changes relating to the “Arab spring” and the increasing dangers of regional war. A central part of the visit was a two-day Pugwash workshop with key political figures from all parties and other experts involved in the reconciliation efforts. In addition, the delegation benefited from private meetings with leading politicians, businessmen, and other experts. According to long-standing Pugwash tradition, all participants took part in these discussions in their personal capacities and not as representatives of any organization, party or institution.<sup>1</sup>

This report seeks to represent the range of views the delegation heard throughout its visit, recognizing that there is no way to develop a fully comprehensive overview during such a short time. The purpose of the visit was to develop a deeper understanding of the complexity of the situation through vibrant and open discussions.

Without diminishing the serious and important historical narratives as to the reasons for the current situation in Gaza, this report focuses on identifying possibilities for future progress and factors that may hinder that progress. It highlights areas for possible future clarification and exploration. The report is divided into the following sections:

- Legacy of the Occupation and the Siege of Gaza
- Political Relations in Gaza
- Central Policy Questions
- The Changing Region
- The US and Europe
- Next Steps

Please note, the “next steps” section contains a list of policy options which might help to improve the political and economic situation for all involved.

Because this meeting took place in Gaza, the predominant views summarized in this report are those of Gazans. As in all Pugwash meetings, there was no attempt to achieve consensus, and the sharing of diverse views was encouraged. This is one of a recent series of meetings Pugwash has held in the region, including in Egypt, Israel, and Ramallah.

We would like to thank all those who made this meeting possible, and particularly the leaders of the political movements in Gaza ( Hamas, Fatah and Islamic Jihad) for their contributions to the discussions and their insights. Special thanks are also to be given to our Gazan Pugwash member Taghreed El Khodary for her relentless work in making this meeting possible.

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<sup>1</sup> This report is prepared by Pugwash Senior Program Coordinator Sandra Ionno Butcher (sibutcher@earthlink.net). The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the rapporteur, the Pugwash Conferences or any of the sponsoring organizations. Quotes are included to provide a sense of the dialogue. Wording may not be exact. Pugwash appreciates the support for its Middle East project provided by the Norwegian MFA, the Carnegie Corporation, other funders and our national groups.

## Legacy of the Occupation and Siege of Gaza

The city of Gaza has a long history, going back more than 3,500 years. The city has experienced sieges throughout history, and was named the “City of Resistance” at some time in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. Today the population in Gaza lives under duress and Gaza once again is besieged *de facto*. While the siege eased a bit after the flotilla incident, many were disappointed that the expected further relaxation did not happen after the IDF soldier Gilad Shalit was returned.

Gazans lead a “harsh life,” as one person said. In the war in 2008-2009, some 1,500 – 1,600 people were killed, 20,000 houses destroyed, and “still nobody lifted a finger,” as one person said. Gazans express great disillusionment with the international community, which is viewed as uncaring and, some believe, complicit in these continuing conditions.

Some basic needs are not being met. Fresh water supplies cannot meet the demand, and they have to use salt water at times. The smell of sewage pervades part of the city, and raw sewage is being dumped into the sea. (This also affects nearby Israel.) Garbage is seen throughout the city. (One person said trash collection in some areas suffers due to politics, as those in power do not want to pay the political cost for increasing taxes on the people to cover these basic services.)

Electricity is not adequate for demand. (While in Gaza, the delegation experienced repeated power outages.) Various estimates were provided: Gaza is approximately 1/3 short of electricity for its needs at any time.<sup>2</sup> The main source of electricity is from Israel (110-120 megawatts) and Egypt (now 22 megawatts<sup>3</sup>, up from 17 in the past year). Gaza is capable of producing 140 MW but according to authoritative figures, it produces 60 MW due to lack of transmission lines in Gaza. Gaza needs 250 – 360 megawatts and this will increase, some say as much as 10 percent, as the population increases, air conditioners become more widely used, etc.). It was noted that after the power plant was bombed in 2006 it took two years to fix it and reroute the transformers. Added to this, fuel is a major problem and fuel shortages happen frequently. When the EU paid for cost of fuel from Israel, the situation was normal, but last year the EU stopped paying and Hamas in Gaza supplied the power plant fuel from Egypt through the tunnels, though this was recently disrupted.<sup>4</sup> Israel will not allow the import of solar energy equipment. One business person asked, “What is the security concern if we use solar energy in Gaza?”

Academic life is suffering. There is no academic normalization. Europe downgraded representation and relations with Palestinian academic institutions. Gaza students are not allowed to attend West Bank universities in general (though it was noted that in limited cases counselors from the UK and Germany have intervened for approximately 10 students). During the siege schools were closed. There was not enough fuel to use for transportation, so they sent children to school on donkey carts, a practice witnessed by the delegation.

Healthcare remains a deep concern. Gaza is lacking in health facilities and equipment, so a “great proportion” of patients must be referred to West Bank hospitals or to Egypt or to Israel itself. Israel will not

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, “The Humanitarian Impact of Gaza’s Electricity and Fuel Crisis,” United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, occupied Palestinian territory, March 2012.

[http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha\\_opt\\_electricity\\_factSheet\\_march\\_2012\\_english.pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_electricity_factSheet_march_2012_english.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Note: on 13 March Egypt announced an increase to 22 megawatts and is considering further increases. See for example: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201203130893.html>

<sup>4</sup> A 28 March agreement with Egypt for a gas pipeline from El Areish to Rafah which could be built in 6 to 9 months. Some say this could possibly solve the problem.

allow patients to go from Gaza to West Bank hospitals without security clearances. Someone said “many hundreds” have died because of the siege as they had no security clearance to get to a West Bank hospital. (Another person said this fear for healthcare also causes a wide range of people to self-limit their public criticisms of Israel on Facebook and social media since there is a sense Israel is watching and they could be denied medical entry, and this could cost them their lives.)

During the siege some 120,000 skilled workers were jobless. Laborers are not able to cross borders for work, and they are incapable of finding job opportunities. People who used to work across borders and bring additional money into the Gazan economy can no longer do so.

### **Reconstruction**

Reconstruction is hindered in a number of ways. Israel denies entry of needed reconstruction materials to Gaza. Some smuggled materials come through, and some are allowed through the UN agency, UNWRA. But business people expressed deep frustration at the rules, and said they do not see how these can truly be related to security concerns. For example, elevator parts can only be imported in pieces, not to a specification. One business person said there will be a “disaster” because of bad quality elevators as a result. It is possible to import aluminum sheets that are 3mm but not 4mm thick.

There were questions raised as the lack of follow up on US pledges for reconstruction money, and concerns over implementation of some of these projects. Civilian houses that were destroyed are not being rebuilt rapidly enough. Some minor part of what was destroyed is being rebuilt by Hamas and UNWRA, and some have been compensated, but many feel the progress is slow.

Some believe strongly that it is important when discussing economic issues to talk about Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem together, and not just Gaza alone. It also is important for Palestine to be in touch with Jordan’s economy.

### **Impact of the Siege on Business**

One person pointed out that increasing economic development is also a way to address Israeli security concerns. However, business development is constrained due to the existing situation in Gaza. Business people feel they have no choice but to use tunnels. “It’s not legal, we know. But give us another way,” said one person.

Goods coming through Israel are taxed at 14.5%. When they come through the tunnels, there is “pure profit.” However, this entails many risks for the business people. The goods could be stolen, confiscated, etc. It also means that Ramallah is not getting taxes it might otherwise raise.



TUNNELS IN RAFAH

It is much quicker for goods to come through the tunnels as well. One person said it can take 4-6 weeks for a shipment to go through Kerem Shalom crossing, while it takes 3-7 days to come through the tunnels from Egypt. Some items can take even longer. For example, someone said it can take four months to get permission from Israel to import tiles, "What is the security concern about tiles?" The unregulated tunnels also raise concern since other smuggled items can come through, such as drugs or weapons.

Some items are cheaper in Gaza. Computers are on average 20% cheaper in Gaza than in Egypt or Israel. Gasoline is approximately 2.5 shekels a liter in Gaza, while it is 7 shekels in Israel. Some restrictions have been easing, and this is easing the pressure on the tunnels. (Some food from Israel, for example, is now cheaper.) However, business people say there are still rules restricting items that have no security benefit. Some say business people do not want to be pushed more toward Egypt, since the Egyptian economy is nowhere near as strong as Israel's. "We will suffer."



PAOLO COTTA-RAMUSINO

The scale of the smuggling through the tunnels is such that there can be no question that all parties who want to know must be aware of the situation. Some 300 tons of cement and 300 tons of steel come through the tunnels on a daily basis. "Sure they know," said one businessman. This illegal trade is "worth millions on a daily basis," said another. It is estimated the value of goods from Egypt are in the order of one billion per year. "Of course Egypt knows," said one person. Someone said these millions are going through the international banking system.

One Gazan leader said "we will have a feast when we close the tunnels." "When the borders are open from Gaza with Egypt and the West Bank, we must have a national feast." "We could go to the tunnels and fill and destroy them, but what is the alternative?" Many believe there must be an official terminal between Egypt and Gaza, and for Rafah to be a free trade zone with open markets. The trade between Gaza and Israel is estimated at 2 billion dollars, and this could be for the benefit of Egypt, one person said, if trade was opened. Egypt may stipulate conditions, and one participant said "we don't mind." No goods would enter unless the two sides agree. There would be no smuggling of weapons. This could perhaps be under EU sponsorship or supervised by Europe, since Israel would have no part in it. Someone said the logistics could be worked out in a week to create a free trade zone with Egypt, over land. But it was not clear if this would be a positive step. One participant believed tunnels will always be problematic.

Another complication raised is that tunnels may be increasing in length, further into the Sinai. Israel is holding Egypt responsible for this, and some wondered if this is intentional, so Israel can intervene in Sinai. If so, Palestinians are "not part of this at all," one participant said.

One person said it is hard for any government to stop or control them. Israel's raids on the tunnels lead to the death of many youths. One person said the solution to this must be through forming a government. This should be done swiftly. Agreements on managing the borders, crossings, entry of communities, importing/exporting goods, etc will lift the economy.



### **Border Crossings**

The Rafah border crossing is better now than during the Mubarak era, however the flow is still very limited, with no more than 500 people allowed to cross per day. The border is closed on Saturday, Sunday and Egyptian national holidays, which makes a “huge problem” in summer. Some say there doesn’t appear to be much hope of this being resolved because Egypt might not be willing to “bear responsibility for the Gaza strip” and it might be worried that Gaza “will export problems to Egypt.” One person said Egypt fears that opening the border would be a trap to “give Gaza to Egypt.” Egypt is unlikely to fully open the border unless there is reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah.



RAFAH BORDER CROSSING

### **Air and Sea**

Someone else said, the “Rafah border is not enough...We have to control the air and sky.” Israel destroyed the airport, and some look forward to it being rebuilt. Some thought a Gazan seaport should be opened, developed with respect for Israel’s security (Israel could provide a channel). One businessperson said, “We want access to the world.” One plan proposed would be for goods to be shipped to Cyprus, and escorted by ship to Gaza, with European monitoring. This wouldn’t cost very much money (a \$1-2 million job, estimated one person).

### **Collective Punishment**

Reasons for the continuing conditions vary and are hotly debated. There is a strong questioning of the “collective punishment” Gazans experience (some question its legality under international law). During the siege the ban on luxury items and chocolate, candy, soda, etc. was viewed with bitterness by the people of Gaza, as it was clear there was no security issue involved with these items, but that the goal was to deprive ordinary people.

All voices in Gaza share a common view that Israel is to blame for the current difficulties. Particularly, there seems to be a sense that continued settlement activity, Israeli actions in East Jerusalem, continued restrictions on Gaza, the perceived continuing brutality of the Israeli armed forces, etc, have proven, they say, that Israel has not been acting in good faith. This reinforces among the population the conviction that reconciliation among Palestinians must become the primary goal. It also provides a foothold for those skeptics who oppose any agreement with Israel and those who benefit in various ways from the current situation in Gaza. These issues will be explored further below.

### **“One Normal Day”**

The delegation heard repeatedly that Gazans want to live normal lives, but that they are frustrated in their ability to do so. One older man said, “I just want to live one normal day.” One woman said, “We want to live just like other people all over the world in peace and stability.” While some aspects of life have been improving, Gazans lack freedom of movement, economic freedom, and their quality of life is severely

impacted by the current situation. Someone said there are many people in Gaza who are wondering how to offer a new generation a possibility of a normal life. One participant said, “The occupation can never normalize.”

It is of deep concern that a population is growing under these extreme conditions. As one person said, “The Gaza strip is one of the most congested places in the world.” Another said the youth are angry, frustrated, and scared, though unorganized. Some say the youth are unhappy with all the political parties. They tried to protest. They tried to do a hunger strike for reconciliation. However, they feared arrest and went home. Someone said, “I hope the youth will have courage.” “We need to encourage younger people to succeed where we have failed.” It was noted by some that there is a vibrant blogger community. The local government, while it limits protests on the streets for various reasons, allows these blogs.

### **Lack of International Focus**

There is a belief that the international media does not provide enough independent analysis of Palestinian issues. Some say that the media is biased toward Israel—under reporting Israeli transgressions against Palestinians, and over reporting when Palestinians send rockets to Israel, often in response to some Israeli action.

There also is frustration across the board from political leaders, business people and others that when they try to talk about the situation in Gaza in other cities like Washington, DC, in Europe, etc. “no one is willing to listen.” If they do listen, “No one is willing to change things.” So, the final result is “zero.”

One participant commented that to the extent that there is frustration that the international community does not pay enough attention to Palestinian issues and the situation in Gaza, social media may play an important role in helping to reshape the international perceptions about Palestinian issues. Issues that have been around a long time can be repackaged, particularly if the narratives of political parties are shifting toward a shared strategy of non-violence. Young people in other countries can be reached directly with these new narratives.



ONE OF MANY DESTROYED BUILDINGS IN GAZA

### **Related Issues for Palestinians**

Issues related to East Jerusalem, “the wall,” the West Bank, and the six million Palestinians living outside Palestine, some in refugee camps, are integral to understanding the full scope of the Palestinian narrative. There is a strong belief that Israel’s actions in East Jerusalem have “undermined the status of Jerusalem as a capital of two states.”

Continued Israeli repression reverberates throughout all levels of Palestinian society. Someone noted that the chair of the parliament, Dr. Dweik was put in jail despite his support of non-violence, and asked what was his crime? More than 27 MPs are now in Israeli jails simply because they are MPs. One person said, “No one knows what is going on” in Israeli prisons, where Palestinian prisoners are held. “If the world media knew one percent of what is happening in the jails, they would transmit it.”

Israel seems to think the people in Gaza, living under these conditions, will pressure Hamas for change. Others think, however, the conditions only create the environment for a deeper radicalization of the population.

A prominent Gazan intellectual noted the cycle of victimization that has been playing out across generations. Jewish people were persecuted. They have persecuted Palestinians. Palestinians have persecuted other Palestinians. He said all involved have to stop being and creating victims.

### Political Relations in Gaza

Senior leaders from Hamas, Fatah and also the Islamic Jihad engaged extensively with the Pugwash delegation, and the participants greatly appreciated this hospitality and encouragement of this visit. In addition, there were opportunities to discuss a wide range of issues informally over meals and during additional private meetings.

The political scene in Gaza is complex. Hamas has been in control of Gaza since 2007. The Fatah-controlled Palestinian National Authority rules from Ramallah, with little practical impact in Gaza. There is a legacy of deeply painful narratives on all sides and this bitterness between Hamas and Fatah has a continuing impact. Senior political leaders on all sides have varying levels of experiences with denial of rights, torture, and imprisonment at the hands of other political parties. There have been moves toward reconciliation (discussed below), and an acknowledgement that they may need to work together toward their common goal. “All factions have been sacrificing blood and flesh for the end goal of our own state, to live in peace, security, and prosperity,” as one person said.

### Legacy of 2006/2007

The refusal of Europe, Israel, the US and some Arabs to recognize the Hamas electoral victory in the 2006 internationally monitored elections raises fundamental concerns. The lack of recognition of the results of fair and monitored elections is illegal and people in Gaza consider it highly hypocritical from nations that say they support democracy. Hamas controls Gaza under clearly difficult circumstances, as described above.

The June 2007 Battle of Gaza between Fatah and Hamas is still a very recent memory. From the Hamas perspective, there is deep suspicion and distrust of Fatah over the deals they have struck with Israelis. There is frustration, some say, because Fatah “obstructed the work” of the Palestinian Legislative Council (set up after the elections). This builds on earlier Hamas bitterness with Fatah, when Hamas was marginalized: “They tortured us, confiscated our money, put us in jail when we didn’t attack them in any way.” One person said Hamas in Gaza was obligated to be the only authority in Gaza because Fatah “escaped,” but that this was “not what we wanted.” Some say that so long as Gaza remains isolated to the extent that it is, there will only ever be



one-party rule in Gaza.

There are some internal debates among the Hamas leadership as to the best way forward strategically at this particular time.

Some pointed out that Hamas leadership outside and inside Gaza may look as though they are one united political office, but there are times when “some viewpoints by the external leadership are rejected inside.” Lack of support in Gaza for the UN bid was one example provided. Some consider the Hamas leadership in Gaza holds a more important role in practical terms than the external Hamas leadership.

Despite the one-party political dominance in Gaza, one person said that everyone in Gaza is unhappy with Hamas but for different reasons. This is not to say that this dissatisfaction is only with Hamas. For example, there is a perception that both Hamas and Fatah have elements of corruption, but one person said, “Hamas is generally much less corrupt than Fatah.”

### **Marginalization of Fatah in Gaza**

Fatah in Gaza is “almost banned” according to one participant. All the offices and headquarters have been taken over. The Palestinian National Authority headquarters and properties have been confiscated, and affiliated NGOs have been closed. They are denied the right to march, even to express the anniversary of Arafat’s death. (One person said that Hamas doesn’t allow Fatah street gatherings, because Ramallah doesn’t allow Hamas to hold protests there.) In addition to marginalization in Gaza, Fatah is also separated to an extent from the decision making structures in Ramallah.

Freedom of movement for Fatah in and out of Gaza has had “some slight change,” where some are able to move more easily now that dialogue toward reconciliation is underway (though still with “great difficulty” through Jordan or Egypt). However, there remains bitterness over prior restrictions that limited the movement, and there are stories of people being returned from the Rafah crossing, etc. As recently as a week before our meeting in Gaza, we were told, some who fled from military confrontation in Gaza tried to return. They were arrested and at the time of our meeting reportedly were still held under arrest by Hamas.

There is a frustration among some that Fatah in Gaza is disorganized. One person said they believed Fatah in Gaza might be able to win an election if only they were better organized. Some resent the current status of some former civil servants who were working for the PNA, who some say were “driven out” by Hamas and were replaced with Hamas affiliates. These include, some say, teachers, etc. who continue to draw salaries from Ramallah while doing no work (some say this figure is as many as 50,000-70,000 people, though others say these numbers are much lower). Others say it is important to note the PA asked its employees not to work and for those who keep working to lose their salaries, a political decision from Ramallah that was made to put pressure on Hamas. Another example provided was the lack of full representation on some committees related to elections of syndicates like the pharmacies, which resulted, in effect, in Hamas taking over the syndicates. Former security forces, police who had fought against Hamas, became fugitives and were arrested and denied return. Ramallah also paid their salaries.



PAOLO COTTA-RAMUSINO AND MAHMOUD AL-ZAHAR

## Political Involvement of Islamic Jihad

The Islamic Jihad is becoming increasingly engaged. Some say the Islamic Jihad is looking to the example of the Salafists in Egypt, as a positive way to begin to engage more in the political process. Islamic Jihad sees that the changes that have taken part in the region “will have a positive impact on the Palestinian cause,” as regimes that were put in place as part of the colonial legacy are replaced.

## Central Policy Questions

### Reconciliation – “Leave Us Alone”

Hamas and Fatah have seen the changes in the region, and this has helped them decide to move toward “harmony,” according to one participant. One person said Palestinians have “no choice but to be one.” Another said, “Internal division has a greater effect than when we suffer from Israel or other parties.”

Since 4 May last year, all parties but mainly Hamas and Fatah, have progressed toward reconciliation. Since last November, six committees (which include, for the first time, Islamic Jihad) have been moving ahead on an agreed work plan. Someone pointed out that “reconciliation is requested by every national party and citizen. There is no disagreement on the principle or vision of reconciliation. The agreement is signed.” Hamas and the Islamic Jihad are joining the PLO. One participant said, “Without unifying Palestinians to confront the occupation, there will be no success in efforts to change the situation.” One person said “the power of all stems from a unity government.” There is no choice. Hamas will lose in Gaza and Fatah will lose in the West Bank if things continue as they are. In addition, the Israelis will continue to use this division as an excuse not to come to the table seriously.



FATAH LEADERSHIP

One person said it is only “when we see something on the ground that we can sense some reconciliation and unity is taking place.” These sorts of accusations go both ways on a range of issues, including controversies over distribution of newspapers in the West Bank and Gaza and vice versa.

However, as another said, “Reconciliation is still very unstable.” In a sense the parties are still at a stage of “managing division and not reconciliation.” This is further complicated, one person said, because “reconciliation means different things to different people.” While it is to be expected there would be some differences, the “split here is deeper,” according to one participant. To the extent this division becomes a strategic variable, it inhibits progress. It is a common perspective in Europe and the US, for example, that the fact that “Palestinians can’t get their act together” is what has hindered negotiations.

Hamas is with reconciliation “100 percent,” we were told. One participant said that even though the Hamas prior experiences with Fatah were very bad, still the “hand is open.” However, Fatah needs to demonstrate its seriousness. “Fatah is either with Israel or their own people. We are their own people.” One participant

said that Fatah will have to stop cooperating on a security level with Israeli forces. As one person phrased it, “ Hamas resists occupation and Fatah coordinates with Israel.”

We heard that from the Fatah perspective “as Palestinian people, our first and foremost goal is Palestinian unity,” and reintegration of the Palestinian people and all factions. “The secret of power is unity.” The big change, from the Fatah perspective, is the “change of atmosphere” between the two leaderships. “The whole world heard Meshal” when he accepted the goal of a state on the boundaries of 1967 and that the Fatah approach to peaceful resistance “is right.” But this has not translated to action on the ground. In practical local terms, from the Fatah perspective in Gaza, there have been no tangible changes since the 2011 agreement between Meshal and Abbas. While Hamas points to some steps, such as opening a Palestinian election directorate and returning Abu Mazen’s house in Gaza, these were not among the confidence building measures agreed between Hamas and Fatah.

Islamic Jihad has shown its “very clear” position on reconciliation, according to one participant. Islamic Jihad “supports reconciliation, is a part of it, is part of the Palestinian people.” Islamic Jihad is a “component of the political map of Palestine.” Islamic Jihad has shown its support of reconciliation by attending all sessions of the ongoing discussions. It is represented in all committees working to complete reconciliation, and also had an active role before the discussions.

There is a perception that the West needs to be neutral, and to let Palestinians work through things in the new regional environment. “Leave us alone until we unify,” said one person. However, some see the US and Israeli opposition to reconciliation as the primary factor hindering the achievement of reconciliation. It was noted that there seem to be some elements in Israel who appear opposed to reconciliation and who are acting to make the achievement of reconciliation more difficult. Israel loves to see Palestinians divided, said one participant.

#### “SOCIAL RECONCILIATION”

One participant spoke of the need for “social reconciliation.” “Reconciliation doesn’t mean that Fatah will be Hamas or vice versa.” However, it was noted that society is not like a Western society, but has tribal influences and revenge plays a role (for example, the government has to collect money and give it to the injured parties).

Someone else noted that this means that Palestinians must govern themselves, without control of only one political force: different ideologies including Islamic Jihad, Hamas, left wing groups, all have to come together to “build a new system based on participation” and to enact new laws.

Some believe that achieving reconciliation will be an important signal to those in the West who want to help push for Palestinian recognition. One person said reconciliation is “very difficult to argue against.”

#### “THE OSLO UMBRELLA”

There was a lively debate about the “umbrella” provided by Oslo. (One participant called this an “iron umbrella”). There is widespread frustration that Israel has not taken concrete steps to implement a two-state solution, with Jerusalem as the capital. Someone said, “Israel wants Oslo to continue forever while not complying.” One person said a new agreement of reconciliation is needed, “tell Israel, tell the ‘umbrella’ to go away.” Israel has not lived up to its responsibilities, so now it is time for something else.

From both Hamas and Fatah perspectives, there was discussion about “dissolving the umbrella.” From the Hamas perspective, Oslo is not respected because there was no consultation on the agreements. Others from the Fatah perspective say it was a “classified process” which had negative aspects. One person said, “Not all Palestinians now are all happy, including not all Fatah.”

Someone said the main problem is that reconciliation is obstructed because of the occupation. "If we want to do anything about reconciliation, we are frustrated by the occupation." Someone else then asked if there was any possibility the PA would collapse over this? "Can there be no reconciliation if the PA functions?" Some say all sides can discuss these issues and reach agreement. Someone said that "all resent" having two different authorities and governments.

There was discussion on all sides as to whether the Palestinian Authority is a structure that should continue. One person said, if the PA is "dependent on national programs, let it go. We don't want the PA if requested to become a ministerial council. Let it go to hell, we can manage affairs ourselves."

Some believe that all components need to build a new system, based on transparency and good governance, to establish and arrange elections, and for the representation of all Palestinians to the PLO. One participant said it is important to reactivate the role of the PLO, to give formal representation to all. This can't be achieved until Hamas and Islamic Jihad join.

### SECURITY FORCES

One of the central concerns about Oslo has to do with the "security ideology" and the coordination of security between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. (While Egypt accepted this in past, some say things are different now.) Someone said there is a need to agree on security coordination as part of reconciliation. It is not sustainable for Fatah to have had 100 percent control of security forces until 2007 and for Hamas to have 100 percent control now. Some believe the security forces in Ramallah, Jerusalem, and Gaza should be coordinated. One person said there is a need for defined borders with Israel, "we want to control respectable national forces."

Some people believe quite strongly the security forces must have a national role. This area emerged in discussions as controversial. Some believe "transmitting information to the occupier is treason." The security forces, some say, also have a responsibility to protect the will of the people - the resistance. If security forces, some said, were "rebuilt" on a national Palestinian basis, it would be "a source of pride for the Arab region."

Questions were raised over the function of the Palestinian security forces. Do they have a national function, to "protect resistance and protect our citizens?" One criticism is that the Palestinian Authority forces have taken over the "original functions of the occupier." Someone said they do not want to be "affected by a secret agreement between the PNA and the occupier." Some felt the question of security is at the "heart of the debate." There is a "strong popular demand" for rule of law, fair delivery of security, with a respect for rights. Many are "dissatisfied" with the performance of the police.

### PRISONERS

This issue of prisoner release is "highly sensitive and significant" according to one person. There are some 60 prisoners in Gaza, and "tens" of Hamas and Islamic Jihad affiliated prisoners in the West Bank. Someone said from the Fatah perspective, there is "no objection to synchronized release of prisoners on both sides." There are no objections to provide lists of names of people.

## PASSPORTS

Gazan passports remain another issue. Passports are granted centrally by the PNA and Ramallah to all the governorates, though they were previously issued from Gaza. There are some passports that were issued previously but these will expire in five years. When the PNA fled Gaza, they left some unprinted passports, which Hamas is using for diplomatic passports. These are not signed in Gaza. Fatah has suggested the staff of the passport office in Gaza could return to their job, people could apply here in Gaza and then send to Ramallah for processing. There had not yet been an okay on that proposal.



*THE MEETING ROOM LOOKED OUT OVER THE SEA. ISRAELI SHIPS COULD BE SEEN AND HEARD FIRING (WE WERE TOLD THIS WAS PROBABLY TO SCARE FISHERMEN).*

## ELECTIONS

There is a need for free and fair elections. "Give us a chance as a people to choose and accept a result," said one participant, who noted this was not the case in the last election. There are a series of issues raised by the request by Abu Mazen to postpone formation of the government until after 26 January in hopes that there would be a response from Israel and the Quartet. They went to Jordan, but "got nowhere." There is no possibility of forming a government. If there is no government, the biggest obstruction and hindrance is who will lead the security forces, because they are affiliated with the Interior Ministry.

Who will run the elections is another major issue: the government, Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad? An election must be run by one government, yet there is no government. There is a committee, but some say practically it has not answered key questions. Who will run the elections, protect the poll boxes, etc. Who will be able to guarantee there will be no forgeries or false accusations of forgeries?

Someone said if elections are held in the next two years, it is widely believed Hamas will win, others disagreed.

## Negotiations

Negotiations with Israel are seen as a failure. As one participant said, since 1991 talks have resulted in a "big zero." One participant said when the PLO started negotiations with Israel in Oslo, they were hopeful that a Palestinian state would be established in ten years, "but unfortunately Israel was buying time, and negotiating only for the sake of negotiating" and there have been no tangible results. The Palestinian perspective is that they have kept all commitments, while Israel has not. Settlements have expanded, land has been confiscated, and Israeli actions in East Jerusalem continue to raise concerns. Someone said, "The negotiation option is a full failure."

Fatah has been blamed for the failure of the negotiations with Israel. Fatah considers this to be one of the causes of their defeat in 2006 elections. Fatah is seen as not having achieved anything through negotiations, while others might have achieved things through resistance. One person said, from the Fatah point of view negotiations have reached a "dead end." "We won't say they failed" because people still are hopeful that the Quartet can apply pressure to get back to the table, to correct the path "from stagnancy." Some believe the EU can play a pivotal role.



Officially, Abu Mazen (M. Abbas) and the leadership still believe the solution is only through negotiations, but “with the right references.” These include two states, side by side, within 1967 borders of the expected state. The recent halt of negotiations, one participant said, was the “direct result” of the fact that Israel won’t recognize those references for negotiations. Even in the exploratory talks in Jordan they encountered similar problems.

Someone asked, “Is there now or in the near future any Israeli party willing to reach a genuine solution giving some justice to the Palestinians?” Someone said many questions need to be asked of Israel. Israel needs to clarify its positions on 242, 343, land versus peace, and to state clearly whether it accepts a Palestinian state next to an Israeli state? There is a belief that demographically, Israel has shifted too far since Oslo. The right is expanding in Israel at the expense of the left. Someone said that the left in Israel “was devastated” by the second intifada, which did “huge harm to those on the Israeli side who genuinely want peace.” Someone else noted that in Israel, more people would like to end the occupation than it might appear, but the Israeli population is overwhelmed by a sense of danger. Israelis can’t go to Ramallah or Gaza. They have no direct experience and only get news from the TV or newspaper.

One person said that “everyone knows” Israel is not interested in talking. But when Palestinians do not go to the talks, this is misunderstood in the US and the West. Since not going strengthens the prejudice against Palestinians, some wondered if the spin would be different if Palestinians went no matter what. Then, after the talks fail, they can claim it wasn’t their fault.

### **Commitment to 1967 Borders**

With all the changes going on in the region and among the Palestinian community, someone said, time is of the essence to solidify an agreement. “If we wait two more years” with all the variations, “no one will accept 67, you will never find anyone to get this after two years.”

One participant noted that from the beginning, in 2002-2003, Israel has refused to accept the Arab Initiative, and that it is “not on the table forever.” Today, “nobody speaks of the Arab Initiative.”

However, one senior participant emphasized “if Israel is ready ... to allow a Palestinian State on 1967 borders, we are ready to recognize Israel and to deal with it.” That said, the same person said that on a practical level it is impossible for Israel to accept or implement this plan. The two-state option is an “imaginary question on a political level.” Some questioned the advisability of trying to resurrect this.

One participant asked, what is the meaning of the 1967 boundaries? Is it the value of the land in 1967? The moral value that it was occupied in 1967? Is the occupation legal? Does it mean automatically accepting the 1948 boundaries are Israel’s? Israel has been increasing land over the years. “What is the border of Israel?” one participant asked, noting the lack of Israeli constitution. Without being able to answer this, the border of Palestine is unclear. Someone asked, “Who is the crazy man who could repeat the experience of Arafat, with a state without a constitution and without borders?”



FORMER HOME OF YASSER ARAFAT

However, one participant said, while many appreciate Israel is not interested in talking any more about the 1967 border, if the Palestinian side said clearly they are still fine with the Arab plan, and the 1967 borders, the Israelis would then be forced to explain their position more clearly.

Some thought Europe and the US focus too much on the 1967 borders, and should perhaps look again at 1948 as a decisive year. One person said that more and more people in Europe realize this. A related question is “Who are the people of Palestine?” Some believe the fate of the six million Palestinian refugees and exiles must be addressed along with questions over ownership of their land. Is Jerusalem Israel or Palestine? Someone said “we insist” elections must include people from outside Palestine. Meetings were supposed to take up this question, but were considered unsatisfactory in terms of representation, etc.

As one participant said, “Jerusalem is not ordinary land.” It contains one of Islam’s most important shrines. One person said he would not accept under any circumstance to declare the division of the West Bank from Jerusalem. “The 48 land is ours and its people are ours,” said one person. One participant said if the right of return exists for Israel, it should exist for Palestinians and those who were forced off their land in 1948, some of whom live “a lower life than just dogs.” “Who has responsibility for these people?”

On the question of a one-state solution, it was noted that for centuries the people were part of an Arab and Islamic country, where Muslims, Christians, Jews, and others practiced human rights over many centuries. Some believe that a one-state solution will need to be explored, perhaps toward a multiethnic system based on the South African model.

One participant suggested a commitment to 1967 borders, with no recognition of Israel. In general the issue of recognition of Israel was mentioned a few times (see separate section below). One authoritative answer from a senior Hamas official was posed as a question: “Does Israel recognize us?” Recognition of Israel inside the 1967 borders could be discussed in a more constructive climate. Khaled Meshal himself hinted in December to this possibility.

### **Non-violence**

The delegation heard a range of views on the question of non-violence. This was clearly different than an earlier discussion some participants held in Ramallah, where the general tone (including from the Hamas perspective) was in favor of a non-violent strategy. The question boiled down to two parts: 1) whether or not violence is a right inherent to national liberation movements and “freedom fighters” (bolstered some say by the experience of South Africa); and 2) regardless of how one answers the first question, there remains the question of the use of violence as a strategy.

Meshal and others have clearly stated in the reconciliation process that Hamas accepts non-violence as a strategy. This is not easy to implement on the ground in the radicalized environment of Gaza. Clearly, there are still parts of Gazan society that believe it is imperative of emphasizing the existence of “young martyrs” who are ready to strap explosives to their bodies for the cause (one participant said, “We are not Gandhis”). Someone said, “We are with all types of resistance, all types.” However, there also exist very powerful elements who seek ways forward and who are willing to consider a non-violent strategy. Some felt this group needs more oxygen from the outside world. The arrest of Dr. Aziz Dweik, head of the Palestinian Legislative Council (who attended a recent Pugwash meeting in Ramallah where a non-violent approach was discussed and unanimously supported), and other Palestinian legislators clearly raises questions, not just among Gazans, as to Israel’s commitment to a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian question.

There are some who continue to question the advisability of a non-violent strategy. Some noted that in the West Bank, Palestinians are practicing peaceful methods and are “cooperating with Israel against resistance.”

“What have they achieved,” one participant asked, “Nothing.” If the international community is not ready to stop the aggression, one participant asked, how are we to defend ourselves? It is a “foolish idea” to think “throwing flowers and demonstrations against tanks” will work. “No one can convince the people of this.” “We are obliged to use these methods to defend ourselves.” Even from the Fatah perspective, some have expressed frustration. “Negotiations seem to be a failure, other options seem to be succeeding.”

One participant asked, “How did Sharon leave Gaza in 2005, through the peace process or through resistance? In the Palestinian context, resistance was effective.” Another person said, “We need to impose pressure on Israel. Look at Shalit and what happened.” From the Fatah perspective, they have been asking since Oslo for the release of prisoners. Hamas captured one soldier and 1,027 prisoners were released. Palestinians have returned “tens of Israeli soldiers” in the past with nothing returned from the Israeli side. As recently as a couple of days before this meeting, one Israeli soldier in the West Bank was taken by Palestinian forces and returned to Israel with nothing in return. From the Fatah perspective “the popular sense” is that this gave “Hamas some sort of victory” over Fatah. This was furthered by perceptions generated by the way the release was done. The first group of prisoners released was predominantly Hamas and Islamic Jihad prisoners who had high sentences. The second release was mostly Fatah people with lighter sentences, and who were finishing their sentences or had only a couple years more time.

One person said, “We are the weak party. We are ready to practice non-violent resistance. We have to give non-violence resistance time. Do you think it will lead to tangible results? Will it help lift Palestinian suffering?” One person said the example of Rachel Corrie proves that non-violence is not effective against the Israelis.



PARTICIPANTS

Someone else asked the opposite question:

Is violence effective, and if not, then what? “It’s important to fight against crime in an effective way.”

However, another participant pointed out that in fact the violence exerted by Palestinians is very little, while the violence Israel exerts on Palestinians is very high. Yet the rhetoric is mismatched. Israel says it is for peace, while some in Gaza say they will fight to the end, rather than using Israeli language of “we will defend ourselves if attacked, this is not a choice.” A portrayal of a more defensive strategy on the part of Hamas and Islamic Jihad would increase pressure in relations with the US and Europe.

Someone noted that in particular the targeting of civilians versus military targets caused concern in Europe. Another participant asked then if Europe would be willing to supply the weaponry needed to carry out attacks on military targets? Someone said, “If you don’t help us resist them, don’t impose anything on us.” Take away the occupation, and we won’t resist militarily.

Since 9/11, the “single central element of US external strategy is counterterrorism.” If a group takes steps to be defined as terrorist, it gets put “in the bull’s eye.” If one thinks the US backing of Israel is a problem, then getting out of this framework seems to be an important variable that could change the political balance of power. An example was given that after 9/11, Sharon rushed to DC and said to President Bush, now you understand what we are up against, we are in this fight together against the terrorist threat. This had strong resonance in the USA and the 2nd intifada played completely into that narrative. Aside from any question of morality, in pragmatic terms, as frustrating as it may be, non-violence would be a more effective strategy to complicate the Israeli narrative and alter relations with the USA, and it may have less costs.



PARTICIPANTS

Some felt that it is hypocritical that “those who are the roots of violence are accusing us of using violence.” From this perspective, Palestinians in the second intifada “resorted” to power in the face of torture and expulsion from their land. It was pointed out that the first atomic bomb belonged to the US. One participant asked, how did the West handle Qadaffi, the Taliban government, did it “resort to flowers or violence” and asked “who is the king of violence?”

### **Recognition of Israel**

One person said this issue of recognition is only raised “to make obstacles for peace.” “States recognize states, this is normal.” Ahead of full statehood for Palestine, the PLO, as the entity designated to speak on behalf of Palestinians, has already recognized Israel. Some however question whether Hamas wants to recognize Israel.

One participant noted that certain phrasing in the Hamas charter repeatedly is used by those who question Hamas’s underlying intentions. If, as many Palestinian leaders have indicated, the vision is to live peacefully with one’s own rights in the neighborhood with Israel, a change of the charter would be well perceived as a change of attitude. Otherwise, this argument is used to “detract from the reality.” One participant said there is a trap of “opposing concrete violence with verbal violence” when the verbal violence impedes the forward movement one is seeking.

As a strategic question, one person said, “Palestinian violence is a vast enormous gift to Israel. It doesn’t undermine them, it reinforces Israel’s paradigm.” “Violence transforms a victim into a terrorist.” The world stands by because Israel says it is acting in self-defense. Someone said it may not be fair, but it is reality that if you “don’t want a scratch, don’t poke the tiger.” It would make it much more difficult for Israel to justify its behavior if it could not say it was provoked.

### **Boycott**

The agenda in Gaza appears different from that which some participants heard while in Ramallah. The questions of an international boycott of Israel or promotion of sanctions against Israel didn’t seem to have much resonance in Gaza. Some felt that boycotting produce from settlements into Gaza was more of an immediate issue, with a goal of emphasizing the 1967 borders. Someone pointed out that with the

downgraded relations, for example, with European academic institutions, there is no cooperation through which they can pressure for a boycott on Israel.

### Islam and Government

It was emphasized that “Islam does not consider any nation an enemy.” Historically Arabs and Jews have been able to live in peace, and there were multicultural societies. As one participant said, “If we achieve sovereignty, we can welcome everybody.” One participant spoke of shared values in “science, cooperation, and human values” that serve as a “strong bridge” between Islamic and Western cultures. Zionism from some perspectives appears to be against Western values, and is instead equated with racism and dictatorship.

One international participant noted that an influential political leader of the Islamic movement in Egypt privately compared the role Islam will play in the new governments to the role Christianity has played in Western societies. As Islamic societies, the values are Islam, the laws may be influenced by Islam (like laws in Europe are influenced by Christian traditions), but all laws are civil laws, voted by parliament, and there will be protection of minorities and respect for freedom of religion, including freedom to change religions. The question is the extent to which Hamas, Islamic Jihad and others share this vision, since there are many different models of society. Some that define themselves as Islamic behave differently from others. For example, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia all have different approaches. Engaging in these discussions about the form of government can be a healthy process for a society. The future Palestinian government is in the process of further defining these sorts of issues, including constitutional questions, economic structures and relations, relations with the West and the US, etc.

Some point to the fact that Christians have been included in Hamas lists in past elections and have received votes from Muslims, and that some 2,500 Christians live in Gaza and who “resort to Islamic traditions to solve their problems and resort to Islamic leaders to solve problems.” In 2006, a Christian minister was included in the Hamas government, with “no bad feeling or differentiation.” Christians are “our colleagues, brothers, with full rights and duties,” one participant noted.

One participant said, “As Palestinians, we want democratic life...real democracy...free from the use of weapons against others.” Democracy, it was noted, is a core value of Islam. In Hamas, you cannot be a leader without an election. Muslims have used elections for 1,400 years. Some question the nature of a “democracy” like that in the USA that allows money, including “Jewish money,” to influence elections. They say that their system is better than democracy, and is “at essence” a democracy. Someone suggested the first element is to acknowledge a plurality of different parties and different people.



WELCOMING REMARKS AT DINNER

## The Changing Region

### Impact of the “Arab Spring”

Participants refuted the idea that Islam is “resurgent” and emphasized it has been in this region for more than 1,400 years. Twenty eight percent of the world’s population is Islamic, and some believe Islam will be a new moral power. (Islam is more than “praying and fasting” said one participant, it stands for human interests). Someone said the West must try to better understand why the Islamic parties were rejected from participation up until now, and the impact of the fact democracy has been subverted in the past. The involvement of Islamic movements in politics is increasing because Islam is and has been part of the region. Now that there is freedom against oppression, these revolutions are clarifying certain cultures, values and traditions of the region, bringing back dignity and a “new shape of justice” in the region as compared with other ideologies, for example communism.

Some pointed out that political changes in the region have a lot of subjective causes, many of which trace back to the colonial legacy and regimes that were put into place though they were not supported by the people. These regimes and their ideologies failed to provide dignity and an appropriate standard of living for the people. Most people are not particularly surprised about the political developments in the region, though the volume of change was not expected.

Another person noted that it is too soon to judge the Islamic movements in Tunis or Morocco. Iran’s revolution at first involved left wing parties, but that is no longer the case. In Sudan, other parties in the elections were marginalized. Afghanistan has experienced internal battles between the Talibans and other Islamic movements. This person also said, “ Hamas is a status quo government.”



MAHMOUD AL ZAHAR, MATTHIUS MOSSBERG,  
TAGHREED EL KHODARY

The Palestinian question is “the basic key conflict in the region,” said one participant. Palestinians took heart from the support for their cause that has been shown in Tahrir Square and throughout the region. Another participant said, “We are welcomed as heroes, not because we are terrorists, but because we are freedom fighters.” Some see what has happened in the geopolitical states around Palestine as anti-Israel, anti-occupation, backing reconciliation and supporting the Palestinian cause.

### Egypt

There is an expectation that once Egypt has its new constitution and a new civilian president, they will back Palestine and that Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Palestinian people as a whole will benefit from this “100 percent geopolitical change.” (Others expressed slightly more caution that the end results of changes in Egypt are not yet solidified.) The Muslim Brotherhood was once considered an enemy of democracy but has proven to be the only democratic system in the region. One person commented that the Muslim Brotherhood wants to deepen democratic citizenship, civic understanding and civic society, and that the results will still be positive even if the Salafists or others with more extreme views increase their involvement. Some noted the fact that “ordinary people acted randomly” in the attack on the Israeli embassy in Cairo. There is a strong sense of empathy in Gaza with the gains of the Muslim Brotherhood. One person said Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood refer to the “same ideology.”

There was some discussion about whether or not the future Muslim Brotherhood led Egyptian government should stop relations with Israel. Some thought this would be important and that there is “no way” the Muslim Brotherhood will continue the Mubarak regime’s policies. Some believe there is no way Egypt will help with the blockade on Gaza. One person said, “for sure the agreement of Egypt with Israel will be reconsidered with balanced steps, democratic steps.” Others thought that while Egypt can stop the “under the table support” for the suppression of Gaza, the broader implications of Egypt cutting ties with Israel would not be good since Egypt can play a useful role in the wider international scene.

Normalizing the Egyptian border would be important for reconstruction, and perhaps Egypt could help with that reconstruction. Some others are still wary about this, and say the relationship with Egypt lacks “dignity” and is still “humiliating,” though it has definitely improved following the revolution. One person recalled a time as a child, when he could stand with one foot in Egypt and one foot in Palestine and when it was possible to travel by train to Egypt. This sort of freedom of movement is restricted by Israel.

One person pointed out that Israel may welcome pushing Gaza toward Egypt because it is a “demographic bomb,” with Palestinians having one of the highest population growth rates in the world.

### **Wider Region**

Some Palestinians believe they will have an opportunity in the near future to establish relations with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the administrations in Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and many other countries. Arab-Arab relations are not yet equal, though they are better than before. They will be wary, said one participant, of US, Israeli and European “tricks” to “dismantle the results” in Egypt and other countries. The cooperation among the development of the Islamic movements in the region was seen by many as positive. Others noted that the extent to which Fatah and others could also be brought into discussions with the Islamic movements in the region would potentially contribute to a “more respectful” response from the US and West. One person proposed all the different political forces should get together, to help the region and to face any threats from outside.

One participant mentioned that Tunisia might be a good model for Palestine, especially in the way they are talking to the minorities. One person said that if the revolutions in Egypt or Libya had happened first, the division of Sudan would not have happened since funding from Egypt and Libya were a factor in the division of Sudan. Some believe the revolutions will continue to expand in the 26 African Muslim countries.

Some are concerned about the near-term stability of the region. The problems that led to the so-called “Arab Spring” had deep roots, and there are still big problems to be faced: economic development, problems between tribes, sectarian/religious challenges, etc. The international community needs to create a better climate to help stabilize the region. Unconditional loans may be important for development.

The relations that these new countries will develop will be critical. Some questioned if they will have relations with Israel (will Egypt continue to honor the treaty?) and the US, and what role money will continue to play in the region. One participant thought the regional changes could have a positive impact on relations with Europe and the US. The EU is a geographical neighbor, with a long history of involvement.

One participant said that if the developments in the region are approached with an “open mind” in the West, they can help to “bring back security to everyone, and institute dialogue among civilizations.” This can lead to “peace, justice, security, deepened values of democracy and social justice in the region.”

## Iran

The Iran nuclear issue is a “train going very fast,” said one participant. The international community is putting pressure on Iran to change its policy on nuclear enrichment. Iran has made some mistakes, but the problem is, according to one participant, that Iran is “doing what it is in its rights to do.” The issues are further complicated because Iran has promoted verbal attacks against Israel, and the Palestinian question gets tied up in this. Israel takes seriously Iran’s rhetoric, and there is growing concern in Israel, as witnessed by several participants in the last Pugwash meeting in Israel. Israel asks for more pressure on Iran, or threatens they will take military action on their own. None of this affects Iran, which continues its nuclear program as if nothing is happening. Because of the special relationship between the US and Israel, the more the US pressures Iran, the more Israel demands. It was noted that if there is military confrontation between Israel and Iran, Gaza will be a primary target and “will suffer tremendously.” Therefore, it is important to lower the temperature.

It was noted that Hamas and Islamic Jihad are often presented by Israel, the US, and the West as the “proxies” of Iran. This linkage, whether or not it is based on solid fact, can cause problems. One participant said, the Palestinian people “are not present in any axis.” It was noted that some outside parties have questioned the source of Hamas funding. Hamas states they do not take conditional money, including from Iran. “Our strength and power is independent decision making.” They believe that the changes in the regional provide a “golden opportunity” for rich Arab countries to contribute to the Palestinian cause. They can give money, electricity, water, not only to Gaza, but also the West Bank.

One participant said there is a need for increased transparency and balance on questions related to nuclear weapons in the region. There is a need for a “balanced policy” that includes discussion of Israel. It was noted that within 100 km of Gaza is a country (Israel) with an arsenal of nuclear weapons. Israel is not a part of the NPT, and there are questions as to their control of nuclear weapons and what their policy is.

If Israel were to attack Iran, and Iran were to respond, many believed that Israel would use this pretext to clamp down further on Gaza. The international participants felt this is a critical question, and could be the single most important determinant of the future of Gaza.

## The Role of the USA and Europe

One participant emphasized what he called a very frank message that they are “ready to have a neutral, balanced relationship with Europeans and American people.” We are “not the enemy of anyone.” Some felt strongly that Europe and the US naturally will need to change their attitude to political Islam as a result of changes in the region.

## USA

It was noted that the US will be consumed by elections in the coming period, and this means the “US political class competes to see who can be most pro-Israel.” One participant said, “The election produces a prism causing all to lean toward Israel.” In this respect, according to one participant, “the Republican primaries are not glorious.” The leading Republican, Mitt Romney, has said there will not be “one inch” between the US and Israel. President Obama says that he has unprecedented close relations with Israel, especially on a military-military level, and there is in fact some truth to this.



Someone pointed out that the Obama administration was optimistic at first about peace between Israel and the Palestine. However, Obama feels he “got bruised badly” in a collision with Netanyahu over settlements, and that there is “no appetite” to re-run this experiment, especially during an election year. They launched a peace effort with Senator Mitchell, a respected politician, who has since resigned and faded from the scene. There is therefore “no instinct” in the current administration to try to restrain Israel in any strong way. There is no interest in the US being a “catalyst” for peace, and the Israel-Palestine question is considered a low priority. The DC policy community is consumed with Iraq, Afghanistan, and completely obsessed with Iran. There is a sense in DC that it is somehow losing control of events, and that its policies in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Israel have failed. The Palestinian emphasis on unilateralism (i.e. pushing the UN bid without consulting with the US or Israel) plays into this feeling of “losing control,” and might explain the strong US reaction to the Palestinian UN bid. The Arab Spring is viewed as a “mixed bag” from the US government’s point of view. Some bad guys are out but it is much more delicate and difficult when it comes to Egypt, where a close ally was swept away. There is no single, simple phenomenon to all of this, and the US has no coherent policy in response.

Some in the US have seen that Islamic forces have done extremely well in the democratic exercise, and this produces unease in DC, not because these are Islamic, but because they are seen as anti-American. One participant said there is fear in DC that the Muslim Brotherhood, for example, might be anti-American. If these movements are less hostile to the US than expected, then there is potential room for maneuver.

According to one participant, the Obama administration recognizes the “inescapable conclusion” that political Islam is a fact in the region. This may provide an opportunity for engagement, particularly after the election if Obama is reelected. A “best case” might be a decisive reelection of Obama, with a decision to recommit to Israel-Palestinian issues at the beginning of a second administration. Some say Obama is personally very committed to the issue, as he has shown willingness to try to reframe the debates to those of human rights for all people in speeches like those in Cairo 2009, 19 May in Congress, etc. Someone pointed out that Obama has shown he is not likely to make the same mistakes twice, so if he does recommit, that could be significant.



STEVE MILLER (WITH MICROPHONE)

One participant questioned the US commitment, “What guides the US is not a moral position.” The US said it respected freedom, and yet supported Mubarak. If it is for democracy, “why not accept the 2006 results?” It was noted that the Muslim Brotherhood is not promoting violence, and this is helpful in their relations with DC. Questions were raised as to what the Arab world could do to put more pressure on the US regarding Palestinian issues.

The Palestinian presence in DC was noted by one participant as being ineffective, compared to the Israeli lobby that has been nurtured over years.

## Europe

Someone pointed out there is a great difference between the US and the EU regarding Palestinian issues, and that within the EU there is a diversity of opinions between countries and people. This has changed over time.

In 1967, support in Europe was 100 percent with Israel, but through the 1970s and 1980s, Palestine started to “appear on the European political map.” Support was strong in the 1980s, and especially after the first intifada, when Sweden and other countries took a role, and most thought that Camp David in the 1990s would have solved the problem. In 2000, with the second intifada, a lot of people in Europe thought, “Oh no, not again, they will only fight” and lost interest. The democratic changes in the region are viewed mostly positively from Europe, though some worry the changes may affect their own populations. However, the negative side of this renewed European interest in the region as a whole is that the Palestinian issues are no longer the only focus of European attention. There is, according to one participant, a risk the Palestinian issue will be drowned out.

There is a big difference between countries with different viewpoints (for example, Norway and the UK). There also are differences between official government positions and public opinion. Many in Europe now believe it is becoming clearer and clearer that “Israel is not honest in its attitude to the peace process.” In the last couple of years, “when there has been a choice for Israel between peace and land, Israel chose land.” In political circles, some Europeans feel like they have been “taken for a ride” by Israel. Europe also has never been comfortable with the post-9/11 outlook, and feels like it has been “painted into a corner” regarding relations with Hamas and will be looking to find a way out. This provides, from a Palestinian perspective, an interesting question as to how to create an environment where Europe can get out of this position and take a “more realistic” position in the region. Factors that Europeans look at include: 1) the degree of division among Palestinians. (Europeans understand diversity, and European society is based on it, but division is another thing, especially in a national liberation situation); 2) democracy; 3) respect for human rights; 4) security and opposition to violence. It is worth noting, one participant said, that on the question of violence, Israel “has won the fight” in Western public opinion. As soon as there is any violence in the region, the blame shifts only one way, to the Palestinians.



DELEGATION WITH MOHAMAD AWAD, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER  
(2<sup>ND</sup> FROM LEFT AND AHMED YOUSIF (RIGHT)

The EU, it was noted, is already committed in various agreements, and if the EU would uphold its agreements, it could go a long way in the dialogue. There have been clear positions, for example that Israeli actions in the settlements and Jerusalem are illegal, but the EU is not acting on these agreements. One participant noted, “The EU in particular can apply standards” and we may look positively to an EU intervention.

There is a geographical bond between Europe and the Middle East that is significant. Many believe in the need for fruitful dialogue and the need to live together in peace. One participant pointed out that Europe has a great opportunity to pragmatically engage in economic cooperation, rehabilitation of the infrastructure throughout the Middle East in light of changes brought about in the Arab Spring.

Some thought that if the differences between Europe and the US positions could be better defined, Europe could potentially play an important role in helping to push the US on issues related to Palestine. Another said, “We need support from the US and the EU, to support reconciliation...Don’t apply pressures.”

Someone said that Jewish people around the world have a role to play in pressuring Israel for change and progress in its relations with Palestinians.

### **Terrorist Designation**

The continued listing of Hamas as a terrorist organization was questioned by many. This designation has an impact in many ways, including laws and rules limiting opportunities for dialogue that could address core concerns on all sides. One person said, "If Europe removed Hamas from the terrorist list, and dealt equally with different Palestinian parties this will be a serious change."

One of the basic political realities is that the US still has a very negative perspective of Hamas and other Islamic groups. One participant noted it is very important to remember we are still "under 9/11's shadow." This has raised the political cost for politicians in the US. One of the basic US goals is to limit the political influence of Hamas, even after the 2006 election. The policy circles in DC also view Palestinian reconciliation as a negative, since they believe this will "enlarge rather than shrink" the space for Hamas and Islamic Jihad. This also, in parallel, is accompanied by a deep skepticism over the new Palestinian strategy of non-violent struggle. Some in DC wonder if it is still the same Hamas, has it really "changed its spots." Changing this perception will take some persuading. However, if this reported change of tactics toward non-violence is true, it provides an area of leverage which some thought might "change the political dynamic," though it won't be easy or quick. The ability of Israel (supported by the US and Europe) to label Palestinians, especially Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, as terrorists plays strongly into the international post-9/11 mood. To the extent that Hamas and others reinforce this label, it strategically backfires.

One participant asked, "What is the difference between terror and freedom fighting?" From this perspective, Hamas and others believe themselves to be the victims of injustices perpetrated by the US and a majority of Europeans in support of Israel. One participant said, "The real terrorism is the occupation supported by the US and the West," who are sending money and materials to kill Palestinians.

### **Criticisms**

Palestinians are told to face the political reality of the US election year, while meanwhile, one participant pointed out, Israel will complete more settlements, continue to annex Jerusalem, and otherwise change the geography of the land. Some felt that arguments that focus on the domestic political scene in the US, the economic situation in Europe, etc. seem to be letting the US and Europe off too easy. At the same time that Palestinians are being asked to give up violence, they also get the message that their issue is no longer of primary immediacy on the international agenda. One participant asked, "Why are Palestinians always blamed while Israel is spoiled by the US and the West?" The West wants to assess whether or not Hamas has changed strategy toward non-violence as proposed by Meshal. Meanwhile, Israeli actions in the settlements, East Jerusalem, etc are not being addressed. One Palestinian participant expressed frustration that for over five years since Abbas has been in power, saying peace is the plan, but there has been no concerted pressure from Europe or the US on Israel. Someone else said, "Frankly, it's not us who needs to change." Someone said Palestinians "demand the US and Europe to stand by in harmony with their principles," to stand by the oppressed against the oppressors. Someone said, "We can have much better democracy than the US."

Someone else expressed frustration that even when the US says in private that the Palestinians are right, publicly they state unconditional support for Israel. One person said that Americans have "lost their role as mediators" because they "speak the language of Israel." Someone said, we gave the US space for their role as mediator and they failed. The US and Israeli opposition to reconciliation further this frustration. One

person said that Europe could play an increasing and important role in helping to achieve reconciliation and unity, but it is talking only to Ramallah and this is limiting their impact.

### UN Bid

From the perspective of some Palestinians, the US and others intercepting the bid for UN membership raised questions about the commitment to the “road map” which the quartet seems to recognize and which includes reference to two states. One person said Palestinians went to the UN to implement and dispense the two state solution, “not to insult the US.” Someone pointed out that the PLO is designed to represent all Palestinians, and had the right to do this. They are still considering going to other UN organizations as they did with UNESCO. This is a “genuine right.” “Seeking this right doesn’t target the legitimacy of Israel or its existence. It seeks not to delegitimize Israel, but to delegitimize the occupation, and to reinforce our right to live independently “side by side.”

Some said that there was a contrast between the support of Hamas leadership outside, which looked like it supported the Palestinian bid and didn’t reject it, from the Hamas leadership in Gaza which didn’t support it and “prevented people from supporting Abu Mazen.” Some say Hamas was not consulted on the UN bid, and this “didn’t pay attention to unity.” Hamas reportedly rejected permission for mass marches in Gaza in favor of the UN bid. Others looked at this from a different perspective—there are some states with populations less than 50,000 that were not granted UN statehood despite the support of more than 180 states. Some believe this attempt at UN recognition only served to weaken Palestinian leadership in front of Hamas. Others thought that the attention it brought to Palestinian issues was useful. Even some very conservative US senators, for example, said they didn’t support US having to pull out from UNESCO in response to UNESCO’s recognition.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon’s recent visit to Gaza was a disappointment to many. He “said less than what was required from him from our side”. He also refused to meet the political leaders in Gaza.

### People-to-People

There was a belief expressed in our meeting that people in the US and most of Europe do not know anything about the situation in Gaza. One participant said he has “trust in people.” Someone highlighted the difference between the people and the government in the West and the US. “People want to befriend people. God created people to understand each other.” Someone noted that there are some similarities between the US civil rights movements in the 1950s and 1960s, and this is an argument that resonates in an American context, especially if the non-violent strategy is solidified and promoted.

As one participant said, Palestinians want a relationship with the US and Europe “based on justice” and ask Americans “to implement justice.” This participant wondered if intellectuals in the US and Europe would describe what is happening in Gaza as justice or not. Some Palestinians point out that their cause is similar to others similarly oppressed in other parts of the world, and say they are ready to cooperate to stop suffering, to stop “criminal and savage occupations and dictatorships” and the forces of “dehumanization.”



CLAUDIA VAUGHN, PAOLO FORADORI,  
TAGHREED EL KHODARY, MATT DUSS AT  
MOMUMENT COMMEMORATING 9 TURKS KILLED  
ON THE FLOTILLA

However, there was a strongly expressed belief that if Europe and the US continue current policies considered against the interests of Palestinians, they will “lose too much” among the Palestinian population.

They do not blame the American people, but they do blame the administration. Obama is seen as a tremendous disappointment, especially on the question of settlements.

The rights Gazans desire are fundamental human rights, acknowledged and accepted by the global community. This appeal on a human rights basis resonates within the US and especially within Europe.

Palestinians perceive themselves as victims with limited options.

“We are ready to understand US interests,” one participant said, “but not at the expense of our national interest or our lives. Wars are all massacres against us,” this participant said, pointing not only to Gaza and the West Bank, but also the Sabra and Shatila, and South Lebanon. “The West closed its doors to us...we are not foes of the West. We are not enemies,” said one senior participant.

It was pointed out that Gaza provides business opportunities (it was noted that Google has played a positive role in Gaza). They are looking for experts, possibly from Egypt, to come invest in the land, and help make use of the resources there. They are looking for a bigger generator project, for example.



MAHMOUD AL ZAHAR

### Next Steps

Some ideas surfaced in the course of the discussions, which could be further explored in future meetings. The following list identifies some of these areas, it is not prioritized:

- The continuation of a *de facto* siege on Gaza was called “a big political mistake.” Many believe that Israel, Egypt and others could take further measures to increase the quality of life for average Gazans.
- A Gazan airport and seaport would greatly improve the Gazan economy, according to many. These structures in principle could be established in a special zone in Egypt.
- The list of goods that are not allowed into Gaza should be totally re-examined. For example, solar energy, and other items that pose no security threat to Israel should be allowed as a matter of priority. Increasing economic development in Gaza is also a way to address Israeli security concerns.
- The listing of Hamas as a terrorist organization hinders forward movement on key issues, including processes for dialogue and should be urgently reconsidered.
- A portrayal of a more defensive strategy on the part of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, to the extent this reflects current strategy, would give scope for improved relations with the US and Europe.
- Palestinians could signal they are willing to talk at any time with Israel, and therefore place the pressure on Israel to show more clearly its lack of interest in real negotiations rather than letting Israel promote itself as the one willing to talk.

- There was a belief that however slight they may be, the differences between the US and Europe on questions relating to Gaza should be explored. The role of Europe could be pivotal, especially when it comes to issues related to human rights in Gaza. For example, even if the US does not move on the issue, if Europe removed Hamas from the terrorist list, and dealt equally with different Palestinian parties this would be considered a “serious change.”
- Europe has some preexisting responsibilities regarding Palestinian questions, and these could be revisited. There have been clear positions, for example that Israeli actions in the settlements and Jerusalem are illegal, but the EU is not acting on these agreements.
- Some felt reconciliation will be important in dealing with the EU. It would be difficult for the EU to ignore an appeal from Palestinians speaking with one voice opposing what have been defined as illegal Israeli actions.
- Europeans, including MEPs and others, should visit Gaza and help define steps for its economic development.
- The frustration and the negative domestic impact experienced by Gaza leadership when they go to Europe and return with no “tangibles” should not be overlooked.
- There are steps that Hamas and others could take to clear up any opportunities for misconstruction of their intentions and precepts. For example, certain phrasing in the Hamas charter repeatedly is used by those who question Hamas’s underlying intentions. Political leaders in any environment can make use of their authority and public roles to clarify any vague areas and to ensure that governing charters, etc reflect the current policies.
- Taking all opportunities to acknowledge a plurality in the Palestinian political and religious landscape was considered by some to be important.
- Prisoner release remains an important issue. Some have suggested sharing lists of prisoners, and a synchronized release of political prisoners held in both the West Bank and Gaza might be possible.
- The issuing of passports remains a problem. Fatah has proposed that the old passport office in Gaza could be reopened, to allow for applications to be taken, then forward to Ramallah for central processing.
- Border crossings restrictions should be eased, including making it easier for Fatah members, who still report some difficulties.
- Further discussions are needed on coordination of security forces as part of reconciliation.
- Some Palestinians are considering the option to go to other UN organizations for recognition, as they did with UNESCO.
- Normalizing the Egyptian border would be important for reconstruction, and perhaps Egypt could help with that reconstruction.
- Some further attention might be given to the Palestinian presence in DC, which is much less effective than Israeli interest groups that are present in DC, and which have been nurtured over many years.
- Ways to facilitate reconstruction in Gaza could be discussed in meeting between Fatah and Hamas.
- The Jewish community around the world could send a stronger signal to Israel to change its policies and to promote resolution of the conflict with Palestinians.

## CONCLUSION

In the end, all problems are solved through some sort of compromise. In Gaza (and among Palestinians more broadly), there is a strong perception that Israel has yet to show willingness to compromise. Some believe this makes Palestinian unity even more important, so it cannot be used as a diversion from the main lack of movement on the Israeli side.

Action is needed to improve the lives of the people in Gaza, despite the many intensely challenging issues involved both internal level and an international level. As one participant said, “No one can justify the siege of Gaza.”



## PARTICIPANTS

### From Gaza

#### **Workshop Participants (Provisional List)**

*The workshop was co-chaired by Paolo Cotta-Ramusino, Mahmoud Al-Zahar, and Taghreed El-Khodary.*

Ismael Al-Ashkar, Palestinian Legislative Council, Hamas

Khadir Habib, Islamic Jihad

Diab al-Louh, Fatah

Yehia Mousa, Palestinian Legislative Council, Hamas

Sayed Msameh, Hamas

Rizeq Al-Mzaanin, Fatah

Basim Naem, Minister of Health, Hamas

Huda Naem, Palestinian Legislative Council, Hamas

Yehia Rabah, Fatah

Abd Al-Rahman Abu Nasir, Fatah

Mukhaimar abu Saadah, Professor of Political Science, Azhar University, Fatah

Jamil Salameh, Member of the Reconciliation Committee

Ayman Shahin, Professor of Political Science, Azhar University, Fatah

Alaziz alshiqaki, Member of the Reconciliation Committee

Dr Abdul Aziz Umar, Hamas

Zainab Al-Wazir, Fatah

Ahmed Yousif, Hamas

Jamil Yousif, Islamic Jihad

Mahmoud Al-Zahar, senior leader and co-founder of Hamas

#### **Private Meetings**

Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders

Fatah leaders (including Abd Allah Abu Samhadanah)

House of Wisdom, including Mohamad Awad, Deputy Prime Minister

Senior businesspeople and intellectuals



## International Delegation

**Mrs. Sandra Ionno Butcher**, Senior Program Coordinator, International Secretariat, Pugwash Conferences, UK; Director, Pugwash History Project; Honorary Research Associate, Science and Technology Studies Department, University College London [formerly: Joint Executive Secretary, British Pugwash Group; Executive Director, Student Pugwash USA; Interim Research Director and Senior Analyst, British American Security Information Council]

**Prof. Paolo Cotta-Ramusino**, Secretary-General, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs; Member, Pugwash Executive Committee; Professor of Mathematical Physics, University of Milan, Italy [formerly: Secretary General, Union of Italian Scientists for Disarmament (USPID); Director, Program on Disarmament and International Security, Landau Network – Centro Volta, Como, Italy]

**Mr. Matthew Duss**, Policy Analyst and Director of Middle East Progress at American Progress, Washington, DC

**Dr. Paolo Foradori**, Senior Lecturer, Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento (Italy)

**Mr. Roland Friedrich**, Head of Office 'Palestinian Territories', Operations Division Africa and Middle East, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), Al-Bireh/Ramallah, Palestinian Territories

**Dr. Steven Miller**, Director, International Security Program, Center for Science & International Affairs (CSIA), Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA; Member, American Academy of Arts and Sciences; Editor-in-Chief, International Security; Member, Pugwash Council; Co-Chair, U.S. Pugwash Group [formerly: Senior Research Fellow, SIPRI; Assistant Professor, Defence and Arms Control Studies, MIT]

**Mr. Mathias Mossberg, Ambassador (ret)**, Senior Fellow, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University, Sweden, directing the Parallel States Project at Lund University. Served i.a. at the Swedish Embassy in Amman with responsibilities for the Occupied Territories, as ME Director at the Swedish Foreign Ministry, and as Director of Policy Planning and as Ambassador in Morocco

**Mr. Joachim Paul**, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Cairo

**Ms. Claudia Vaughn**, Program Coordinator, Pugwash Conferences, Rome, Italy

**Dr. René Wildangel**, Director Arab Middle East Office, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Ramallah/ Palestinian Territories

