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MIDEAST/N. AFRICA

*Hisham Ahmed is an ICWA Fellow compiling oral narratives of the Palestinian People.*

## Democracy Debates in Gaza

JERUSALEM, Israel

September 1995

By Hisham H. Ahmed

On August 29, 1995, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung [Foundation] of Germany conducted one of its democracy workshops in the Gaza Strip. About 60 people were invited to the modest facilities at the YMCA hall. Close to 100 attended.

Three panels were organized. The first dealt with the role of political movements and parties in building a democratic Palestinian civil society. The second panel focused on Islamic and secular perspectives on democracy. Finally, strategies for democratizing Palestinian society were discussed.

I was invited to participate in the second panel. My task was to present a secular view of democracy. However, I found the first panel, and particularly the discussion that followed, most fascinating. The panel was composed of speakers representing different political orientations. Mr. Diyab Al-Loah represented Fatah; Mr. Imad Al-Falouji represented Hamas; and Dr. Heidar Abdul-Shafi represented the Democratic Construction Movement. What follows is a translation and transcription of what was said.

**Diyab:** In the name of God the merciful. To begin with, I would like to thank the brothers who organized this panel. We believe that the subject under discussion is extremely important. The Palestinian National Authority, the PNA, has now been formed and the Palestinian people have started to govern themselves for the first time in contemporary Palestinian history. All political parties and movements should perform their role in a manner consistent with this historic responsibility. The subject of democracy has been demoted for many years under the Israeli occupation. Our objective oppressive conditions as a people have been quite abnormal.

It is of importance to talk about democracy in Fatah. The democracy we used to practice in the movement had a solid basis. We espoused democratic centralism based on democracy and centralization. Interaction within the movement, especially in its leadership institutions, was conducted on the basis of these two principles. However, due to the oppressive measures of the Israeli occupation, very often centralism overcame democracy in decision-making, governance and in organizing the struggle.

Moreover, we used to rely on democratic practices derived from other institutions in our movement. We were democratic in expressing opinions and dictatorial in executing decisions: Once a decision was arrived at by majority rule, it became binding on the minority, *i.e.*, those in the opposition.

In previous stages, most of our work was secretive in nature. We relied on the "do it, then discuss it" principle. After the enormous developments that took place over the course of the past year, we started taking a series of new measures to solidify the democratic tradition in the movement. We are particularly interested in convening local and regional conferences for the election of leaders. This will raise the level of democracy inside Fatah; we urgently need to be democratic at this crucial stage. As the ruling party, we bear the responsibility

to build Palestinian civil society.

It is of utmost importance to deepen the democratic tradition within political parties and movements as a prerequisite for building a Palestinian civil society. What makes this issue even more pressing is the fact that Palestinian society is highly politicized. After the signing of the Oslo accords by Israel and the PLO, Palestinian society was divided between supporters and opponents. We view opposition as a healthy, necessary phenomenon for the society. Therefore, from the moment the PNA began its work, we in Fatah have been utterly careful to insure that all parties and movements contribute to the building of Palestinian society. We put particular emphasis on the right and role of opposition movements and parties to express themselves freely.

I regret to say that the results have not been at the expected and/or required level. Political opposition forces, especially the Islamic movement, have deviated from principled opposition in their political work. In particular, this pertains to conducting military operations and other suicide violent attacks, whether in or from the areas under the control of the PNA. This course of action contradicts the very historic stage through which we are going. Such attacks violate agreements we had with the Israelis. These agreements should be respected. They are reached and signed by the PLO, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The behavior of the opposition, particularly that of the Islamic movement, has put us as a Palestinian people in an awkward position: It gave the Israelis the justification to drag their feet and to disavow commitments they made to us.

It is for this reason that I want to stress that the opposition should honor agreements signed by the PLO. In effect, these agreements are signed by all Palestinians in their various locations of residence. No given faction or party has the right to make or violate a treaty with any other state, nor does it have the right to make peace or go to war. There is only one authority that represents the homeland and the people. It should be respected and its agreements should be respected as well, since it represents the will of the Palestinian people.

How do we build a healthy civil society? First, we should put an end to the spread of arms on our streets. Some factions have their armed groups roaming around in different places. This stage requires us all to be united. Only the Palestinian police force is authorized to carry arms. Political parties and movements can continue to perform their political role without any problems. All of us, however, should put an end to the spread of arms.

There is also tribalism in Palestinian society. It stands in the way of building a civil society. Regrettably, in the last few months this phenomenon has become even more rampant than at the start of the Israeli occupation. Tribalism has been getting stronger. Building a civil society and insuring security to the citizenry necessitates getting rid of this phenomenon. We should deepen the sense of belonging to the society and to the people in general, rather than to the tribe.

Now, when a problem occurs between two individuals, their respective tribes interfere on their behalf. To enable civil society to survive, a solid base of discipline and law needs to be established. Without insuring law and security, it will be quite difficult for us as a people to pursue our goal of building a civil society.

In brief, if the issues I dealt with are taken into consideration, we should be able to build a civil society with the participation of all political parties and movements. I want to stress that not a single organization, party or movement is free of this responsibility at this critical stage in our history. We all bear the responsibility. Building the homeland is not the responsibility of Fatah and the PNA only. After all, the PNA is not exclusive to one political organization: It represents all the Palestinian people. All political groups have responsibility to strengthen the PNA.

**Imad:** In the name of God the merciful. Undoubtedly, political parties represent the core of any political society. Due to our circumstances, we as Palestinians have a particular characteristic in this regard. Palestinian political parties have an important role to play in building and in solidifying democracy in our society. However, the question that should be tackled is whether these parties practice democracy internally. This will help us understand whether they practice it externally in terms of their dealings with other parties. This should be the main issue of concern. People can tell how democratic a party is. No party that does not practice democracy internally can practice it externally.

We very well understand the nature of each and every faction and organization. We have had several experiences together as political parties over the past several years. Also helpful in shaping our understanding of others has been the interaction during the struggle against the occupation and in prison. Finally, the agreements and meetings we had with other groups made us realize that the principal problem is that there is no democracy inside political parties. This crisis among party leaders has been reflected on the masses. Thus, discussions of democracy have become void of content. It should not come as a surprise

"There is only one authority that represents the homeland and the people. It should be respected and its agreements should be respected as well, since it represents the will of the Palestinian people."



to know that when the subject of democracy is raised, some people smile and others whisper. They all know what is happening on the ground.

One would expect to see different opinions within a party. This is quite natural: There might be supporters of and opponents to certain policies within the same party. I have not seen, however, one party that respects having different opinions.

I was not planning to talk about political differences. After all, this session is devoted to a discussion of the role of political parties to promote democracy in the future.: This session deals with our ambitions and wishes. How should a party play its role to strengthen civil society? How should a party lead the masses? I don't view a party as a group of individuals brought together by an idea; rather, I view it in civilized terms. In order to lead the people in the best way possible, a party should allow all points of view to be expressed. Only in this way can the people achieve their goals and ambitions. Therefore, we should broaden our horizons when we speak of political parties. A party is cultural thought. How do we build society? We should agree on one main theme. This, however, should not prevent us from criticizing when we find it necessary to do so. All points of view should be heard regardless of differences in opinion.

For example, let's talk about elections. A given party might have a critical position toward elections. What will happen to a member from an opposition party if he participates in elections? Would he be considered to have violated the principles of the party? It is to be kept in mind that the basic rules of the party are not violated. According to the Arab tradition here, however, this kind of member will most likely be dismissed. His character will be defamed. If a member opposes his party's official position on another issue, we are likely to see character assassination. His attempt to express himself to other members will, with certainty, be obstructed. The party leadership will destroy his reputation, so that he does not make any noise around. All Palestinian parties without any exception face this real crisis.

Although that was not my intent, I find myself compelled to respond to some of the things brother Diyab said. Diyab asserted that the opposition has the right to perform its role at this critical stage. I would suggest that the Palestinian political opposition lacks the atmosphere in which to express itself freely in the media. Are the official media, radio and TV, open to all political parties to the same degree? Is Palestinian democracy real? When you turn on Palestinian Radio, do you find all points of view represented?

The peace agreements represent only the will of

those who signed them. We do believe that the PLO is a legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. It is not the sole one, however. There are forces that are not represented in this organization. In 1989, the Islamic movement was asked to join the Palestine National Council the PNC. Based on the Shura and democratic deliberations, a position was adopted. We did not reach an agreement with the PLO as to the size of our representation. Therefore, the PNC kept out of its representation a sizable portion of the Palestinian people. For this reason, I cannot concur with the view that the signing of the peace accords by the PLO is binding on the Islamic movement.

Nonetheless, the Islamic movement is prepared to participate in building civil society in spite of its political differences with the PNA. It has taken initiatives in this regard, such as respecting the present PNA and abiding by the laws of the state. From the very beginning, the Islamic movement welcomed the PNA and complied with many of its decisions.

I fully agree with Diyab that all of us should build Palestinian civil society. This society should be under total Palestinian control and authority. Our civil society should enjoy freedom of the press and speech. It should not suffer from closing down newspapers and the like. I hope that all parties will be able to express themselves in civilized democratic ways. Hopefully, nobody will resort for self-expression to methods all of us might not like.

The PNA should respect the point of view and method of the Islamic movement to the same degree we have respected its participation in the negotiations.

**Dr. Heidar:** Good morning. Our title "the role of political parties and movements in building democracy and civil society" does not limit our discussion to the Palestinian case. The title is more general in scope. I certainly do not want to talk about the current situation here.: There is no democracy in Palestinian parties.

In general, however, I would suggest that political parties are one indication of democracy. Democracy means a lot of things. Among others, it means political pluralism and freedom of having parties and organizations. Accordingly, each party should play its role in building democracy.

I do not want to deal with argumentative positions. Let's move away from our situation and try to talk about democracy objectively. This is quite important: We should know what democracy means and how important it is. Further, we should learn how to arrive at a democratic society.

The word "democracy" is taken from Greek. It is

made up of two words: Demos means people and Crutus means authority. In effect, democracy means authority of the people. At the time of the city-state in ancient Greek society there was direct democracy: Authority was in the hands of the people. It was possible to do that at the time because the structure of society was not complicated. The population of the city-state probably did not exceed 10,000. Women and slaves were deprived of political rights. In essence, the society was very small and thus everyone participated in exercising authority. Representatives were responsible to the whole people. This was the type of democracy that existed at the start of Greek society. It lasted for a while. Afterwards, discussion of democracy stopped for about 2,000 years.

In the Middle Ages of Europe, new developments took place. The concept of the state was redefined. So was the meaning of people. Discussions of rights took shape. Interests of the various groups in the state were talked about.

This is how the modern way of thinking about democracy started. Authority of the people is not to be exercised directly as was the case at the time of ancient Greece. Authority is to be carried out by elected representatives. This was called legislative democracy. We also had liberal and constitutional democracy. Economic and social democracy also emerged: Extra care was taken in order not to let one group have advantages over others. As a result, democracy started to mean a lot of things. It meant authority of the people; supremacy of the law; respect of human rights; political pluralism; freedom of parties and institutions; rights of women; freedom of worship; and many other things. Many of these were stressed by those revolutions that propagated democracy, especially in Britain and France.

Democracy is not a slogan. Many talk a lot about democracy without adhering to its requirements. Democracy is not only education and knowledge. It is also practice. This is what is important. This does not at all mean that learning about democracy is not significant. Actually, arriving at a democratic society starts by learning about the process. The difficulty stems from practicing what is being learnt. What do we do in this case?

I would suggest that we are talking about a process that is ongoing in nature. In my view, democracy must start at home. The mother has the greatest role to play of all. She is the one who disciplines the child in his relationship with other children. Among other things, he needs to be taught the importance of mutual respect.

The second station for learning about democracy is

the kindergarten. All different stages at school are important as well: They are very critical to one's upbringing. He who is raised in an environment of aggression and selfishness cannot learn about democracy at a later stage. Accordingly, the furtherance of democracy is an ongoing process.

Of course, social institutions, political parties and unions have their role to play. These bodies might provide examples of practice: They might serve as role-models. Pamphlets and courses about democracy are also helpful. A democratic institution, party or union will undoubtedly have a tremendous positive effect on the people. They learn so much about democracy by experience.

I think that we all agree on the fact that we don't have a democratic structure in our society. We are badly in need of democratic principles. This means that we should fiercely defend the values of democracy. We, for example, cannot remain silent on the obstruction of the laws. If we were to let this happen, we allow undemocratic practices to be on the rise. We should speak out loudly against tampering with laws.

The same can be said about human rights. With loud voices we should speak in support of respecting human rights and against their violations. These are important considerations in shaping democratic thought and in arriving at a real democratic society. Women's rights should be guaranteed. It is undemocratic to view women in a manner not equitable with their real role and status in society. All these issues are of great importance.

**"Democracy must start at home. The mother has the greatest role to play of all. She is the one who disciplines the child in his relationship with other children."**

The way institutions conduct themselves internally says a lot about how democratic they are. This relates to decision-making and administrative style.

Accountability and transparency are two important qualities for a democratic society, too. The executive branch, for example, should not be allowed to do all it sees fit. It should be accountable to others. In terms of transparency, everything should be clear. This should be particularly the case with financial affairs. You all very well understand that this is a sensitive issue. Therefore, unless accountability and transparency are taken into consideration, things will not go the right way. These are vital prerequisites for developing a society. We must insist on these matters.

Finally, suffice it to say that by practicing democracy, political parties serve as the institutions that can achieve the will of the people. This is usually done by electing qualified representatives who are accountable and whose positions are transparent.

You very well know that there were societies in Europe that were distant from democracy. They were

under the rule of notables and aristocrats. At other times such societies were governed by the church. Such situations eventually led to violent revolutions in several places—in Britain, France and Russia. In Russia the dictatorship of the Czar was replaced by that of the workers. It didn't last, however, because it was not a democracy.

We should learn something from these historical lessons. These lessons should be of benefit to our society, which is under construction. This requires us all to remain patient and to move away from factionalism. I call upon all Palestinians to remain open-minded at this stage, in spite of the fact that there is Fatah, DFLP PFLP and PPP. I call upon all to pledge allegiance to Palestine first and foremost. Otherwise, our losses might be incalculable.

## DISCUSSION

**Speaker One:** How does Mr. Al-Loah explain having a separate department specializing in tribal affairs, with a full-time director, in the PNA?

**Speaker Two:** Mr. Al-Loah indicated that he opposes the deepening of tribalism in the society. How does he explain the licensing of tribal leagues by the authority at this stage?

**Speaker Three:** The participants in the panel focused on democracy in the context of the relationship between various political branches. What should have been dealt with are the instruments to be employed by the people to practice democracy.

**Speaker Four:** I have several questions for Mr. Diyab. First, we all like to fight against the phenomenon of carrying arms. Who bears the responsibility, though? Second, tribalism is deep-rooted in Palestinian society. During the Intifada, however, it almost vanished. With the arrival of the authority, tribalism was strengthened all over again. It seems to have been encouraged by the authority. Third, Democracy is not just political in nature. It applies to the masses and to the authority. No one is to run away from it.

**Speaker Five:** My question is to Mr. Al-Loah. While at college, I have learnt that one of the main pillars of a democratic system is respect of the social contract by the political authority, which it had struck with the people who elected it. The authority is to represent and express the concerns of the people. The PLO had a contract with the Palestinian people. The PLO violated this contract. The contract was based on several premises. It included the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination; the right of independence; return of the refugees and statehood. The authority did not come as an expression of the will of the people.

It evolved as a result of political circumstances not necessarily agreed upon by the people. How does Mr. Al-Loah call for organizing the work of the opposition while there is no constitution to regulate any political activities? An article in a newspaper could cost somebody his political life. This is what happened with Professor Abdul-Sattar Qassem of Al-Najah National University in Nablus. What about absolute rule? There are several security apparatuses. Each has its own responsibilities. All of this hinders the development of a democratic society.

My other question is to Mr. Falouji. Would the Islamic movement be willing to respect the supremacy of the law? Will it not repeat the bloody experiences of Algeria?

**Speaker Six:** To begin with, I would like to thank all the panelists for what they said. Nonetheless, I have a question to Dr. Heidar who is highly respected among Palestinians. Can a party or a movement that calls for the consolidation of democracy boycott the forthcoming elections? What do you personally think and what does your movement think?

**"The international community and all parties to the conflict have recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people."**

**Speaker Seven:** My first point is to Mr. Al-Loah. Despite the fact that we talk about democracy, our starting point seems to be flawed. We do not seem to know where to begin. We consider every thing we say to be the last word.

As far as Mr. Falouji is concerned, here is what I want to say. He suggests that there can be no democracy without full control. This is quite a dangerous principle. We view democracy as a tool to take care of an urgent need during most difficult times. This can be under occupation, under the rule of the PNA or under the rule of the state. These urgent needs are ongoing in nature. They include securing basic rights to the individual and to the society. They further entail creating balanced relations between people. There should be no conditions attached for practicing democracy by any side.

My other point to Mr. Falouji is that you cannot undo the representative character of the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The fact that one party or organization did not join the PLO does not make it illegitimate. Historically, even the international community and all parties to the conflict have recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Thus, agreements signed by the PLO must be respected. This does not at all mean that the PLO can be absolutist in its decision-making or in its governance processes. It should reflect the will of the people and take their interests into consideration.

I have one objection to what Al-Loah said. This re-

lates to his view on the use of Palestinian arms. Historically, we heard that Palestine was to be liberated through the use of armed struggle. Nowadays, Palestinian guns should be used to protect the citizenry with full equal basis under the law. This means the authority that controls the gun cannot misuse it against the people. Since we carried guns in the past to serve the goal of liberation, we should use them today to protect opponents and supporters of the authority alike. What is happening, however, shows otherwise.

**Speaker Eight:** First, I believe that all of us here are supporters of democracy. We all, however, disagree on what it means and on how to bring it about. For me, democracy is cultural in nature in every sense of the term: It is a socialization process. Each of the panelists talked about democracy from a different angle. Out of the various definitions, it is quite important to arrive at a Palestinian conception of democracy.

Frankly, we are going through a process of tremendous change: New patterns of interaction are replacing old ones. It is not fair to suggest that the PNA has backed tribalism. It is the objectivity of the situation that makes this phenomenon on the rise. All parties are contaminated with this problem, even on the leadership level. Political parties have not satisfied the ambitions of their Palestinian constituencies.

Having said all of that, I have a question to Mr. Falouji: Can your movement cooperate with us to formulate a practical political program where daily, as opposed to eternal, religious issues are dealt with?

**Speaker Nine:** All three panelists barely touched the subject of democracy. People are fed up hearing more about democracy. Practice is not at all there. Simply put, you cannot disagree with someone in power because he turns into a dictator right away.

What we are in need of is a practical concrete way of being democratic, not an abstract theoretical one. As a woman, I would feel that there is democracy the moment I see men looking at me as a human being with an equal status. Another thing is that tribalism has been rekindled with the return of the Authority. Tribalism is meant to replace the party system. Finally, opposition in Palestinian society is not new, as Al-Loah suggested: It has been around since the establishment of the PLO.

**Speaker Ten:** I have a criticism to make. Indeed, we are discussing an extremely important subject. However, the panelists did not deal with the heart of the matter. They veered toward political lines. It is not fair for one party to have its voice heard while others

do not. Such issues need to be discussed objectively and scientifically. We are in need of very long sessions to deal with matters such as elections, comprehensive national dialogue, our concept of Authority and political parties. All political tendencies and personalities should be included in such discussions.

Mr. Al-Loah talked about the obligation of the opposition to respect the laws that are put forth by the Authority. If the Authority were to represent the interests of all social and political segments, I would be supportive of respecting the law. How would I, as a citizen, respect the law that hurts me and violates my rights? How would I respect a law that negates my national problem? Opposition is a legitimate thing to have. The question that should be dealt with is how can the opposition express itself?

In our discussion of democracy, we should keep in mind that an idea becomes a mode of behavior someday. The question I want to raise to our brothers in Fatah, since it is the leading organization, is how do they feel about proportional representation? Or, do they really believe that all institutional hiring should be done by appointment? If we look at appointments by the Authority, we will find that those who belong to Fatah get appointed right away. On the other hand, activists who belong to another faction don't get appointed, even if they spent 30 years of their life for the cause. Can we consider this Authority to be representative of everybody? Or, is it a factional Authority?

**"In the West Bank and the Gaza Strip there are British, Jordanian, Israeli and Egyptian laws. Accordingly, we should draft our own laws."**

**Speaker Eleven:** In general, democracy can be said to mean rule of the people, by the people and for the people. However, interpretations are too many to enumerate. Furthermore, we cannot talk about laws unless we have them. First, we should create a code of law. In the West Bank and the Gaza Strip there are British, Jordanian, Israeli and Egyptian laws. Accordingly, we should draft our own laws.

Before the arrival of the Authority, all factions used to settle their differences in the Palestine National Council, the PNC. As to Hamas, there was a measure to include them in the PNC. They, however, refused to attend the last session of the PNC and the last three meetings of the Central Council.

To question the legitimate representation of the PLO is tantamount to passing a red light.

**Speaker Twelve:** My question is to Mr. Al-Loah. What about the Palestinian citizen in the midst of all such legal contradictions? How should I feel about the Authority when it violates all my rights and all the laws? How should we respect an Authority that does Israel's job here? It arrests and humiliates those

who conduct operations against Israelis. As citizens we are lost between various security apparatuses. We can survive against all kinds of political odds. We can afford to starve or to withstand economic blockades. But to remain silent on the disappearance of citizens due to acts committed by the Authority is more than anybody can take.

**Dr. Heidar:** To begin with, I want to stress that elections are an important component of democracy. Elections represent the right vehicle for choosing true representatives in society. There can be no separation between democracy and elections. Any democratic person can never dismiss the importance of elections. Our position regarding the forthcoming elections raises other questions.: The contents of the Oslo Accords regarding elections contain some negative aspects. Why? The Oslo accords stipulate that elections are to be conducted according to an Israeli-Palestinian agreement. This means that the Accords gave Israel the right to interfere in an affair that should be solely Palestinian. Agreements are parts of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. As soon as the Accords gave Israel the right to interfere, she started to put forth demands and conditions that cannot be implemented. Most dangerous of these conditions is assigning a different status to Jerusalemites from that of the rest of Palestinian society in the other occupied territories. Basically, the Israelis want Palestinian legitimization of their illegal annexation of Jerusalem. In my view, the Authority did not pay attention to this issue. Thus, elections might be conducted on the basis of such Israeli conditions.

There are other conditions demanded by Israel that we, as the Democratic Construction Movement, cannot agree to. These include, but are not limited to, Israel's interference in the number of candidates to be elected and the responsibilities of the elected council. These are very dangerous issues. We are keeping our eyes open, so to speak. We want to see how the Authority will conduct itself. Unfortunately, there is a total blackout as to what goes on at the negotiating table until now. My view is that at the end of the negotiations, the people have the right to know how and under what terms elections will be conducted. It will be most dangerous if the Authority does not disclose details to the people. This will lead all honest people to boycott the elections. Neither the Palestinian people nor the Democratic Construction Movement can participate in an election that will violate one of our basic rights. The Palestinian people have the right to have free elections where legitimate representatives are chosen. The elected council should have the power to legislate, because it represents the people.

**Diyab:** To begin with, I want to thank all the brothers

and sisters for the very frank questions they raised. First, I want to remind the audience that I am here in my capacity as a representative of Fatah and not of the PNA.

In all candor, I consider myself to be one of the strongest supporters of the current negotiating political process. As far as questions dealing with the PNA, I can only give my personal view. Therefore, whatever I say otherwise represents the point of view of Fatah.

We very well understand the dangers inculcated in developing tribal sentiments in Palestinian society. I dealt with this issue rather briefly. In my presentation, I did not offer a comprehensive analysis of what is going on. Here, I would say that there is an urgent need to develop new patterns of interaction in our society, so that they would replace old, outdated ones. New patterns should gradually put an end to tribal and familial sentiments. The sense of belonging to Palestinian society should be enhanced. One cannot make the argument that by establishing a tribal council or by having a presidential advisor for tribal affairs, the Authority encouraged tribalism in the society. Tribalism has been deeply rooted in Gaza for many years. The sense of tribalism might have been reduced somewhat during the Intifada. But new political developments may have helped heads of families and tribes to play a more visible role at this stage. The Authority has created this council to deal with such a phenomenon and in order to contain it. I personally stress the need for doing away with tribalism.

"We Gazans have suffered from the spread of weapons more than anybody else, especially the year before the PNA arrived."

As far as the possession and the use of arms are concerned, let me say the following. We Gazans have suffered from the spread of weapons more than anybody else, especially the year before the PNA arrived. The Israeli occupation deliberately wanted to spread weapons among people. It worked hard to achieve this goal. Everyone felt the danger of the spread of weapons. Therefore, this danger should be removed by getting rid of the weapons, which are spread in an arbitrary manner. We should have some arms-control measure.

Those weapons that are not licensed should be confiscated. In addition, those weapons in the hands of Palestinian factions should be turned over to the Palestinian police force. Previously, I used to advocate keeping weapons in the hands of various factions. Now, however, security requirements have changed drastically. Such weapons are not needed since they are dangerous.

All citizens, regardless of their factional affiliation, should be treated equally. Any citizen who wants to

possess a weapon should seek licensing from the Authority. We cannot afford a show of force by the weapons we carry with us. This type of behavior frightens the citizenry. Therefore, this is totally unacceptable.

The Palestinian police force is the only official body responsible for the security of all citizens without any exception. All states in the world have an armed body. This does not mean that the weapons they have can be used against other parties in the opposition. These weapons are not to be used in a war, either.

Previously, we used to say that armed struggle was the means to liberate Palestine. Today, we say that negotiations are the means to work out problems with the Israelis.

Objectively, I cannot say that we have achieved all our goals: Not all Palestinian lands are liberated. Frankly, we have not achieved the minimum of our national ambitions. The Oslo Accords, however, have opened the door for our national rights to materialize. I say this in spite of their shortcomings and despite the fact that I personally have some reservations and criticisms regarding them. If we and all parties and movements cooperate, regardless of whether we are supporters or opponents, we shall be able to pass this critical stage in spite of all difficulties. We will, indeed, be able to build our homeland. All citizens should respect the agreements we signed. It is not the right of any party to say that it wants to defeat these agreements by all means. There are democratic legitimate means that can be followed.

Using violent means, however, to destroy such agreements and to undo the current state of affairs contradicts our national vision and our national ambitions. It further contradicts our local and regional commitments.

Regarding hiring, the situation is like this: Some factions permitted their supporters to apply for jobs with the PNA. Such applicants were welcomed and many were hired. Other factions either prevented their supporters from applying or decided to open the doors to applications when it was too late. By then institutions were filled and many extra applicants were not hired. As far as I personally know, an application from a non-Fatah applicant was generally approved before an application from a Fatah supporter. A non-Fatah member, according to what I know, was even promoted much faster than a Fatah supporter.

Issues like arrests, the state security court and protection of citizens are extremely important. I am

pained by all of this. To end the phenomenon of arrests, which was started several months ago by the PNA, we should end the reasons that caused it to happen. Personally, I suggest that the reasons should be dealt with first.

The PNA does not conduct arbitrary arrests. It first investigates and then arrests to maintain security and order. This happens only after acts of violence are committed. Such acts have very negative ramifications as far as our interests are concerned. There might be other circumstances that compel the PNA to take certain measures to maintain order and security.

Very often, the other side uses security-related issues as excuses to disengage from commitments they made to the PLO. Thus, the PNA is expected to prove that it is capable of enforcing law and order in its areas, in order to become qualified to spread it to other areas. This is quite an important issue. This is the responsibility of each and every citizen. It is the responsibility of the society as a whole, especially of the security apparatuses.

**"So long as the parties themselves are not democratic, they can neither preach democracy, nor can they practice it."**

Let me also say that we are not the first society to have different security apparatuses. Let's also not forget that we are Arabs living in an Arab society. In some other states, there are apparatuses such as "Protective Security," "State Security" and "Mukhabarat." We are not the first to have such varied systems of security. The question that needs to be raised has nothing to do with the number of systems. It pertains to the role of such security apparatuses and to the functions they perform. We need to wonder about the way these systems coordinate matters among themselves. This issue requires a detailed study by all concerned.

**Imad:** I want to stress that as a Palestinian people, we are going through a new stage. There is a huge malfunction, however. We can't keep beautifying our situation any more. We do not live in a democratic society.

Workshops and meetings like this are supposed to deepen the idea of democracy. I reiterate what Dr. Heidar said: "So long as the parties themselves are not democratic, they can neither preach democracy, nor can they practice it." All of us agree on this. Therefore, I cannot beautify our situation. If it continues the way it is, things will be frightening. We will continue to have an undemocratic society unless we tackle the problem right away. I continue to be optimistic. Having a workshop like this is indicative.

We should always be proud of being Arab. As Palestinians we have our own unique capabilities that we should develop further.

The Islamic movement wants to have a civilized democratic society. It agrees [that we must] have a democratically-arrived-at constitution that allows for political pluralism and freedom. We do not aspire to the type of fake democracy prevalent in the Arab World. We want real democracy. Keep in mind that the Algerian government, for example, called for democracy. But when it turned out that the Islamists were to win the elections, democracy was abandoned. The kind of democracy we want is that which is binding on all regardless of results. This is what we call for at this stage.

Many accuse us of wanting only to hold onto power. In reality, every political movement or party likes to get to power. We, however, want to be able to spread our civilized message in a democratic way. Nobody should try to shed any doubts on our respect for democracy. To the contrary! What we are asking for is a democratic constitution that respects everybody, — a constitution that should not be subject to a

signature by the President. We need institutions and tools to enable citizens to govern themselves. What the Palestinian people lack are institutions to regulate political life.

If we want to come up with a system to regulate the work of political parties, we should see to it that all are including in the deliberations. The same mistake applies to the regulation governing the press, which became law only when seen fit and signed by the President. All interested and concerned groups should be allowed to participate in organizing the Palestinian house.

As Dr. Heidar said, elections are one component of democracy. Therefore we support holding elections because we are against appointments. However, we do not want Israeli-Palestinian elections. We want Palestinian-Palestinian elections. Elections are a Palestinian affair. Nobody wants cosmetic elections with pre-determined results. We want real elections. □

## Current Fellows & Their Activities

**Hisham Ahmed.** Born blind in the Palestinian Dheisheh Refugee Camp near Bethlehem, Hisham finished his A-levels with the fifth highest score out of 13,000 students throughout Israel. He received a B.A. in political science on a scholarship from Illinois State University and his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of California in Santa Barbara. Back in East Jerusalem and still blind, Hisham plans to gather oral histories from a broad selection of Palestinians to produce a "Portrait of Palestine" at this crucial point in Middle Eastern history. [MIDEAST/N. AFRICA]

**Adam Albion.** A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is spending two years studying and writing about Turkey's regional role and growing importance as an actor in the Balkans, the Middle East and the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

**Cynthia Caron.** With a Masters degree in Forest Science from the Yale School of Forestry and Environment, Cynthia is spending two years in South Asia as ICWA's first John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow. She is studying and writing about the impact of forest-preservation projects on the lives (and land-tenure) of indigenous peoples and local farmers who live on their fringes. Her fellowship includes stays in Bhutan, India and Sri Lanka. [SOUTH ASIA/Forest & Society]

**William F. Foote.** Formerly a financial analyst with Lehman Brothers' Emerging Markets Group, Willy Foote is examining the economic substructure of Mexico and the impact of free-market reforms on Mexico's people, society and politics. Willy holds a Bachelor's degree from Yale University (history), a Master's from the London School of Economics (Development Economics; Latin America) and studied Basque history in San Sebastian, Spain. He carried out intensive Spanish-language studies in Guatemala in 1990 and then worked as a copy editor and Reporter for the Buenos Aires Herald from 1990 to 1992. [THE AMERICAS]

**Sharon Griffin.** A feature writer and contributing columnist on African affairs at the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, Sharon is spending two years in southern Africa studying Zulu and the KwaZulu kingdom and writing about the role of nongovernmental organizations as fulfillment centers for national needs in developing countries where governments are still feeling their way toward effective administration. She plans to travel and live in Namibia and Zimbabwe as well as South Africa. [sub-SAHARA]

**John Harris.** A would-be lawyer with an undergraduate degree in History from the University of Chicago, John reverted to international studies after a year of internship in the product-liability department of a Chicago law firm and took two years of postgraduate Russian at the University of Washington in Seattle. Based in Moscow during his fellowship, John is studying and writing about Russia's nascent political parties as they begin the difficult transition from identities based on the personalities of their leaders to positions based on national and international issues. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

**Pramila Jayapal.** Born in India, Pramila left when she was four and went through primary and secondary education in Indonesia. She graduated from Georgetown University in 1986 and won an M.B.A. from the Kellogg School of Management in Evanston, Illinois in 1990. She has worked as a corporate analyst for PaineWebber and an accounts manager for the world's leading producer of cardiac defibrillators, but most recently managed a \$7 million developing-country revolving-loan fund for the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) in Seattle. Pramila is spending two years in India tracing her roots and studying social issues involving religion, the status of women, population and AIDS. [SOUTH ASIA]

**Teresa C. Yates.** A former member of the American Civil Liberties Union's national task force on the workplace, Teresa is spending two years in South Africa observing and reporting on the efforts of the Mandela government to reform the national land-tenure system. A Vassar graduate with a *juris doctor* from the University of Cincinnati College of Law, Teresa had an internship at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies in Johannesburg in 1991 and 1992, studying the feasibility of including social and economic rights in the new South African constitution. While with the ACLU, she also conducted a Seminar on Women in the Law at Fordham Law School in New York. [sub-SAHARA]

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