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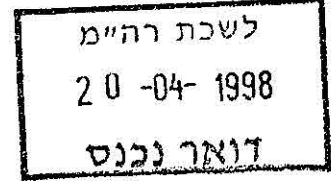
PALESTINIAN NATIONAL AUTHORITY  
Palestinian Legislative Council  
Secretariat General  
Information Department



السلطة الوطنية الفلسطينية  
المجلس التشريعي  
أمانة السر  
الدائرة الإعلامية

April 4, 1998

Benjamin Netanyahu  
MK-Jerusalem  
The Knesset  
Jerusalem



Dear Mr. Netanyahu,

Please find enclosed the first and second issues of the official Palestinian Legislative Council English language newsletter "*PLC REPORT*". This newsletter hopes to provide a glimpse at the first attempt at democracy in the history of the Palestinian people.

I hope to be able to provide copies of this publication to your office on a regular basis.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best Regards,

Bassem Barhoum  
Director General  
Information Department

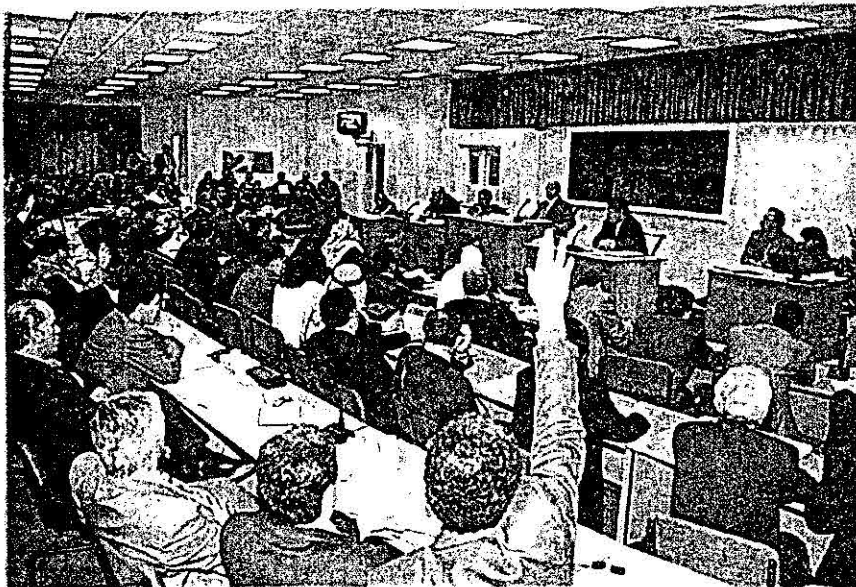
# PLC REPORT

Palestinian Legislative Council - Information Department

1  
January 1998

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*Democratic debate during a Palestinian Legislative Council session*

## HISTORIC STEPS TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

The Palestinian people took an important step towards democracy on January 20, 1996, when, under the supervision of thousands of international election observers, they cast their votes for President of the Palestinian Authority and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). This historic effort marked the first free, direct, and democratic election in Palestinian history.

The 88-member Legislative Council began its role immediately by drafting legislation, addressing constituents concerns, and monitoring the Executive Authority. In its role as 'monitor', the Council has since made three important accomplishments, considered to be the first of their kind in the Arab world.

The first accomplishment was Council debate and approval of the Palestinian Authority's 1997 General Budget. Second, Ministers were questioned during Council sessions on issues relating to finances and efficiency of the work of their Ministries.

Finally, after much debate, the approval of the report of the special council committee on the General Monitoring Commission Report — investigating mismanagement and performance in PA Ministries — concluded with a recommendation to President Arafat to replace members of the Cabinet on the basis of competency and specialization, in addition to adhering to the provisions of the general budget.

All of these accomplishments were made during open sessions

in the presence of local and international media, representatives of the public, diplomats, and visitors.

The Council has proved that it is dedicated to democratic process and protection of its national achievements. It is progressing in a determined manner towards an independent and democratic Palestinian state, fully respecting human rights, freedom of speech, with the city of Jerusalem as its capital.

In spite of its short two-year existence, during continued Israeli occupation, the Council is proud that it has been capable of establishing democracy within Palestinian society — a strategic choice that Palestinian people believe in completely.

This historic achievement did not come easily for the Palestinian people. It came as the result of tremendous efforts on both the Israeli and Palestinian fronts. Palestinians have struggled for nearly three decades to convince the Israeli authorities that Palestinian people have national rights. For the last two decades Palestinians have engaged in various forms of negotiations with Israeli authorities, specifically by stressing the importance of a Palestinian parliament.

A second historic event has been the education of Palestinians about the concepts and advantages of democracy, because the Palestinian people living in the Diaspora throughout the world live in a political ocean of dictatorship—the main characteristic of Third World nations.

## Structure of the Legislative Council

The Palestinian Legislative Council leadership is called the "Office of the Council" and is headed by the Speaker, Ahmed Qurie (Abu Ala), First Deputy Speaker Ibrahim Abu Naja, Second Deputy Speaker Mitri Abu Eita and Secretary General Rawhi Fatouh. The Office of the Council is elected by PLC members in a secret ballot - the person receiving one half of the members plus one shall be elected. If no one receives half plus one, the voting shall go to a second round between the two candidates who received the most votes. The candidate who receives more votes shall then be declared elected.

The Speaker, represents the Council, speaks on its behalf, presides over sessions, and authorizes the Secretariat to publish the decisions of the Council. If the Speaker is absent or in other meetings, the chair shall be taken by the First Deputy Speaker, and if he is absent, by the Second Deputy Speaker. If all are absent the oldest member of the Council presides.

The Secretary General, Rawhi Fatouh, presides over all the administrative aspects of the council.

### COMMITTEES

Shortly after its establishment, the council formed 11 permanent committees. These committees generate economic, political and social ideas necessary for the council to make proper decisions, in detail not achievable during the open sessions. Each committee has an elected chair person and reporter who are elected by committee members. The committees range from five to twenty-five members, and council members can serve on as many as three committees - the chairman can serve on one other committee.

The committees operate in three general areas: legislation, monitoring and oversight. Committees study, review and suggest amendments to draft legislation transferred to the committee, monitor the operations of all ministries and agencies of the Executive Authority and look into complaints and violations submitted to the committee. Committees also oversee all plans, programs and agreements entered into by the Executive Authority. After the committees complete their week of hearings, discussions, and research, they present reports and draft resolutions which are presented during council sessions for



consideration, general discussion and voting.

*Following is a brief description of the committees:*

#### Economic Committee

Chaired by Fakhri Turkman, the Economic Committee studies the Palestinian economic situation, as well as economic plans submitted by ministries and follow-up on their implementation. Review all economic agreements signed by the PA. Review and draft the necessary regulations to encourage local and foreign investment, removing all barriers from future investments, activating the role of the private sector in the nation's building process and a review of the customs and tax systems.

#### Education and Social Affairs Committee

Chaired by Abbas Zaki, the Education and Social Affairs Committee has one of the largest and most diverse areas of responsibility and as a result contains four permanent subcommittees which are: (1) Education and Religion; (2) Health; (3) Prisoners and; (4) Youth and Women. Some of the issues that are on the committees agenda include providing new curriculums for schools, universities and colleges; social issues such as aiding prisoners, detainees, widows and assisting homeless children, abuse of women and children, and the conditions of workers and the families of martyrs, the wounded and veterans of war.

#### Finance and Budgetary Committee

Chaired by Dr. Saedi Kurunz, the Finance and Budgetary Committee concentrates on the budget of the PA and discusses the laws that are linked with banks and revenues. The committee studies the financial agreements such as grants, loans and aid which the Executive

Authority signs with international and local parties. This committee also deals with the bills that are received from the Cabinet, the budgets submitted by the ministries, and investigates any financial complaints that the public might have concerning the ministries.

#### Interior and Security Affairs Committee

Chaired by Fakhri Shaquora, the Interior and Security Affairs Committee works in harmony with other committees in preserving the unity, security and integrity of Palestine and its citizens, through the relationship between the Executive Authority agencies and the Palestinian people. It also deals with

security forces, crimes, detainees, prisoners and human rights issues.

### Legal Committee

Chaired by Abdul Karim Abu Salah, the Legal Committee aims at creating Palestinian laws and overseeing amendments to bills. The committee considers bills that are suggested by the Cabinet, discusses all legal matters in the PLC and assist the PLC in drafting legislation. The bills which are studied and discussed are then passed on to the PLC for amendment, adoption or referral to the relevant committee.

### Natural Resources Committee

Chaired by Dr. Yousef Abu Safiyeh, The Natural Resources Committee focuses on all the environmental aspects of Palestine. The committee looks into the areas related to water, agriculture, energy, animals, forests, landscapes, minerals, oil and fishing, and proposes bills for their preservation. In the case where the health of the people might be endangered because of environmental dangers, the committee organizes field expeditions in Gaza and the West Bank, in order for members to have contact with the citizens concerned.

### Parliamentary Monitoring and Human Rights Committee

Chaired by Dr. Kamal Sharafi, the Parliamentary Monitoring and Human Rights Committee coordinates with the other Committees to monitor different aspects of the daily life taking place in Palestine. But the monitoring does not contradict or overlap with the duties of the PA. It also monitors financial, administrative, legislative, ministries, human rights and freedoms and security apparatus to ensure that they are fulfilling their responsibilities.

### Political Committee

Chaired by Dr. Ziad Abu Amr, the Political Committee focuses on creating solid communication links between the PA and other nations. The committee is

concerned with all aspects of the political spectrum, from meeting with opposition groups to holding talks with the Israeli Government. It also contributes to developing democratic practices and ensuring the rights of the Palestinian people. They are also developing procedures to monitor and report on Israeli activities which violate the principles and spirit of the peace accords.

### Council Affairs Committee

Formed in October 1997 and chaired by the Speaker, the CAC is the newest committee, which is in charge of all administrative and operational aspects of the PLC. The CAC has four permanent sub-committees: (1) Parliamentary relations - relations with other parliaments; (2) Aid and assistance coordination - to oversee all assistance to the PLC; (3) Employee affairs - to monitor appointments and reappointment of the PLC staff; (4) Information and publications - to oversee all publications and information issued to the public and press by the PLC.

*Unlike any other parliament, because of the unique political situation faced by the Palestinian people, the PLC has three committees that are truly unique: the Jerusalem, Land & Settlements and Refugee & Diaspora committees.*

### Jerusalem Committee

Chaired by Ahmad Hashem Zughayar, the Jerusalem Committee coordinates with all the other committees on issues related to Jerusalem and focuses on the preservation of Palestinian land and the safety of the citizens of occupied East Jerusalem. Although this committee should play a crucial part, it is often the victim of the Israeli Government practices, which attempts to undermine its effectiveness.

### Land and Settlements Committee

Chaired by Salah Ta'amri, the Land and Settlements Committee conducts information campaigns about political, economic and humanitarian situations concerning the tense issues of illicit land

sales, land confiscations and settlement expansions - all violations by the Israeli Government, which continues to speed along with the construction of settlements despite agreements for a halt to settlement activities.

### Refugees and Diaspora Committee

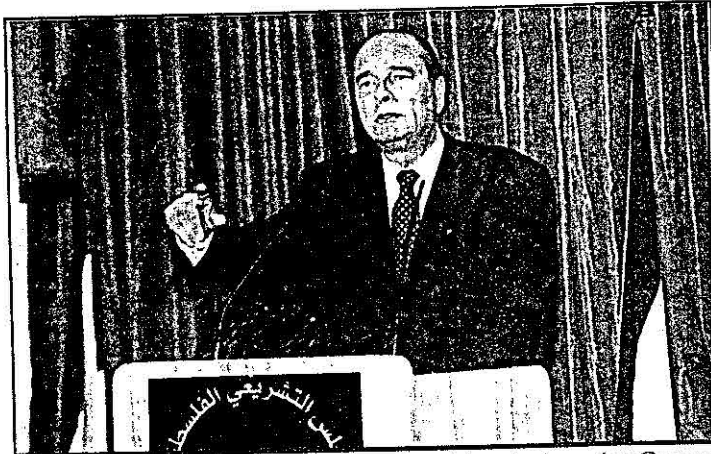
Chaired by Jamal-al Hindi, the Refugees and Diaspora Committee follows up all on-going negotiations for concrete final results which will ensure all the rights of the refugees (those forced to flee in 1948) and Diaspora (those residing outside of Palestine). The committee aims at protecting the Palestinian refugees and Diaspora by encouraging the implementation of all UN resolutions according to plan, the operation and services provided by UNRWA and taking a closer look at their needs: clean water, health services, social services, employment opportunities, stable school systems, paved roads, comfortable living situations and sufficient food for families. The committee must also address complaints against refugees, such as building homes or shops without permits illegally.

## Committees

- Council Affairs;
  - i. Parliamentary Relations;
  - ii. Aid Liaison;
  - iii. Employee Affairs;
  - iv. Information and Publications;
- Economic;
- Education and Social Affairs;
  - i. Education and Religious Issues;
  - ii. Health;
  - iii. Prisoners;
  - iv. Youth and Women;
- Finance and Budget;
- Interior and Security Affairs;
- Jerusalem;
- Land and Settlement;
- Legal;
- Natural Resources;
- Parliamentary Monitoring;
- Political;
- Refugees and Diaspora;



## Delegations visiting the PLC



*French President Jacques Chirac speaking before the Council*

During the first eighteen months since the establishment of the Palestinian Legislative Council, 1996-1997, 44 delegations visited (1996:16, 1997:28). Undoubtedly, the visit of French President Chirac was the largest event for the PLC in 1996; as well as the visits of Klaus Hirsch, Speaker of the European Parliament, Mustafa Kalmali, Speaker of the Grand Council of the People of Turkey, Frene Ginwala, Speaker of the South African Parliament, and Ernesto Semper Pizano, Colombian President and current Leader of the Group of Non-Aligned Nations.

Most of the visiting delegations were from the European Union countries and the USA, with one delegation from Latin America "Cuban Peoples Party", the former Eastern Europe "Leader of the Slovenian Democratic Party", Africa "South Africa", Sweden, Canada and the Israeli Knesset.

Thirty-three delegations came for meetings with the Speaker alone or with PLC members, five for meetings with Deputy Speakers and Committee Chairmen, four with PLC members and two heads of state addressed a council session.

Most meetings revolved around the

following subjects:

(1) Latest developments in the peace process and the situation in the Palestinian areas;

(2) Parliamentary Cooperation or exchange visits;

(3) Assistance to the PLC;

(4) Invited to speak before the PLC (Jacques Chirac, Ernesto Semper Pizano, Klaus Hirsch, Mustafa Kalmali, and Frene Ginwala).

The latest delegation visiting the council was Hubert Vedrine, Minister of Foreign Affairs of France. He insisted on visiting the council to stress the support of France for democracy in Palestine.

### Importance of these visits

The large number of visiting delegations and a similar number of Council delegations invited to visit other parliaments is extremely important and significant. Not only are they an explicit recognition of the legitimacy of the PLC as the democratically elected body representing the Palestinian people, it also reflects the commitment of the world to ensuring that the Palestinian democratic experience is both real and lasting.

## PLC delegations invited abroad

During the first eighteen months since the establishment of the Palestinian Legislative Council, 1996-1997, 27 delegations from the PLC were invited to visit parliaments all over the world (1996:10, 1997:17).

Eighteen of the visits were to EU nations; one to the USA; four visits jointly with the Palestinian National Council (of the PLO) to: China, Greece, South Korea, Egypt; one visit to Tunisia; one visit to the Israeli Knesset; attendance at the African-Arab Congress in South Africa; a PLC observation team to the Yemen elections.

The Speaker of the PLC engaged in 7 visits to the EU nations and one to Tunisia. **Most visits concentrated on:**

(1) Relations between the PLC and various parliaments;

(2) Formation of Joint Parliamentary Committees;

(3) Assistance to the PLC;

(4) Update on the Peace Process and the situation in the Palestinian areas;

(5) Democratic process in the PNA areas.

(6) Follow-up of the issues that were suggested during visits that resulted in the formation of: i) Committees of members and administrators to follow-up on the creation of the Joint parliamentary committees, ii) Expansion of the liaison committee to follow-up on the assistance offered by different countries;

(7) Deepening communication with parliament members and committees that were visited.

The latest delegation was invited to visit the Vatican, and meet with the Pope and Minister of Foreign Affairs. A joint committee was created to study the legal status of the Catholic Church in Palestine, which will result in an agreement between the PA and Vatican on the status of the Catholic Church in Palestine.

## Most distinguished visitor



On May 12, 1997 a delegation of Italian businessmen visited the Council, headed by renowned Italian Poet Mikalia Darkangelo. Darkangelo, who was ill at the time, made the trip at great personal effort - and recited a poem he had written for the occasion. In light of his personal sacrifice, PLC Report names him Most Distinguished Visitor.

# Jerusalem poised for battle

As the final status talks on the future's sovereignty over Jerusalem—which has been occupied by Israel in 1967 war—rapidly approach, skirmishes relating to the state of "Jerusalem" have transformed themselves into an open battle. "Har Homa" or "Abu Ghneim", the expansion of settlements, illicit land purchases, pressuring of Jerusalemites into accepting Israeli citizenship or lose their ID cards, demolishing hundreds of Arab homes and the unilateral expansion of Jerusalem's municipal borders are Israeli ethnic cleansing policies. They not only strive to de-Arabize Jerusalem, but strengthen a larger plan to put "facts" on the ground before final status negotiations begin. Israeli Authorities often refuse Christians or Moslems entry into Jerusalem holy sites for prayer, and most Palestinian health care professionals or their patients cannot enter for work or for treatment.

The Abu Ghneim or Mount Homa Plan, developed in 1990 by the Jerusalem City Planning Board, and approved by the West Jerusalem Municipality in September 1993, is a plan to put 6,500 Jewish homes in a settlement between Jerusalem and Bethlehem despite international opposition. The first 1,000 homes are to be constructed early in 1998. The plan has become a cause célèbre because it will isolate Jerusalem from Bethlehem and the southern side of the West Bank.

The Israelis claim, "We will never allow Jerusalem to be redivided." This mandate includes unilaterally (and illegally) expanding the municipal borders of Jerusalem - to where it now constitutes nearly 1/3 of the West Bank, extending north to Ramallah, south to Hebron, and east to Jericho. Other hurdles already imposed are: Palestinians need permits from the West Jerusalem Municipality to build homes—only to a maximum height of two stories—while Israelis can go up to eight. The permit fees alone cost nearly US\$40,000 each, and take up to four years to be issued - if they are issued at all.

In July 1993, Israel's government announced that Israeli Settlers outnumbered Arabs in East Jerusalem; the de-Arabization of Jerusalem was increased; the closure or forced movement of Arab institutions to the suburbs; demolition of hundreds of Palestinian homes; and

promised removal of 800 more.

By 1996, 86.5 percent of Arab East Jerusalem had been removed from Palestinian use. This includes: 34 percent confiscated for new settlements and expansion of existing settlements and roads; another 8.5 percent of the Arab section is designated for confiscation; while 44 percent is designated as "Green Area" where building is forbidden. Other barriers that exist for the Arab residents of East Jerusalem: a resident may not apply for a permit to build if the neighborhood has not been surveyed by the West Jerusalem Municipality - a process that is intentionally slow.

Israelis claim that Jerusalem is their "eternal" capital, but infrastructure spending in East Jerusalem is almost nonexistent. The West Jerusalem Municipality charges very high (armona) taxes while providing little in services. "The meaning is very clear," said one Jerusalem resident. "They [Israelis] know it is not theirs, so they are trying to take as much as they can without putting anything back — a policy that makes clear that their hold on East Jerusalem is short-term."

A recent US Congress decision declaring that undivided Jerusalem is the capital of Israel is simply the latest illustration in a series of influences by the US/Israel Lobby that began in 1990. The timing of the latest resolution, however, is inopportune. It comes at a very sensitive point in the peace process, when both sides need reassurance that the US signed onto the process as an impartial sponsor.

According to the Palestinian Authority, the latest track of negotiations in Washington, D.C. will not be very productive, because the Israelis are ignoring the major issues — redeployment and a halt to settlement activities - by focussing exclusively on minor issues such as the Gaza sea port, airport, and "security".

As wasted negotiations and ongoing hurdles are being put into place, another insult to the progress of the peace process has been noted by Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu, who asked for something in exchange for a halt to settlement activities. Mr. Netanyahu has forgotten that concessions have already been given in order to receive the promise of a halt to settlement activities. A poise for battle continues.

## Settlement Facts

	Settlements	Dunums*
<b>GAZA</b>		
North	4	907.6
Central	2	908.0
South	12	4,432.5
<b>Gaza Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>6,248.1</b>
<b>WEST BANK</b>		
<i>North</i>		
Jenin	9	1,967
Nablus	48	25,318
Tulkarem	8	3,353
<i>Center</i>		
Jericho	11	3,311
Jerusalem	28	21,940
Ramallah	27	14,984
<i>South</i>		
Bethlehem	18	8,129
Hebron	27	4,989
<b>WB Total</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>83,991</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>90,239.1</b>

Note: the network of bypass roads which link the settlements together amounts to some 120,000 dunums.

\* 1 Dunum = 1,000 sq.m. = 0.1 Hectare

## Settler Population

According to a 1997 study by the Israeli "Peace Now" organization, total settler population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip totals 158,000 - of which 5,000 are in the Gaza Strip.

These settlers consume more water than all of the remaining 2.2 million Palestinians residing in the remaining West Bank and Gaza Strip.

There is a constant effort by these settlers to confiscate more lands - and as a result, assaults and land occupation by heavily armed settlers are frequent - and usually under the protection of Israeli soldiers.

# Most important resolutions of the Council

**2/19/199** - Call on the Executive Authority to draft a Law for the Encouragement of Investment within one month.

**2/19/201** - i) Confirmation of all previous legislative council resolutions on land, settlements and the importance of establishing an executive mechanism or independent commission as the sole reference on all issues of land; ii) A call on the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Negotiating Committees to ask for the original land registration documents for Area "A" in Hebron, like all other Palestinian cities; iii) A call on the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Negotiating Committees to ask for all of the original land documents for Areas "B".

**2/20/202** - i) Creation of the joint Palestinian Legislative Council - Executive Authority committee to follow up on the implementation of council resolutions; ii) Coordination of the work of this committee with the Council of Ministers to study which resolutions were implemented and which were not; iii) This committee will present a detailed report within 45 days to the legislative council.

**2/20/206** - i) Approval of the 1998 Palestinian Legislative Council General Budget; ii) Reevaluation and redistribution of PLC employees based on their qualifications, needs of departments and the PLC organizational structure; iii) Stress to the Council Affairs Committee to coordinate the foreign aid given to the council with the aid coordination committee, a requirement of the aid coordination committee to give the council a detailed report every three months and the importance of the Finance & Budgetary committee's involvement in the committee - as well as their inclusion of assistance in the general budget as a separate line item; iv) Confirmation of the previous legislative council decision on the importance of finding drivers for all of the members; v) The committee will meet for no more than one day per week of committee meetings - exceptions made by the Speaker.

**2/20/208** - Formation of the Council Affairs Committee of 20 PLC members (chaired by the Speaker).

**2/21/209** - i) Modernization of all government hospitals, provide them with all of the necessary equipment and medical staff as well as the needed budgets; ii) Call on the Executive Authority to proceed quickly with the implementation of the Civil Service

Law; iii) Creation of a plan for the development of health services; iv) Unification of all laws and regulations that are in use by the Ministry of Health between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, so all vacancies can be filled by Palestinians with competence; v) Placing clear rules on the provision of health care out of the country.

**2/22/213** - i) Acceptance of the draft political parties law in general discussion; ii) Transfer of the draft law to the political, interior & security and local government committees for the necessary amendments in light of the general council discussion and to draft a proposed political parties law within two weeks for first reading.

**2/22/215** - The legislative council calls on the Executive Authority to: i) Ensure that the year 2000 is the year that the infrastructure is completed in the rural areas of Palestine including water, electricity and roads; ii) Presentation of the development plan to the council for debate and approval.

**2/23/218** - First: confirmation of all previous legislative council decisions relating to refugees and refugee camps; Second: a call on the Executive Authority, in coordination with UNRWA, to deal with the following issues: i) support of popular movements and organizations in Shufat refugee camp; ii) find a solution for the problems of overcrowding by expanding the borders of the refugee camps; iii) find a solution for the problem of wastewater through rehabilitation of existing wastewater systems construction of new systems; iv) find a solution for the water problems and rehabilitate existing water systems; v) to call on UNRWA to find a solution for overcrowding in school classrooms in these refugee camps, increase the number of teachers and to rebuild schools in Aroub refugee camp; vi) to establish a model kindergarten and day care center in Aroub and Fawar refugee camps; vii) call on UNRWA to rehabilitate the medical centers, increase medical staff and medical supplies to better serve increased population levels and increase medical, educational and general services; viii) provide Fawar with an electrical transformer, and rehabilitation of the electrical systems in Fawar and Aroub refugee camps; ix) paving of refugee camp roads; x) provision of telephone systems for Fawar and Aroub; Third: the PLC designates the Refugee and Diaspora Committee to follow-up with the concerned Palestinian organizations and presentation of

a complete report during a special legislative council session.

## Press Release on Violence Against Women

At its 23rd session on November 26, 1997, on the occasion of the International Day Against Violence Against Women, the legislative council discussed with great concern the issue of violence against women, and stressed that the council on many occasions issued statements condemning violence of any kind, whether political or social. The council in its statement stressed the following: i) Complete refusal of violence, whether social or political in Palestinian society; ii) The legislative council specifically denounces violence within the Palestinian family directed against women; iii) The legislative council calls on commissions and organizations within the Executive Authority and non-governmental organizations to counter these occurrences and to carry out wide educational campaigns in schools and universities; iv) The legislative council concurs with UN resolutions rejecting discrimination against women, and respect of human rights, because the role of women is the foundation of building and developing society; v) The legislative council sends its regards and solidarity to our sisters the Palestinian women and all of the women of the world, and promises to work towards legislation that will end these incidents in Palestinian society.

## Laws passed by the Council

### Signed:

- Local Committee Councils Elections Law
- Local Committee Councils Law
- Palestinian Monetary Authority Law

### Third Reading:

- Basic Law

### Second Reading:

- Civil Service Law (*final reading*)
- Animal Health Law
- Palestinian General Petroleum Council Law
- Foreign Ownership of Land in Palestine Law

### First Reading:

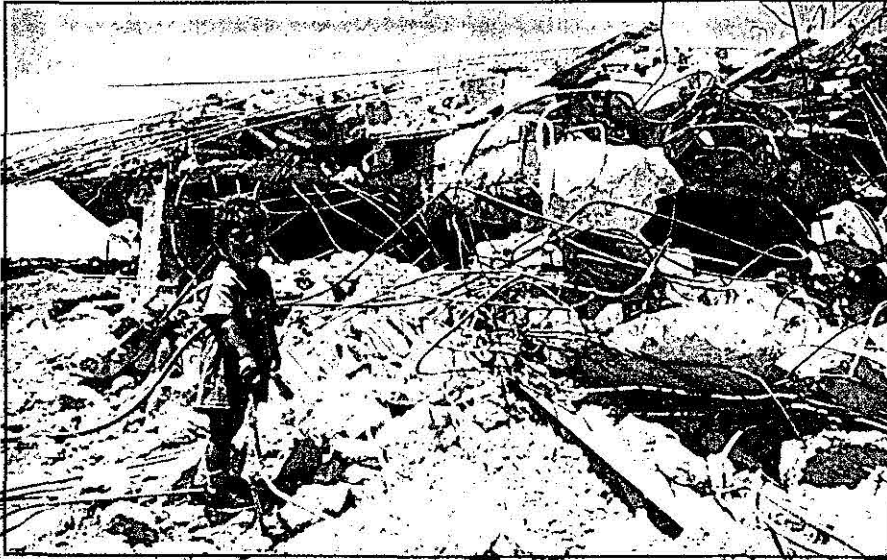
- Civil Defense Law
- Precious Metals Law
- Firearms and Weapons Law

### General Discussion:

- Political Parties Law
- Judicial Independence Law
- Rehabilitation Centers (Prisons) Law
- Encouragement of Investment Law
- Commercial Agents Law
- Local Societies (NGO) Law



# Israeli violations of the signed agreements



*A child made homeless - his home demolished by Israeli forces*

The present Israeli government is expending every effort to avoid the obligations of the accords signed by the Rabin Government, the single most important of which is the redeployment of Israeli troops from the West Bank - despite a pledge from Netanyahu to do so according to schedule.

The Interim Agreement specifies the redeployment from most of the West Bank in three phases, with a maximum of six months in between each phase - and all three phases lasting no longer than 18 months after the establishment of the "Palestinian Council".

Most analysts place little hope in the present negotiating track. According to the PA, the Israelis are completely ignoring all major issues and concentrating on marginal issues and details such as the Palestinian census in Jerusalem, the number of work permits issued to Gazans or the issue of "security".

The position of the "sponsors" of the peace process leave much to be desired. Russia, with limited resources can do little but offer their opinion. The US Administration understands that the Palestinians desperately need an "impartial" sponsor, but exert very little real pressure on the Israeli government to implement the agreements. The European Union, Israel's major trade partner, have taken a firm and just stand - but have

offered little in terms of real pressure on the Israeli government [such as trade measures].

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have been forced to sit by while their economic situation has deteriorated dramatically, as continued closure suffocates its residents. They have seen an airport built, but permission to operate it is denied. They see funds allocated for the building of a sea port in Gaza, but permission to begin construction is denied. They see a plan for a Safe Passage Route between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, that exists only on paper. They see settlements continue to expand, like weeds in an unkempt garden - at the expense of their homes and fields. They see unilateral Israeli actions in Jerusalem intended to change the demographic face of the city from Arab to Jewish, by increasing home demolition and confiscation of Jerusalem ID's.

Residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip are denied permission into Jerusalem for prayer or medical treatment. Prisoners are still not released - and often face living conditions even more difficult than before the Oslo Agreements.

Every violation that can be conceived of is carried out. The question that remains to be answered - when it finally ends, will there be anything left of the agreements that were signed?

## VIOLATIONS

Phase II and III Israeli troop redeployment from the West Bank as scheduled by the Hebron agreement still not completed;

Unilateral acts in Jerusalem to change the demographic nature of the city;

Safe Passage Routes remain unopened;

Gaza Port funds have been allocated but the Israeli government refuses permission for construction to begin;

Continuing closure is causing severe economic hardship for the Palestinian people;

Rachel's Tomb (Bilal Bin Rabah Mosque) in Bethlehem completely closed to Moslem worshippers;

Tomb of the Patriarchs (Ibrahimi Mosque) in Hebron is 75% occupied by radical Israelis. On Jewish holidays it is completely closed to Moslem worshippers;

Approximately 3,400 Palestinian prisoners still in Israeli prisons (880 administrative detainees - held without charge or trial);

Paris "economic" Protocol is not yet implemented (no free movement of goods into and out of Palestinian Autonomous Areas);

No halt to settlement activities.





## The city of the Master will arise

In two years, humanity will complete the second millennium of the birth of Jesus Christ. In only two years, the annunciation of the birth of the savior will enter its third millennium ... and from this very moment, suitable celebrations are in the midst of preparation in the city of Christ, the Master, the Savior, the Redeemer.

The shepherds will come again to Bethlehem, to deliver to all humanity the annunciation in the alleyways and courtyards of the city, the star that has completed its cycle in the horizon will sparkle

again to light the city declaring the great arising over our holy land. We will hear the voice resound again over the city [I give you this truth], while other cities will repeat this Palestinian right until Bethlehem returns to its holy presence, leaving behind its enforced absence once and forever.

In the year 2000, and during the illumination of the city in a celebration befitting of the symbolism of the city ... Bethlehem will arise ... Palestine will arise.

PLC Report is available on the Palestinian Legislative Council internet homepage: <http://www.pal-plc.org>

# PLC REPORT

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# PLC REPORT

Palestinian Legislative Council - Information Department

February 1998

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## Building Civil Society

In its first two years, the Palestinian Legislative Council has expended a great deal of effort in the building of the Palestinian civil society under the rule of law and with proper respect for human rights.

The parliamentary efforts of building civil society are channeled in three main directions: legislation, democratization and the monitoring of the Executive Authority.

In terms of legislation, the legislative council has 35 pieces of legislation in various forms of completion, as well as numerous proposals for legislation from countless interested parties - both official organizations (ministries and governmental organizations) and special interest groups (i.e. lobby groups and NGO's).

The past 24 months has realized a remarkable change in how democracy is perceived by the Palestinian population in general, and by PLC members in particular. Only now are the

Palestinian people beginning to grasp the significance of democratically elected representatives for the first time in the history of the Palestinian people. A new awareness is taking shape, with the electorate turning to their representatives with problems ranging from inadequate sewage systems to calling for legislation to counter the dangers of family violence. The legislative council members themselves are becoming a "parliament", speaking in the proper language for the occasion - committee meeting or council session.

The monitoring of the Executive Authority has begun to take a normal routine (for details see Page 6). The Executive and Legislative Authorities are becoming more comfortable with their roles, and are coming to realize that the legislative council can provide constructive criticism, and that a strong, democratic, and independent Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital, is the collective goal.

# Delegations visiting the Council

... I have seen the expression of Israeli ethnic expulsion, and it's condemnable ...

Pierre Schori,  
Swedish Minister

Pierre Schori, Sweden's Minister for International Development Cooperation and Deputy Foreign Minister, speaking before a special session of the Council in Ramallah on January 27, 1998, began his speech with the words: "...I come to you today in this new building with great humility and pride. I have mud on my shoes because I have come directly



Pierre Schori, Sweden's Minister for International Development Cooperation

from the Camp of Steadfastness and Solidarity in Jerusalem - and I have seen the expression of Israeli ethnic expulsion, and it's condemnable, and therefore we stand in solidarity with the people that the camp houses."

The minister addressed the council as part of his visit to the Palestinian areas, and to sign the second agreement with the Palestinian Authority for this year and next. He expressed outrage at the racist practices of the Israeli Authorities, and

called on Israel to withdraw from the Golan, south Lebanon, Gaza Strip and the West Bank - including East Jerusalem. He finished his speech with the statement:

"The aim of our development cooperation and our policy at large is to support the progress of a democratic Palestinian state. We are looking forward to the day, not too distant, when the Palestinian people can live as free citizens in your own State, in peace and cooperation with your neighbors."

## Council delegations invited abroad

### Council delegations invited abroad:

- 18-21/1/98: PLC delegation headed by the Speaker to the Russia Federation;
- 22-25/1/98: PLC delegation headed by the Speaker to the Republic of Ukraine;
- 12-13/2/98: PLCM Azmi Shuaibi visits Strasbourg, France;
- 14/2/98: PLCM Ziad Abu Amr visits Holland invited to the Dutch Liberal Convention;

### Issues discussed during the meetings:

- Inter-parliamentary relations & friendship societies;

- Peace process;
- Explanation of the work of the PLC;
- Invitation to Bethlehem 2000 Celebrations (Russian Patriarch);
- Exchange visits;
- Economic/cultural exchange;
- Cooperation between businessmen (Ukraine);
- Palestinian trade representative office (Ukraine);
- PLO Representative office (Ukraine);
- Taking special care of the 6,000 Palestinian students (Ukraine);

### Delegations visiting the council during January and February 1998:

- 23/2/98: Guennadi Seleznev, Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation;
- 21/2/98: German-Arab Parliamentary Group;
- 11/2/98: Rosemarie Hallis, British writer on Jordanian-Palestinian relations;
- 9/2/98: Austrian parliamentary delegation;
- 8/2/98: Jacques Santer, Commissioner General of the EC;
- 4/2/98: British Conservative Party Friends of Israel delegation;
- 4/2/98: Deputy Speaker of the European Parliament;
- 3/2/98: Head of the Middle East division of the Danish Foreign Ministry;
- 3/2/98: Chairman and members of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Italian Parliament;
- 27/1/98: H.E. Pierre Schori, Swedish Minister of Development Cooperation;
- 21/1/98: Paul Dingeldine, Head of the Middle East division of the Canadian Foreign Ministry;
- 17/1/98: US Senator Ben Campbell, and four of the leaders of AIPIC from Colorado;
- 13/1/98: South African Parliamentary delegation;
- 12/1/98: President of AIPIC, and Conservative Council;
- 10/1/98: Delegation of the Jewish Community of Philadelphia;
- 10/1/98: H.E. Kurt Valbeck, Norwegian Foreign Minister;
- 8/1/98: Assistant to Congressman Benjamin Gellman, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee;
- 6/1/98: H.E. Kurt Valbeck, Norwegian Foreign Minister;
- 6/1/98: British Conservative Party Friends of Israel delegation;

### Issues discussed during the meetings:

- Peace process;
- Follow-up of issues discussed during PLC delegations' visits to other parliaments;
- Strengthening of bilateral/parliamentary relations;
- Support/assistance to the PLC;
- Support to Palestinian villages (China, EC);
- Russian efforts to advance the peace process;



Interview with the Speaker

# Abu Ala comments on the second term of the Palestinian Legislative Council

Palestine Report interviewed Ahmed Qurie (Abu Ala), the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council on the work and achievements of the council during its second term.

*Palestine Report: What were the accomplishments of the Legislative Council during its second term?*

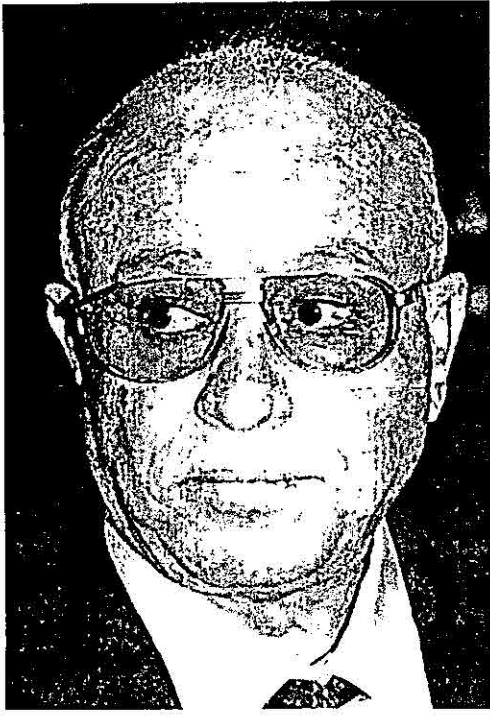
Abu Ala: During the second term the council held 29 regular sessions and three special sessions. The council committees held 260 meetings, issued 72 reports and 92 resolutions - covering political, economic and legal issues important to the Palestinian people. In terms of legislation, the council has 35 laws in various stages of debate and approval, and we anticipate even more in the third term.

The council also distinguished itself in terms of intensive monitoring on all levels. Beginning with the debate and approval of the PA 1997 General Budget, the transparent debate of the Report of the General Monitoring Commission on deficiency accompanying the establishment of the Authority, in an open session [before the media and visitors], and finally with the directing of 183 questions to ministers and officials of the PA on issues related to the operations of their ministries and agencies on the services provided to the Palestinian people.

*What are the improvements in the Legislative Council from the first to the second term?*

The council is finally completing the development of its administrative systems and internal structure. The council's staff, coming from diverse educational and working backgrounds, have recieved training and been provided with the necessary equipment to perform their jobs. Council sessions and committee meetings have become more orderly and productive, the council members themselves have

become more cohesive and have begun to act like a parliament. Despite our achievements, we must realize that we are



AHMED QURIE (ABU ALA), THE SPEAKER OF THE PALESTINIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

still at the beginning of our journey, and the path before us is long and hard - we have a great deal of work to do merely laying the basic foundations of Palestinian plural democracy.

*How are the international relations of the Legislative Council?*

The role of the Legislative Council has improved significantly in the international arena: the council has received more than 70 foreign delegations, and sent more than 30 council delegations all over the world, in response to invitations from the international community. The world understands that our parliamentary democracy is still growing, and are interested in nurturing and assisting in building and developing the work of the

council - as the first Palestinian parliament, elected on a sound basis of democratic plurality and transparency.

*How are the relations of the Legislative Council with the Executive Authority?*

At the beginning, the council and the Executive faced many problems in cooperation and coordination, mainly because of the newness of our democratic experience - due to the complex transformation from a revolutionary to a governmental structure - we developed new working methods, made strides in a clear separation of the Legislative and Executive Authorities, and created a cooperative relationship based on mutual respect. This has expanded the monitoring activities of the council, by bringing about a closer cooperation with many of the PA agencies and ministries. The Legislative and Executive must enhance the role of the other to bring about the common pursuit - the establishment of a Palestinian Democratic Civil Society.

*What are the effects of the stalled peace process on the work of the Legislative Council?*

The stalled peace process and the actions of the Israeli occupation continues to negatively affect the work of the council, because the council is an indivisible part of the Palestinian people, the effects of the lack of redeployment (the basic principle of the Interim Agreement), collective punishment, closure, economic seige, settlement activities, home demolitions, Judaization of Jerusalem, and continued refusal to release the 3,500 prisoners and detainees is not only creating a climate of frustration and hopelessness, but deflecting the council from drafting the necessary legislation that is the foundation of Palestinian Civil Society.



# Work of the Council in the Second Term

The work of the Palestinian Legislative Council during its second term was comprehensive on three fronts: Administrative, Parliamentary and Executive Relations.

In terms of its administrative infrastructure, the council developed complete organizational structures for the various department, and with the assistance of international parliamentary experts held training courses and workshops for council staff on the best methods for doing their jobs based on council requirements. The council also established a parliamentary library, a parliamentary research unit, and equipped and staffed council offices in all of its electoral district - the main point of contact with the constituents.

In terms of equipment, the council has installed over 100 computers in its offices, and its chamber has been equipped with an electronic voting system, a simultaneous translation system, a vote display system, which will allow the simultaneous transcribing of the council record via the computer network, which links the council administration offices with the chamber.

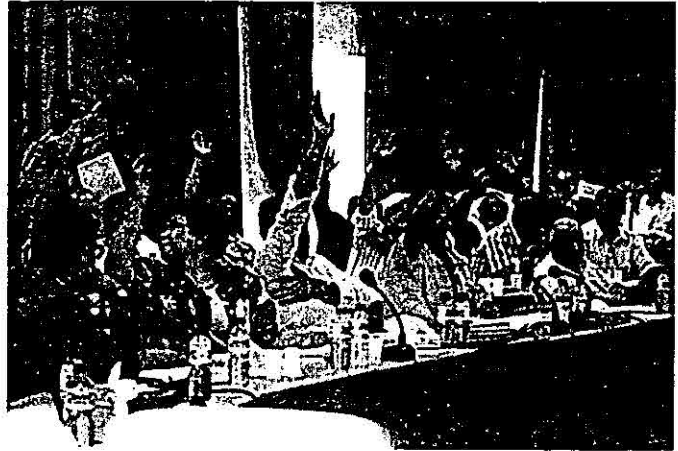
The European Commission has agreed to fund the construction of the new temporary Palestinian Legislative Council building in the Governorate of Ramallah/Al-Bireh to house the council administrative staff, the offices of the leadership and the council chamber.

In terms of its parliamentary tasks, the Legislative Council has at present 35 pieces of legislation in various forms of completion (see Legislation Statistics page 5). The council held 29 regular sessions, two extraordinary sessions (the visit of the Colombian President, visit of President Arafat to discuss the relations between the Legislative and Executive Authorities)

and one special session to discuss the general political situation in the region, in light of the stalled peace process and the developments of the Iraqi Crisis (see Special Council session page 5).

In addition to more orderly sessions, the committee meetings have become more routine, with 260 meetings held, yielding 72 reports and 92 resolutions (see Committee Statistics this page). The second session also saw the formation of the new permanent "Council Affairs Committee", to deal with administrative aspects of the council, as well as the formation of three temporary committees: Special council committee for the study of the Report of the General Monitoring Commission for 1996; Joint Council-Ministerial committee to study the council's resolutions; and a special council committee to hold hearings for ministers and officials linked with the General Monitoring Commission Report.

The council has seen a marked improvement in terms of Executive-Legislative relations, and a clear separation between the two. The second term also witnessed increased executive oversight activities (see PLC in its role as "Monitor" page 7), and culminated with the promise by President Arafat for the creation of a mechanism for coordination between the Authorities ... a Minister of Parliamentary Affairs.



*Palestinian Legislative Council members vote on a resolution during a regular council session*

## Committee Statistics

COMMITTEES	MEETINGS	REPORTS
Economic .....	27	6
Political .....	27	15
Legal .....	20	14
Financial / Budget .....	42	5
Natural Resources .....	10	2
Refugee .....	22	2
Monitoring .....	30	7
Educational & Social .....	50	8
Land and Settlements .....	13	7
Interior & Security .....	13	4
Jerusalem .....	3	4
Council Affairs .....	4	--
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>72*</b>

\* Note: several meetings and committee reports were joint between two or more committees.

TYPE OF RESOLUTION (ISSUE)	RESOLUTIONS
Economic .....	28
Political .....	12
Refugee .....	2
Land and settlements .....	8
Jerusalem .....	4
General freedoms & human rights .....	12
Budget & general financial .....	24
Economic .....	18
Social .....	17
Local government .....	8
Environmental and energy .....	2
Legal and council affairs .....	10
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>92*</b>

\* Note: several resolutions covered two or more of the types of issues listed.

## LEGISLATION STATISTICS

Laws passed by the council and endorsed by President Arafat:

- *Local Committee Councils Elections Law*
- *Local Committee Councils Law*
- *Palestinian Monetary Authority Law*

Laws passed by the council and awaiting endorsement by President Arafat:

- *The Basic Law (third reading)*
- *Civil Service Law (second reading)*
- *Foreign Ownership of Land in Palestine Law (second reading)*
- *Palestinian General Petroleum and Natural Resources Council Law (third reading)*

Laws passed in the second reading:

- *Livestock Law*

Laws passed in the first reading:

- *Tax and Stamp of Precious Metals Law*
- *Civil Service Law*

Laws passed in general discussion:

- *Political Parties Law*
- *Rehabilitation Centers (Prisons) Law*
- *Judicial Independence Law*
- *Local Societies (NGO's) Law*
- *Encouragement of Investment Law*
- *Commercial Agencies Law*

Laws passed to committees for study before general discussion:

- *Creation of Rural Development Centers*
- *Free Trade Cities and Areas*
- *Assistance to the families of the Martyrs, Prisoners and Injured*
- *Auctions and Tenders*

• *General Census*

• *General Meetings*

• *Charging of Value Added Tax on some luxury goods*

• *National Service*

Laws that have been postponed:

- *Veterinarians (until the approval of the General Union Law)*
- *Local Council Development Bank (until the approval of the Bank Law)*
- *Lawyers Union*
- *Budget and Finance*

Laws returned to the Executive for input:

- *Protection of Natural Resources in Gaza*

Laws rejected by the council:

- *Appointment of Mayors*

## Special Council session: The regional political situation

The Palestinian Legislative Council held a special session on February 17, 1998, to discuss the dangerous developments in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process and the failing US efforts as a suitable sponsor for the peace process.

The council discussed in-depth the Iraqi crisis and the danger that threatens the entire region because of the threats of the use of force and the continuation of the policies of sanctions and pain towards the Iraqi people and the double standard towards international resolutions.

After hearing the report of the political committee's meeting with President Yasser Arafat, hearing from a representative of the Executive Authority, the Legislative Council, after general discussion affirmed the following:

1. The council holds the Israeli government completely responsible for the dangerous stalling of the peace process and the breakdown in the negotiations because of continued Israeli intransigence and disrespect towards the signed agreements as per the letter, spirit and timetable, especially with respect to land and the redeployment from it.

2. The council reaffirms all of its previous resolutions, holding the Israeli government responsible for the continuation of settlement activities, Judaization of Jerusalem, confiscation of land, construction of settlement bypass roads, home demolition, confiscation of

Jerusalem ID's, and eviction of Palestinians from their homes and places of residence.

3. The council calls on the Executive Authority to continue with firmness and cling to the references of the peace process represented by the principle of land for peace, and UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, the remaining internationally legitimate resolutions, and the Oslo Agreements.

4. The council calls on the PLO and all of the parties and national Palestinian

**... council calls on Iraq to obey all International Laws and UN Resolutions ... council calls on the International community not to allow duality and to pressure Israel to implement all laws and resolutions related to the Palestinian cause...**

personalities, to immediately call for the strengthening of national unity, and to reaffirm the national Palestinian positions towards the peace process, other national causes, and the immediate resumption of a comprehensive national unity dialogue.

5. The council calls on the Executive Authority to immediately respond to issues that continue to be barriers to the work of the council, and in particular to the issues that correct the internal problems and the endorsement of the laws and resolutions passed by the council, and work positively

towards the principles of accountability, transparency and the rule of law.

Because of the Iraqi crisis and the dangers of not finding a peaceful solution, the council resolved the following:

1. The council warns of the dangers and consequences of a military solution on the stability of the entire region in general and on the peace process in particular.

2. The council calls on the Arab nations to stand with firmness and strength beside a political solution and support of the Iraqi people, and to call for an end to the sanctions and an end to the policy of starvation.

3. The council calls on the nations of the world and the permanent nation members of the UN Security Council not to give international legitimacy to a military strike on Iraq, and the council reaffirms, in the name of the Palestinian people, its preservation of the unity of Iraq, both in land and in people, and of the right to stability.

4. The council reaffirms its call on Iraq to implement the internationally legitimate resolutions, affirming that it refuses the policy of duality in treatment of internationally legitimate resolutions, and calls in this regard on the US and the international community to implement with firmness the internationally legitimate resolutions relating to the Palestinian cause.

# Their right to return

The Palestinian refugee problem is one of the most complex problems facing the peace process. A refugee, by definition, is a person taking refuge in a nation (usually in some form of emergency shelter/camp that is intended to be temporary) other than his homeland because of some form of danger, who has no right of citizenship or residence in that nation.

### *Palestinian point-of-view:*

Palestinian refugees fled their homes as a result of massacres carried out by armed Israeli militias - the most famous of which was in the village of Deir Yaseen. Palestinians insist that any solution is conditional upon the return of Palestinians to their cities and villages, and whoever does not wish to return must receive compensation appropriate to their losses, by virtue of UN Resolutions 181 and 194. These resolutions were affirmed by UN Security Council Resolution 237, which called on Israel to ease the return of Palestinians who fled as a result of the 1948 and 1967 wars. Israel only allowed the return of 14,000 of the 300,000 - half of whom were refugees for the second time.

The right of return includes some five million Palestinians, 3.4 million of whom are registered with UNRWA. Palestinians consider the right of return non-negotiable and must be recognized before any negotiations begin on the refugee issue. The right of return means that every Palestinian has the right to return and live in the Palestinian state, and for those that do not, the international community must participate in provision of appropriate compensation. Palestinian officials feel that this will assist the Palestinians in the Diaspora to be reassured and accept an agreement with Israel.

### *Israeli point-of-view:*

The official government of Israel position asserts that the Palestinians left their homes in response to a call by the leaders of Arab nations on to come and live with them, a fact totally disputed by BBC Arabic radio. According to Israel's own archives, opened for the first time in 1978, 70-80% of all Palestinians left their cities and villages because of the ethnic cleansing carried out by the armed Jewish



militia the "Haganah". The Jewish "Haganah" terrorist group put in place the "Dalit" plan, intending to purify all Jewish lands from Arabs.

The Israelis have several points of view on the issue of return: first they are afraid that it will disrupt the Jewish character of the state, and at the same time, the homes vacated by the Palestinian refugees are now occupied by Jewish immigrants. Israel has indicated that it may accept a minimal amount of returnees to inside the "green line", but over a period of 5 to 15 years and a predetermination of their places of residence

### *Suggested solutions:*

The first suggested solution was a combination of the Right of Return and the absorption of the Palestinian refugees in their host countries. Debate within international Zionist organizations was fierce. They refused the possibility of returning Palestinians to their homes, favoring instead their absorption in Arab host countries, and they used all of their

diplomatic pressure in this direction, a position later adopted by the US.

In 1955, the US began a serious diplomatic effort to absorb the refugees in Iraq and Syria (see US study - page 7), but the political will in those countries refused these efforts. There were many other plans for the solving of the refugee crisis - the most famous was the settling of the residents of the Gaza Strip in northern Sinai, and the unconfirmed 1993 rumors of a proposal for Iraq to absorb a portion of the refugees (especially from Lebanon) in exchange for ending international sanctions.

### *Relevant international resolutions:*

- World Declaration of Human Rights (UN-1948), Article 13: the right of every person to leave his home and to return to it;
- UN Resolution 194 (1948): affirmed the right of all refugees (UN Charter) to leave their homes, and return to their homes freely, or to be given appropriate compensation;

LOCATION	NO. OF CAMPS	REFUGEE POPULATION (1950)	REFUGEE POPULATION (1996)	% OF LOCAL POPULATION	% OF REFUGEE POPULATION	% UNEMPLOYED
WEST BANK	19	506,200*	538,391	34.26%	16%	30-40%
SYRIA	10	82,194	352,136	2.46%	11%	8.40%
JORDAN	10	506,200*	1,389,603	33.09%	41%	18.80%
GAZA STRIP	8	198,227	791,942	76.0%	22%	50-60%
LEBANON	11	127,600	356,258	11.53%	11%	40.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>914,221</b>	<b>3,368,330</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>--</b>

\* Note: The Jordanian government annexed the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) in 1950, therefore the 1950 population in the West Bank and JORDAN in 1950 is the same number. \*\* Source: UNRWA, 1996.



# PLC in its role as "Monitor"

- Recommendations of Count Bernadot, UN representative: the recognition of the right of return as a fundamental principle of an solution, the right is applicable to anyone who desires it, and whoever does not, is entitled to appropriate compensation.
- International Convention on Political and Civil Rights (1966): each person has the right to leave his country freely, and he must not loose his right to freely return to his country;
- UN Security Council Resolution 237 (1967): calling on Israel to ease the return of the Palestinian refugees that fled as a result of the 1948 and 1967 wars;
- The acceptance of Israel as a member of the UN General Assembly in 1949 was conditional upon its acceptance of UN Resolutions 181, 194 and 237.

The Palestinian people and their leadership insist that their right of return to their cities and villages is inalienable and non-negotiable. The Palestinian people must be allowed to return.

## *Study conducted by US diplomats on Palestinian refugee absorption in Arab host countries (1955):*

- Jordan has a political desire to absorb the refugees, but suffers from low income, and requires a long range economic assistance plan. But the differences between Jordan and Israel about the Yarmouk river led to a failure of the development plan.
- Saudi Arabia was not considered because of the dangers represented by Palestinians who were already politically active at the time.
- Lebanon was not considered because the refugees represented 15% of the population and that would cause a serious imbalance in the demographic character of the country.
- Syria was considered an excellent possibility by the US, because it has high income, abundant land and water. The US planned for the development of northern Syria, because it could easily absorb 200,000 refugees in the agricultural sector alone over five years.
- Iraq was considered to have a very high agricultural capacity and resources, but suffers from a lack of manpower and income.



*PA Ministers answer questions on their ministries  
Cover: Tayyeb AbdelRahim gives a speech on behalf of President Arafat promising to restructure the cabinet*

The Palestinian Legislative Council, in its role as "monitor" has a very large role to play in ensuring the accountability of the elected representatives of the Palestinian people, in addition to assisting the Executive Authority in running the government of the Palestinian people, exactly as the "people" see fit.

The first real task in executive oversight for the Legislative Council was the debate and approval of the 1997 Palestinian Authority General Budget, which provided the necessary guide by which to monitor the activities and performance of ministries and governmental agencies.

The Legislative Council dealt, in a completely responsible manner, with the Report of the General Monitoring Commission, by forming a special committee to study it and present their report to the council, before local and international media and guests and issued a resolution calling on President Arafat to restructure the Council of Ministers (Cabinet) on the basis of qualification and to abide by the guidelines of the General Budget, to adhere to the rule of law and its principles. In a special session, the Legislative Council with the presence of President Yasser Arafat, reached an agreement for the implementation of the Legislative Council resolutions and the restructuring of the cabinet. One of the most significant results was the formation of the Joint Council-Ministerial Committee to study the implementation of council resolutions, and the Special Council Committee to hold hearings with ministers and officials relevant to the

Report of the Monitoring Commission, to obtain any additional clarification. The issue was concluded when the council transferred the entire file to President Arafat for administrative reform and necessary changes.

Questioning of Ministers became a regular part of the agenda of council sessions during the second term. Council members asked PA ministers and officials 183 questions relating to the operations and activities of their agencies. Questions

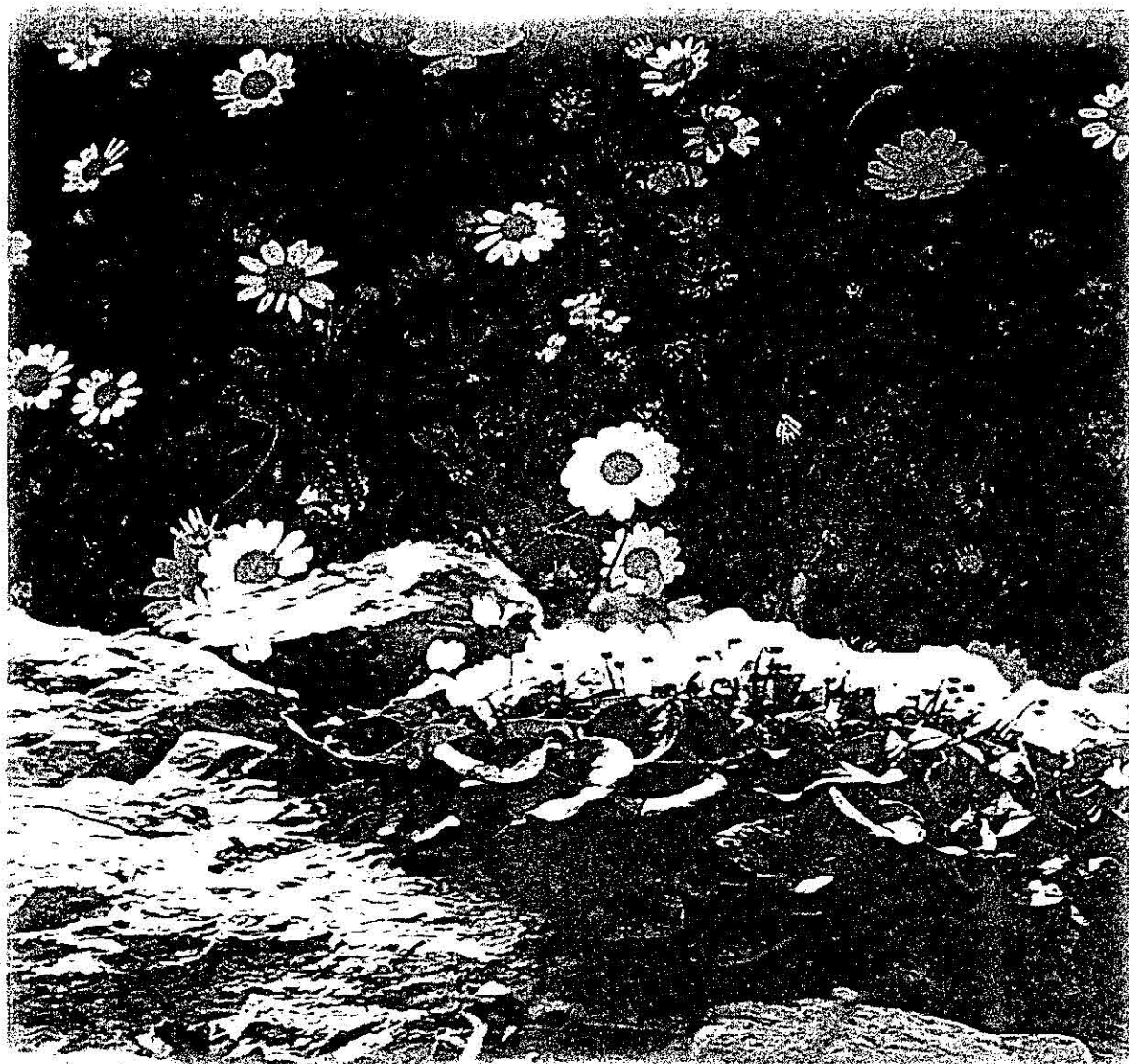
ranged from hiring practices, to constituent complaints on provision of services to their town or village. All of these questions took place in open council sessions, before visitors and members of the media.

Upon receiving complaints from the electorate, the leadership of the council transfers these complaints to one of the permanent committees which has responsibilities in the area of the complaint, to make a report and recommendation to the council.

In terms of monitoring violations of human rights, the council is taking a strong position in defending the right to freedom of speech and plurality. The council tracked Israeli violations of the rights of the Palestinian people, through its specialized committees, on issues related to collective punishment, the lack of implementation of the agreements, and the failure to free Palestinians in Israeli prisons. The council contacted all relevant international organizations through memorandums and letters, calling on them to work towards the freedom of the prisoners and a halt to collective punishment policies. The council also organized field trips to Israeli prisons to see the situations that Palestinians are forced to endure, and to meet with the prisoners and offer assistance. With respect to monitoring the PA in terms of human rights violations, the council has called on the Executive Authority to release all prisoners detained without legal reason, and followed up on the PA closure of several charitable societies in Gaza and call for their reopening.



# SPRING IN PALESTINE



## The Spring of Palestine is coming

The kind of Palestinian Spring, on the way is of a variety that hasn't been seen in the region in a very long time. Such a spring has not come for ten decades, but has been planted in our hearts generation after generation, watered with songs, watered with a river of blood from our hearts and watered with the poetry which flows from our language. It is our dream, but it is the dream of our land first, full of promise and the igniting of a new spring season, for the first time this century, in an independent and democratic Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Spring in Palestine is partial towards songs and the blossoming of the trees. Spring in Palestine never waits, arriving and leaving quickly, only relating to the earth, causing it to spring forth with fertility each year. It is the only season which arrives on time, to the tone of a gently beating drum, announcing the procession of the earth moving towards the season of giving and hope. There is no shame in spring because the earth reveals its secrets and scatters lilacs, daisies, daffodils and windflowers.

*M.E.M. (Palestinian poet)*

PLC Report is available on the Palestinian Legislative Council internet homepage: <http://www.pal-plc.org>

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