

# PALESTINE PROGRAM 2016-19

## INTRODUCTION

According to analysts (Economic Intelligence Unit, EIU), the level of democracy in Palestine has decreased between 2006 and 2012. Palestine changed from a “flawed democracy” in 2006 to a “hybrid regime” in 2012.<sup>1</sup> EIU classifies countries of the world in four groups: full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes. Palestine is ranked 24 out of 37 hybrid regimes. Palestine total rank is 103 out of 148 countries. In general Palestine follows the mainstream of declining democracy across the world that has been caused by the global financial crisis that started in 2008 and highlighted some existing negative trends in political development, according to the Economist Intelligence Units. The weakened democracy in Palestine is also a result of the ongoing Israeli occupation, the eight year siege of Gaza and also the internal political split between Hamas and Fatah.

Transparency International has identified three main challenges related to corruption in Palestine. Government and politics or lack of parliamentary control over executive power is identified as the first one.<sup>2</sup> Without free elections people’s power to hold public officials to account and transparency has been deteriorating. Therefore, it is important to restore the institution of elections and opportunity to people to participate in influencing and shaping the society and controlling the political power.

The second challenge is access to information. The absence of a law on the right to information is a main obstacle for transparency in the public sector there conflicts of interest occur more often than the state controlled media report on. The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedom (MADA) works on the draft of information law in cooperation with the Palestinian Anti- Corruption Commission and respective ministries.<sup>3</sup>

The third challenge and the most widespread form of corruption in the governmental, civic and private sector is nepotism or “Wasta”. The existing corruption diminishes the way in which the marginalized groups could benefit from the public sector and claim/practice their human rights especial social-economic rights. Otherwise, there is no corruption perception index for Palestine 2012. Should these three challenges be handled by political decision makers, the corruption index for Palestine would decrease.

## POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Due to political a split between Hamas and Al Fatah, the Palestinian Legislative Council has been in a state of political paralyses since 2007. This and failure to maintain national and presidential elections since 2006 respective 2005 is one of the main reasons for decreasing of Palestine’s democracy index from overall score of 6.01 in 2006 to 4.80 in 2012. On a 1 to 10 scale Palestine has the lowest scores in category of Functioning of government (2.86) and Civil liberties 3.82 while the Electoral process and pluralism got 5.17, Political culture 4.30 and Political participation (7.78). To increase the ranking there is a need for increased popular participation or citizens’ right to decide who will represent them in parliament, and who will

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<sup>1</sup> [http://graphics.eiu.com/PDF/Democracy\\_Index\\_2010\\_web.pdf](http://graphics.eiu.com/PDF/Democracy_Index_2010_web.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.transparency.org/country#PSE>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.madacenter.org/news.php?lang=1&id=10>

head the government at the national level. Elections for President and Parliament have been postponed several times which has deprived Palestinian voters this basic right. The Palestinian Authority have conducted local elections in the West Bank in 2012 but the Hamas government in Gaza has refused to participate in elections or recognize the results.<sup>4</sup> According to a Gallup survey from April 2013 just 18 percent of the population feel confidence in honesty of elections.<sup>5</sup>

The political landscape is directly influenced by the conflict with Israel. When it comes to the main problems confronting Palestinians today 46% believe that the first most vital Palestinian goal should be to end Israeli occupation in the areas occupied in 1967 and build a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with East Jerusalem as its capital. By contrast, 30% believe the first most vital goal should be to obtain the right of return of refugees to their 1948 towns and villages, 15% believe that it should be to build a pious or moral individual and a religious society, one that applies all Islamic teachings, and 9% believe that the first and most vital goal should be to establish a democratic political system that respects freedoms and rights of Palestinians.<sup>6</sup> These topics are also reflected on the agenda of the political parties in Palestine. The struggle for power in Palestinian politics takes place today between the two movements, Fatah and Hamas. The secular, nationalist Fatah movement is the largest party within the PLO. Fatah, however, found it difficult to transform itself from a guerrilla organization into a political party.<sup>7</sup> After years of rivalries between the two political fractions a reconciliation agreement was signed and a joint technocratic government established in June 2014 with support from the majority of the population.

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Palestinian Human Development Index for 2012 is 0.670 or in the medium human development category and placing the country at 111 out of 187 countries. This index is above-average of 0.652 from countries in the Arab region but masks economic and other inequality across the population at the national level and even in the same household, according to UNDP Human Development Report 2013<sup>8</sup>. The Gross National Income per capita was 3 359 US dollars 2012 while in Arab states in average were 8 317 US dollars. According to the same resource 1.4 percent of the population in Palestine lived in multidimensional poverty while additional 8.8 percent were vulnerable to multiply deprivation or deprivation in education, health and standard of living. Intensity of deprivation or average percentage of deprivation experienced by people in multidimensional poverty was 37. 3.<sup>9</sup> The increasing poverty and more visible gap between rich and poor is potentially a social bomb that could explode at any time especially if the PA continues to face every social demonstration with oppression.

Unemployment in Palestine is high in general and among youth and women in particular. According to The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistic (PCBS) the number of unemployed people in March 2013 was 326 900 out of 1 189 200 or 27. 5 percent. Unemployment is still higher in Gaza Strip 34. 5 compared with and 23.9 in the West Bank. <sup>10</sup> Approximately 41

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.elections.ps/tabid/979/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/worl.aspx?ref=b>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2014/p52epressrelease.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.landguiden.se/Lander/Asien/PalestinskaSjlvstyret/Politiska%20grupper>

<sup>8</sup> <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/PSE.html> (PSE .pdf).

<sup>9</sup> <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/mpi/> The 2012 HDR introduced the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which identifies multiple deprivation in the same households in education, health and standard of living

<sup>10</sup> [www.pcbs.gov.ps/.../pcbs/.../Press\\_En\\_LFSQ120](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/.../pcbs/.../Press_En_LFSQ120).

percent of young people are without jobs and incomes, and over half of them hold university degrees.<sup>11</sup>

Palestinian youth at age 15- 29 constitute about one-third of the Palestinian population in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the East Jerusalem. They are a huge potential of the society but living under the occupation and suffering from poor economic performance, with a high rate of unemployment, paternalism and unequal distribution of familial and political power they are marginalized. Therefore, they are like the other marginalized groups unable or limited to participate in influencing society.

The report on the State of Palestinian Youth in 2013 by the Sharek Youth Forum stresses that frustration, despair, a sense of futility and the reduction of human dignity which result from poverty and unemployment, lead to social and political problems. The young people tend to emigrate in search of better living conditions. There is also much evidence pointing to the correlation between poverty and unemployment with high rates of community violence, crime and drug abuse.<sup>12</sup>

The second marginalized group on the labour market with high unemployment rate is women. For example, the gap in the participation rate between men and women in labour forces still is very big and reached 69.0 percent for men compared with 17.1 percent in the beginning of 2013.<sup>13</sup> At the same time the highest unemployment or 46, 7 percent is among women with 13 years of schooling or more. The women's organizations that are quite well- organized in Palestine expected that women rights would be improved with Palestinian Authority's ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 2009. Actually, this is only one out of ten key international agreements that the Palestinian Authority has ratified. The Palestinian women did not benefit in any way from this ratification until now.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

The Palestinian authorities have failed to replace the outdated and backward penal code and personal status law in Gaza and the West Bank, which date back to mandatory times in Egypt and Jordan and deprived women from their basic rights. The failure to change is not merely a technical-political problem, but a difficulty to reconcile several of socio-cultural and religious approaches and norms. These approaches and norms are based on the patriarchal system that, amongst other things, serve to restrict women's ability to enforce their basic rights, including their reproductive, education and right to work, as well as to play a full part in decision-making both within family and in the public space .

Replacing the outdated law and empowerment women in their rights and promote women's active participation in public life by equipping them with the skills, knowledge, resources and mechanisms to (re-)engage in leadership, decision-making and advocacy at the local and national levels is only one part of the solution. The second one is participation of men in similar activities or in joint activities in order to have a holistic approach to women's issues in the society. A lot of improvement could be done by political parties especially secular parties through bringing a higher number of women in decision making process within own party and in the elected bodies. The election law of 2005 states that political parties must have at least one woman among the first three on the list, at least one woman among the next four, and one woman among every five for the rest of the list. This solution guarantees about 20 percent

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?tabID=512&lang=en&ItemID=790&mid=3172&wversion=Staging>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.sharek.ps/new/report%202013e.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?tabID=512&lang=en&ItemID=790&mid=3172&wversion=Staging>

women among the candidates.<sup>14</sup> In the election for the Palestinian Legislative Council 2006 totally 13 percent out of 132 elected lawmakers were women.<sup>15</sup>

The majority of women in particular and the Palestinian population in general are not very familiar with their rights stated by the Palestinian Basic Law.<sup>16</sup> The rights of people with disabilities and rights of LGBT population are not even mentioned in the Basic Law. The first group is marginalized but relatively visible in the society since the second group is outlawed and because of that invisible.

There are huge needs of intervention in the field of human rights but due to the detention of the Palestinian legislators by the Israeli occupation forces and the ongoing Palestinian political division it has been unable to propose, adopt, or approve any legislation that would support the Palestinians' rights and consolidate the Palestinian legal system. Additionally, it was unable to investigate claims of human rights violations. Independent human rights organizations register and pay attention to human rights violated both by the occupation power and bodies within the Palestinian Authority. Apart from that the Palestinians are collectively deprived of their rights to self-determination in other cases of human rights abuse is question about torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and death in detention facilities, disrespect or delay of courts' decisions, the right to peaceful assembly and association as well as the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Furthermore, the occupation power violated in huge scale the right to movement and travel and the right to private property. Under the ongoing occupation and the split between Hamas and Fatah especially vulnerable groups are journalists and social media activists.

## CIVIL SOCIETY

A long experience in promotion and rights protection of own members have trade union movements, despite that any ILO conventions have not been ratified.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Palestine is not a member of the ILO. In the West Bank pluralism in trade union work has been accepted by the Labour Ministry. There is also quite a good cooperation in policy setting. The Hamas parliamentary group adopted a new union law in the beginning of 2013. The law does not respect international labour standards.<sup>18</sup> In reality both in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank the trade unions affiliated to some political parties tend to control their members in the name of protection of their rights. The right to work is also affected by the split between the main political actors.

In order to increase human rights implementation it is necessary that parties, media and especial civil society organizations work tirelessly to form a strong Palestinian public opinion concerning human rights issues. The focus should be on the right to take part in the government of her/his state, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

It is about 1500 NGO/CSOs in the West Bank and approximately 800 in the Gaza Strip registered with the respective Interior Ministry (IM) in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank. NGO/CSOs in East Jerusalem are under Israeli authority but a number of them have an office in the West Bank also. The Interior Ministry as a registered address is constantly questioned

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.elections.ps/Portals/o/pdf/Elections\\_Law\\_No\\_9\\_of\\_2005\\_EN.pdf](http://www.elections.ps/Portals/o/pdf/Elections_Law_No_9_of_2005_EN.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.elections.ps/tabid/817/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ichr.ps/en/2/6/1041/ICHR-18th-Annual-Report.htm>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/?p=NORMLEXPUB:1:0::NO::>

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.solidar.org/IMG/pdf/6o\\_mena\\_foa.pdf](http://www.solidar.org/IMG/pdf/6o_mena_foa.pdf)

by NGO/ CSOs and interpreted as a mechanism of control rather than a mechanism of equal cooperation. Three legislative frameworks jeopardize the Palestinian civil society and decrease its ability to act as a national movement in democracy building, state institution building, and protection of human rights, advocacy and lobbying for policy setting as well as in representing of specific groups such as the disabled, youth, women and member of trade union movements.<sup>19</sup>

Since 2000 the NGO/CSOs have been governed by the Law on Charitable Associations and Civil Society Organizations (the NGO law), and the Palestinian NGOs Code of Conduct of the year 2008. The NGO Law was for many years the most liberal and least restrictive NGO law in the Middle East. The effects of the occupation combined with the degradation of Palestinian state institutions since 1994, have resulted in arbitrary application of the Palestinian NGO law. The split between Fatah and Hamas has worsened NGO/CSO circumstances by applying arbitrary punitive acts. The worst consequences are the forced dissolution of NGO/CSOs affiliated to Hamas or to Al Fatah or the replacement of NGO/SCOs boards with ideologically loyal members.

Being a member of a political party is not as common as it was during the 1970s and 1980s. At that time 37 percent of NGO employees have been members of some political party. Currently 24 percent are members of some political party and 16 percent are active members. At the same time 37 percent of NGO employee's still feel loyalty to a party they have left.<sup>20</sup>

A new body called the CSO Affairs Commission has been established by the Presidential Decree at the end of 2012 and triggered off protest of human rights and other CSOs. The main task of the new Commission is planning, decision making and the selection of partners, between all Palestinian and foreign CSOs.<sup>21</sup> This kind of guardian and coordinator role has been taken in Gaza by Interior Ministry in Hamas government. In both cases Palestinians' constitutional right to freedom of assembly guaranteed by the Palestinian Basic Law has been infringed. Israel also applies arbitrary measures against the Palestinian NGOs/SCOs in East Jerusalem.

The Palestinian NGO Development Center in a wide coordination with CSOs both from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank has identified four main challenges for CSO connected to the socioeconomic and political environment in the coming five years.<sup>22</sup> The first one is the Israeli occupation that is reflected as movement restrictions, fragmentation of the national territory, land confiscation, new settlements/colonies, the Separation Wall, house demolishing, displacement and imprisonment of people, settler violence, etc. The second challenge is a continuous economic uncertainty caused by unsustainable economic growth and the irregularity of donor assistance to the Palestinians. A conditional funds could be added as a part of the second challenge also. <sup>23</sup> The conditional funds violate NGO law.

Poverty and employment are the third challenge. The last but not less crucial one for the whole society is the internal political division reflected in two governments who claiming legitimacy in the Gaza Strip respectively in the West Bank. At the moment the consequences of the

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.enpi-info.eu/library/content/civil-society-organisation-mapping-study-palestinian-territories>

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.palestine.rosalux.org/fileadmin/ab\\_palestine/pdf/RLF\\_newsletters\\_EN/RLF\\_PAL\\_Gerster\\_PNGOs.pdf](http://www.palestine.rosalux.org/fileadmin/ab_palestine/pdf/RLF_newsletters_EN/RLF_PAL_Gerster_PNGOs.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/topics/palestinian-violations/673-unconstitutional-presidential-decrees-seek-to-control-civil-society-organisations>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.ndc.ps/node/1021#sthash.pJYs8PBM.dpuf>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.maan-ctr.org/pdfs/FSReport/PositionPaper.pdf>

division are reprisals of both parties on CSOs associated with the rival political party as well as increasing pressure on CSOs to fill the gap in basic service in Gaza. Actually, in the last decade, a process of concentration of CSOs on service delivery activities became apparent, while their engagement in the policy making was often marked by difficulties. A positive example is organizations committed to social-economic rights and youth and women's issues. Otherwise the civil society actors as a channel for people living in poverty to participate in the decision making process and development of democracy also tend to avoid demanding accountability from government or from other power holders keeping "neutrality", according to the Mapping Study of the Civic Society Organisations. The study mentioned existing of some exception that corresponds with the Palme Center experience within own program in Palestine. Improving knowledge and practice of good governance is a way how to reach municipalities and involve CSO representatives in local councils. The Palme Center experience is also well in its partners cooperation with some ministries or other PA bodies that often consult "specialized" CSOs,<sup>24</sup> Relatively new social movements dedicated to a popular struggle against the occupation and advocacy for boycott, divestment and sanction against Israel have been established both nationally and internationally.<sup>25</sup> &<sup>26</sup> These movements above all attract young people affiliated to various political factions and parties as well as civil society organizations and local groups.<sup>27</sup>

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

The Palme Center cooperation in the country has been improved the last two years. Working through a program and sharing a joint goal have resulted in partner organizations cooperation with much more stakeholders than before. A clear connection between grass roots activism and policy making on the national level have been created/established in some extent as a good model of two society's sectors cooperation. Internal democracy within the partners is on a respectable level and full gender equality is applied in 13 out of 15 partners. Using of social media in reaching remote target groups and other actors as well as to send the message to the wider audience is also something that have contributed to popular participation and social responsibility increasing within the clan dominated society. The local partner networking every three months and joint capacity building have backed synergies and cooperation between the Palme Center partners and sharing knowledge and resources.

The Palme Center frequently shares information and experience with the Swedish players (Diakonia, Kvinna till Kvinna, Svenska kyrkan, etc.). The Swedish Consulate in Jerusalem organizes a joint meeting every four months. We also exchange information and experience with the Fridrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) that have a similar program and target group in Palestine. The last year we have established a good contact with Germany Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) that actually was interested how we work on the program. GIZ consultants as especial project support are engaged in three out of 15 partners of the Palme Center. Program working is not yet common among international organizations in Palestine. The Palme Center belongs to few international actors who have developed this way of working.

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<sup>24</sup> The Democracy & Workers' Rights Center is a consult to the Labour Ministry; The Palestinian Youth Union is a member to the Youth Council; Pyalara is also a consult to different bodies working with youth and media.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.stopthewall.org/>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.bdsmovement.net>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.stopthewall.org/youth>

## PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

### **Development goal**

Women and youth are able to practice their citizenship rights and actively participate in the democratic decision-making processes.

### **Program Objective**

Palestinian women, men, girls and boys participate increasingly in social processes and has changed the traditional norms in their neighboring/surrounding

### **Intermediate objective 1**

Palme Center's partner organizations acting as a democratic role model and have systems and procedures to fulfil principles of good governance.

### **Intermediate objective 2**

Partners have the ability to influence local and national decision makers in decisions concerning living conditions of target populations.

### **Intermediate objective 3**

The target groups have increased opportunities to participate actively in social processes.

### **Intermediate objective 4**

Target groups have a good self-esteem and change attitudes in their local social milieu