

Foundations for Peace

Urgent Steps to Address the Israeli- Palestinian Conflict

Oxfam International calls on all parties to acknowledge and address the growing insecurity and the humanitarian crisis resulting from the conflict, and to reaffirm and protect the rights of civilians under international law. Immediate action must be taken to protect the lives of Israelis and Palestinians and to take steps to reverse the long-term damage that will affect the livelihoods of the poorest and most marginalised people for decades to come.

28 March 2002

Summary

The urgency for peace and new engagement in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories has never been greater, nor ever more tenuous. Ordinary Palestinian and Israeli citizens, particularly the poorest and most marginalised groups, are paying a cruel toll. Never before have the levels of insecurity, poverty, direct loss of human life, and material devastation been so great. This situation of direct suffering continues to ignite further violence, intransigence and extremism on all sides, further undermining the peace and security that is so desperately desired in the region.

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There is reason for some hope. The United States, the United Nations, and the European Union have all declared renewed commitment to seek a definitive solution to this conflict, most recently reflected in UN Security Council Resolution 1397 which aims to establish a basis for peaceful co-existence between the State of Israel and a future State of Palestine. A number of Arab states, lead by Saudi Arabia, have put forward new proposals for resolving the conflict that would be widely backed by most countries. While the past few months have seen a breakdown in political dialogue and increased violence, there is broad recognition that this conflict must be resolved if there is to be peace for Palestinians and Israelis, and stability and security in the region and beyond.

Oxfam believes that urgent steps must be taken to turn political will into concrete action. The international community must now engage in a sustained effort to resolve this conflict on the basis of international law, international refugee law and relevant UN resolutions, including UNSC resolutions 242 and 338. In particular, the European Union should assume greater responsibility and an effective political role as a key party addressing this conflict.

There is a strong voice for peaceful change within Palestinian and Israeli civil society that will support efforts to resolve the conflict. These groups are providing first aid to the wounded, psychological counselling to those suffering from trauma, creating emergency employment, providing basic services to remote communities, monitoring human rights violations, advocating for a resolution to the conflict, and demanding through peaceful protest for political action to end the violence. Oxfam urges all actors to engage with these groups in shaping a peaceful and safe future for both peoples.

Reducing the suffering of people and protecting basic rights must be a priority. It is both a moral requirement and also an essential component in securing the foundations for sustained peace and development. To this end, Oxfam urges all parties to make four actions an immediate priority.

1. Protection of civilians.

All parties to the conflict must first and foremost uphold international humanitarian law and human rights law, particularly relating to civilians as stated in the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relating to the protection of civilians in times of war, in particular those living under occupation. An international protection mechanism should be an immediate priority to avert further loss of life among both Israeli and Palestinian civilians.

2. Foundations for peace.

Protection of civilians will only come through a just peace for Palestinians and Israelis. Any framework for negotiations must include UNSCR 242 and 338, which call for Israeli withdrawal from lands occupied since 1967, and to reaffirm the right of Israel and a future Palestinian state to exist within secure borders. In addition, a permanent solution to the status of over five million Palestinian refugees must be addressed in a way that is consistent with international refugee law.

3. Immediate humanitarian need.

Immediate needs, particularly for food, water, and health care, must be addressed to reverse the significant decline in nutritional and health status among Palestinians, and intolerable stress on community life. Ensuring the basic conditions that allow people to obtain employment and productive activities is a critical factor in meeting these needs.

4. Livelihoods development for long-term poverty reduction.

Palestinians must be guaranteed conditions that foster economic growth and development for the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and for a future Palestinian state. This includes the reconstruction of destroyed assets, investments in infrastructure and economic enterprises, and special measures that build the capacity of Palestinians to enter into regional and global markets on fair terms.

Ensuring the immediate protection, livelihoods, and long-term prospects for the poorest and most marginalised are the basics for establishing a lasting and sustainable peace. Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza are proportionately the most affected, but urgent measures should also apply to other vulnerable groups including Arab and Bedouin Israelis.

Protection of civilians and foundations for peace

The resurgence of clashes between Israelis and Palestinians has been a sad reality since late September 2000. The conflict is characterised by ongoing violations by both parties of international humanitarian and human rights law, and by the international community's inability and unwillingness to enforce the full obligations of all parties under that law. The Government of Israel has been responsible for extensive violations of basic human rights of Palestinians: excessive use of force leading to civilian casualties, many of them of children below 12 years of age, attacks on emergency medical personnel, military actions against densely populated refugee camps, extra-judicial executions of suspected militants, demolitions of hundreds of homes, prolonged imposition of movement restrictions on entire communities, settlement-related destruction and confiscation of property, including water systems and agricultural property, and uprooting of trees.

There has also been a growing and devastating rise in violence by Palestinians against Israeli civilians. Israelis have become increasingly insecure from the targeted attacks of Palestinian suicide bombers on civilians, including women, children and the elderly, leading to a significant erosion in the most basic security of Israelis. There is growing acceptance among the general public that extreme security measures and retaliatory actions are necessary to stop these indiscriminate killings of Israeli civilians. The cycle of violence is unlikely to end unless there are actions by all sides in the conflict and assertive measures by the international community to protect and respect all civilian lives.

In a situation marked by such extreme levels of violence and escalating conflict it is of paramount importance that all parties to the conflict are held to their obligations under the Geneva Conventions, and that the international community meet its own obligations in 'ensuring respect' for the Conventions. Unless these basic principles can be upheld, the international community will have lost the only globally accepted instrument for the protection of civilians: the 1949 Geneva Conventions and general principles of international humanitarian law. It is vital in the context of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, as elsewhere in the world, that these frameworks guide the conduct of all actors, and serve to set a common standard for international action.

The international community has a role to play in protecting civilians. From other conflicts, such as in Macedonia, Namibia and Guatemala, we know that the presence of human rights monitors can diminish the number of incidences of abuse. While the Government of Israel has resisted the notion of an international presence, it is an option that should be reconsidered in the interest of protecting all civilians, Israeli and Palestinian.

The situation for refugees is a critical factor in the ongoing conflict. The most recent attacks by the Israeli defence forces were marked by direct bombing of refugee camps – an act that is in blatant violation of international law. Direct attacks on civilians, humanitarian personnel, and refugee camps must cease if there is to be any hope for peace. There are 3.7 million registered Palestinian refugees. An estimated one million more are unregistered. The approximately 1.4 million refugees who live in the West Bank and Gaza Strip – 600,000 of whom live in refugee camps – are almost entirely dependent on UN service provision, and have faced some of the harshest restrictions on movement. A just and durable solution to the conflict must resolve the indefinite status of these people, giving them the choice of return, restitution, or alternative permanent settlement.

Recommendations

Urgent steps must be taken to safeguard human life and lay the foundations for a just peace. To this end:

- The international community must press the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to abide by international human rights law and international conventions governing wartime and occupation, as reflected in the 1949 4th Geneva Convention.
- A framework for negotiations must include UNSCR 242 and 338, which call for Israeli withdrawal from occupied land and reaffirm the right of all states in the region to exist within secure borders. In addition, a permanent solution to the status of over four million Palestinian refugees must be addressed within the framework of international refugee law.
- Oxfam joins the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, MSF, and many other international organisations in the call for an international human rights monitoring body and an international protection mechanism to avert further loss of life. Such bodies would serve to secure an independent basis for establishing

accountability to international human rights and humanitarian law.

- All parties should guarantee access by humanitarian personnel to deliver assistance, without threat of intimidation, interference, or direct aggression. The recent attacks on medical personnel and infrastructure are a direct violation of international humanitarian law.
- The US government and the EU should prevent the sale or transfer of arms to Israel or the Palestinian Authority without genuinely effective and enforceable guarantees that such arms will not be used to violate international humanitarian or human rights law. All European governments should uphold the European Code of Conduct on Arms Trade in relating to countries in conflict. Reducing the flow of arms is a key step towards reducing the loss of life.

Immediate Action on Humanitarian Needs

Of immediate concern is the serious and sustained decline in the living conditions of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Recent World Bank reports indicate that, by the end of 2001, some 50-60 per cent of the population were estimated to be living below the poverty line, at an income of less than \$2 per day. This figure is bound to grow significantly as the cumulative impact of closures and other Israeli security measures continue to take their toll. There are disturbing indications that the ability of the entire population to cope with the cumulative effects of closure is coming to an end. Recent household surveys indicate that 80 per cent of households reduced their expenditure since the closures began in September 2000. Dr. Hassan Abu Libdeh, head of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, reports, 'Our recent surveys show that food purchasing and consumption patterns are now changing radically, with a worrying decrease in consumption of milk and meat products.'

Along with reduced expenditure on essential goods, a growing number of households have depleted their personal savings and are now selling their assets and/or incurring debt. UN reports indicate that 41 per cent of households used their personal savings, 55 per cent delayed payment of bills, 35 per cent borrowed money, and 18 per cent have sold personal assets in order to meet basic needs. These measures will increase the immediate vulnerability of families, and

make the prospects for recovery much more difficult in the longer term.

Extract from a recent Oxfam assessment mission

'None of the villages we visited were connected to a water network – all are dependent on local springs or purchase of tanked water. Householders tell us a similar and depressing story. They have lost most of their income because closures have meant that there is no access to work in Israel or local cities. At the same time the price of tanked water has doubled because of the difficulties trucks face in passing checkpoints. Villagers cannot reach their traditional springs because they fear soldiers or settlers. The communities' latrines overflow, as the sewage trucks from a nearby city cannot pass the checkpoints by for days or sometimes weeks. Where there is a piped water system, mainly from springs, pipes and the source have sometimes been vandalised by settlers. Municipal officials face great difficulties in reaching localities to do needed water quality tests or to repair broken pipes. Each household is sadly alike: an unemployed man sits at home and must borrow money or sell his wife's gold to buy food. Children cannot reach their schools. Women try to feed their families on half of what was available before, and keep their houses clean on half as much water.'

Tens of thousands of people have not been able to work since September 2000 due to restrictions on movement. According to a recent World Bank report, 120,000 Palestinians held jobs in Israel before September 2000. In early 2001, the numbers legally employed had dropped to zero, while 50,000 Palestinians still work illegally in Israel. The UN reports that unemployment has tripled to 38 per cent of the labour force, compared with 11 per cent prior to the imposition of closures. A UN report indicated that wage income on aggregate declined by 40 per cent over a one-year period. The economic crisis has led to a dramatic increase in emergency food needs, with the UN now providing emergency food rations to over 70 per cent of the population (up from 10 per cent receiving food aid in September 2000). Attacks by Israeli forces have led to massive destruction of property and agricultural land, including essential development infrastructure, and uprooting of trees. In certain areas, essential services such as water have been cut off entirely. The World Bank estimates that the value of direct property destruction between October 2000 and June 2001 was US\$125m. This figure is bound to increase significantly as a result of Israeli actions in the West Bank and Gaza over the past few months.

World Bank reports suggest that the crisis has most severely affected the southern Gaza Strip and the remote villages of the West Bank, regions with the highest concentration of poverty prior to the crisis. According to the World Bank, about two-thirds of those who fell into

poverty since the crisis are to be found in Gaza. Gaza also bore about two-thirds of the total physical damage incurred by the end of June 2001.

As of 21 March 2002, the EU estimates the damage by Israeli forces to EU financed local infrastructure in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to be equivalent to Euro 19 million. UNWRA reported on 20 March that IDF damages to refugee camps and other UNWRA facilities would cost an estimated US\$3.8m to rebuild.

Tulkarm and water rights

The town of Tulkarm lies towards the northern end of the West Bank. When Israeli forces left on 17 November, 17 km of water pipes and 7 km of sewage pipes had been rendered inoperable. Some had been damaged in constructing security ditches. But others were far away, and appeared to have been rolled over and flattened by Israeli tanks. Indeed, Israeli tanks and bulldozers crushed two of the vehicles of municipal workers trying to make emergency repairs. When Oxfam visited in late November to assess the damage, 5000 people were still without water and broken sewers posed serious risks to public health. In January, Oxfam staff visited the town again and found that more damage had been done to the water network and that the town's main sewage pumping station was out of action. In the words of Oxfam's staff that made the assessment: 'The damage and destruction caused in Tulkarm seriously affected the quantity and quality of water available, causing a major threat to the health of this town.'

Recommendations

Urgent steps must be taken to meet the immediate humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable populations and to ensure Palestinians can obtain work in order to re-establish income to poor families. To this end:

- The international community, the Government of Israel, and the Palestinian Authority must ensure that civilian populations affected by the conflict receive adequate levels of food, water and medical attention, and children's rights of education are fully upheld. This will require guarantees of access and freedom of movement for humanitarian personnel.
- The international community should intensify its efforts to ensure that Israel eases security measures with a view to allowing normal economic activity and provision of services to resume. This must include an end to the closure policy and a significant reduction in security-related checkpoints, and an easing on requirements for international and domestic travel.

- All parties should be held accountable for costs relating to direct destruction of civilian infrastructure. Immediate measures must be taken to repair damages to water systems and other basic infrastructure, to resume normal services, and to compensate civilians and local government authorities for economic losses in the West Bank and Gaza where losses have been most extreme.

Long-term poverty reduction through livelihoods development

Independent of the specific outcomes of any negotiation on territorial status, the future stability of the region will depend in part on the ability of the Palestinian people to engage in economic activity. The generation of independent economic enterprises, both at the household level and through large-scale enterprise development, will be essential to reducing the dependency of Palestinians on both the UN and the Israeli state. Creating conditions where such activities can develop and flourish, and where Palestinians can invest in their own development, must be part of any peace plan.

Deep structural imbalances between Israel and the Palestinian Territories have been created through over three decades of Israeli occupation, direct destruction of economic assets, control over natural resources, and de-capitalisation of enterprises through barriers to trade from Palestinian territories. The Palestinian economy has virtually ground to a halt, with per capita GNP falling by nearly 20 per cent in 2001, even with massive donor aid still pouring into Palestinian institutions. It is estimated that closures amount to losses to the Palestinian economy of over £12m per day. Where Palestinian products formerly made their way into regional and international markets, almost all trade is now cut off.

Tulkarm and agricultural development

Forty per cent of the population of Tulkarm depend on agriculture for their survival. Producing vegetables, primarily for sale in local markets, Tulkarm farmers rely on irrigation networks and greenhouses. Sixty per cent of farmers report damage to their irrigation systems since September 2000. The water infrastructure for the Ministry of Agriculture nursery has been damaged three times. The third and most recent round of damage has reportedly destroyed the irrigation network entirely.

The Palestinian economy is at further disadvantage as beleaguered industries compete with much more powerful Israeli companies on

unequal trade terms. Both Israel and Palestinians enjoy preferential trade access to European markets. But preferential status is often not applied equally. The EU has recently determined that some of the products reaching European markets from Israel are illegal as they are produced on illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands. The EU issued an advisory note warning Israel to abide by rules of origin procedures. Further measures are needed in investments for enterprise development, monitoring of imports to control fraud relating to rules of origin, and fair application of trade rules.

To achieve long-term stability, conditions must be established for generating livelihood options for Palestinians. This will require measures that end the systematic constraints on Palestinian economic development, ensuring adequate institutional and infrastructural investments, and building market linkages that reduce dependence. It will also require a significant shift in the way the PA has managed finances for economic development and donor assistance in the past. Transparency in budget management and accountability must be at the centre of future development plans. The Palestinian territories would benefit from a process similar to that followed by low-income countries that are developing Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers with the World Bank and IMF. These processes offer a framework through which communities take a greater role in establishing priorities, exposing corruption, and holding authorities to account.

Market access in Mawasi

Mawasi was home to a thriving guava industry in Gaza, once producing 85 per cent of the Palestinian guava crop and exporting 60 per cent of its produce to Jordan. Its marketing capacity has now virtually disappeared. The guava industry provided work to 7,500 Palestinians, and became more important as Israeli-imposed movement restrictions reduced the employment opportunities for Palestinians in Israel. Mawasi has experienced some of the worst aspects of closures, including special identity tags that restrict the number of trips residents can make, numerous checkpoints, restrictions on passage of vehicles, and long periods of delays and complete closure. These have resulted in a situation in which any given crate of guavas will pass through at least nine checkpoints, will be unloaded from crates at least twice, and will be transferred across checkpoints from Palestinian to Israeli vehicles in order to reach markets. This includes access to other markets in the Gaza Strip and West Bank as Mawasi cannot transport directly among the Palestinian Territories. These pressures on the marketing system mean that produce is severely diminished in value by the time it reaches markets, and the costs of production have risen exorbitantly.

Measures can be taken now to begin a process of stabilisation and economic regeneration. To this end:

- The US, the EU and its member states, and other countries should review trade agreements with Israel and the Palestinian Territories to monitor abuses actively and to withdraw preferential conditions if abuses occur.
- Donors should work with all parties to strategise on effective mechanisms that will protect basic service sustainability throughout the conflict and promote alternative forms of enterprise development that allow people to survive the immediate crisis.
- The PA should establish a transparency mechanism for prioritising and reporting on the use of international assistance, with stronger accountability measures, drawing from experiences of other countries where civil-society networks have worked to make policy planning and budgets more responsive to local needs. The World Bank should bring the occupied Palestinian Territories into the framework of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.

Urgent action by the international community is needed immediately to intervene to stop any further deterioration of security in Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories. Oxfam believes that an end to the violence can only be brought about by renewed commitment by all parties to take responsibility for building lasting foundations for peace.

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