

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
WEEKLY MEETING

Summary Note

7 May 2007
Geneva

I Occupied Palestinian Territory – Update on the Human Situation and the CAP 2007

Mr. Kevin Kennedy, Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and UN Coordinator for Humanitarian and Development Activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT)

Mr. Kennedy provided participants with an update on the humanitarian situation in the OPT and the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP).

The humanitarian crisis in the OPT continues and political, economic and social conditions have sharply deteriorated since the beginning of 2006. On the broader political front there is limited progress. The Palestinian Authority (PA) experiences a serious decline given both internal and external cleavages, and the work of the PA is further halted by lacking payments to the 160,000 civil servants constituting the PA's work force. The last full salary was paid in March 2006, and in the remaining part of 2006, 40% of salaries were channelled through Presidential accounts and the Temporary International Mechanism (TIM). Moreover, four, now former, Ministers have been arrested by the Israelis.

In his briefing, Mr. Kennedy stressed that the ordinary Palestinians are the main victims of the crisis pointing to statistics showing that 65.8% of the Palestinian population lives below the poverty line (87.7% in Gaza); 28.4% is unemployed (39.6% in Gaza); and 34% is food insecure with additional 12% being food vulnerable, despite that WFP and UNRWA have provided food assistance to between 1.7 and 2 million people out of a population of 3.8 million. As a general notion, the health situation is not grave (maternal and child death tolls are lower than in both Jordan and Egypt), but health services are constrained as a ¼ of all essential drugs is out of stock. Health services in the West Bank are, furthermore, restricted by the second strike among health workers in six months. The strike effectively freezes all public primary health care services and only permits services in life-threatening cases.

Land access in and out of Gaza continues to be a key problem and commitment to and implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA) remain to be seen. So far there is no progress on three out of the four action points: (i) Ensuring land link between Gaza and the West bank, (ii) ensuring direct links to the outside world, including airport and seaport, and (iii) reducing closures in the West Bank (check points have increased by 43%). Only limited and irregular progress has been experienced with regard to (iv) land access in and out of Gaza. The situation is therefore, that while the implementation of the AMA is unsuccessful, the barrier construction continues, and today 60% of the 703 km long wall is completed.

Hostilities and everyday violence remain a key problem. The deterioration of the conflict has brought with it a serious increase in Palestinian deaths in 2006, and Gaza residents live with almost daily Israeli military strikes from land, air and sea. Internal Palestinian violence is, moreover, increasingly becoming a problem and has brought with it 117 Palestinian deaths, just as 466 have been seriously injured as of March 2007.

With regard to the international response, Mr. Kennedy said that UN efforts have been substantial, and pointed to UNWRA, WFP, UNICEF, WHO and FAO as particularly active agencies. Mr. Kennedy also stated that the presence of both national and international NGOs, with well established networks and extensive OPT experience, is considerable.

As regards funding, the international community has made genuine efforts to spare ordinary Palestinians of the worst effects of the crisis by supporting the TIM and by pledging increased humanitarian assistance through the CAP. The CAP appeal for USD 451 million has been covered by 19.8% as of the beginning of May 2007. With regard to the relationship between the TIM and the CAP, Mr. Kennedy expressed concern that the substantial amounts channelled through the TIM might trade of money for the CAP, which potentially risks reducing the funding distributed to the NGOs through the CAP.

An issue raised by several participants was the question on what happens to the Palestinians being arrested by the Israelis on a regular basis. Mr. Kennedy recognised the grave character of the problem, and stated that there is no real UN approach to the problem. Mr. David Shearer, Head of OCHA in Jerusalem, added that 4-500 Palestinians are arrested each month and less than 10% of these cases are subject to inquiry. Mr. Kennedy also stated that the ICRC, and some NGOs, are likely to have more insight, but given the special mandate of the ICRC, there has been no information sharing in this regard.

On questions regarding the impact of the US strategic plan aiming at strengthening the Israeli-Palestinian talks by stepping up security and easing restrictions on movement in the OPT, Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Shearer responded that they did not expect the plan to carry with it major improvements, in particular not, as deadlines for most benchmarks already have passed.

Another central discussion was the potential role out of the Cluster approach. Mr. Kennedy stated that as resources have been committed elsewhere and due to concerns that the Cluster approach would constrain or disrupt structures and sectors currently functioning in a satisfactory manner, there have been no attempts to introduce the Cluster approach yet. However, discussions on the potential role out of the Cluster model will be commenced in 2007, in particular, discussions on how to better involve the NGOs are envisaged.

On the question raised regarding to the level of coordination with the PA, Mr. Kennedy emphasised that coordination is taken place and is solid, but also stated that it is kept low profile in order avoid creating unnecessary tensions.

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