

**INTER – AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE – WORKING GROUP
49th MEETING**

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at

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies: Auditorium

**In-Depth Country Review--Occupied Palestinian Territory: Background Paper
prepared by UNSCO**

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The following is a background note for UNSCO's intervention at the IASC WG meeting.

1. The nature of the situation

The crisis in the Middle East is essentially political, but one that has ever more serious economic and humanitarian consequences. A most salient aspect of the political crisis is the policy of closures. The international community is committed to supporting the PA's capacity to cope, to reform and strengthen itself, and to the vision of a Palestinian state. This means that the aid community faces a unique situation – in which donors and the UN are, simultaneously, supporting classic development and capacity building activities, *at the same time as* responding to emergency infrastructure and repair needs, *at the same time as* meeting growing social and humanitarian needs, *at the same time as* responding to sudden humanitarian crises. In addition, there is the possibility that the aid community may be asked to take on some quasi-interim administration functions, in the form of intrusive oversight mechanisms on PA reform, and also perhaps within months to take on explicit state-building functions.

This situation is likely to continue for a while, and will require the aid community doing everything it can to advocate a political solution to the conflict which can lead to an ending or easing closures, to revitalize the economy, and to deliver assistance. The importance of responding to humanitarian needs will grow, either as the numbers of vulnerable grow, or as a result of fighting and more violence.

2. The aid community

Most of the donors on the ground come from a development background. Until now, the UN's presence has been oriented towards development and capacity building. In April and May 2002, this group of actors, working with the PA and NGOs, did something remarkable: banded together in an unprecedented manner to respond to urgent humanitarian as well as to emergency repair needs. The capacity and determination of Palestinian interlocutors, national and local, governmental and non-governmental,

notwithstanding the extraordinary problems they faced, was such that a major injection of expatriate human resources from outside was not required. The aid community and Palestinians coped, set up Operations Rooms, Assessment Teams, the Support Group, etc. The aid community, broadly defined to include Palestinian partners, is still able to cope, if suitably coordinated and motivated, though doing so will require a reassignment of human resources; this reassignment is needed and welcome in light of the closure regime.

3. Coordination arrangements

The principal local coordination mechanism is the informal Local Aid Coordination Committee ('informal' because strictly speaking, the LACC includes the Parties). The informal Joint Liaison Committee is, effectively, its steering committee, and the co-chairs (Norway, World Bank, UNSCO) provide the joint secretariat, with UNSCO doing much of the secretariat functions. This arrangement is currently working well, though there are concerns that many of the LACC's Sector Working Groups (SWGs), each of which is chaired by a PA ministry and shepherded by a donor, are either not particularly relevant or effective – unlike the arrangements put into place to respond to the April/May emergency. The Operations Rooms that are still functioning and proving useful (e.g. Health) now need to be reconnected with the SWGs, and the SWGs themselves may need further consolidation and revision.

4. Humanitarian Coordination

For reasons outlined above – the nature of the crisis, the willingness of the existing aid community to work in emergency mode, and the robust coordination structure – any coordination arrangements for humanitarian activities must be integral to, and not discrete from, the main coordination structure. The challenge is therefore a) to ensure that activities aimed at addressing the humanitarian consequences of the crisis are complementary with and do not undermine other emergency response and longer term development activities, including to maintain PA capacity; b) to engage the LACC in these issues – rather than create an alternative donor fora for discussing policy issues; and c) to have practical coordination arrangements that facilitate the work of those addressing the humanitarian dimensions of the situation without confusing the picture, overburdening the PA or donors, or creating a totally alternative set of arrangements. Logical steps include folding the Humanitarian Task Force into LACC, reviewing how SWGs can serve as vehicles for humanitarian actors, and strengthening the two Area Task Forces to provide practical humanitarian coordination in Gaza and the West Bank.

5. OCHA's role

The current arrangement whereby OCHA is responsible for facilitating humanitarian coordination within UNSCO and therefore in the LACC needs to be strengthened a) because this would put OCHA at the heart of existing coordination arrangements and b) because it would increase the co-chairs' and co-secretariat's capacity to provide a service

to the assistance community, PA, donor, UN and NGO. For this to work, there needs to be great clarity between OCHA on the one hand and UNSCO and its partner co-chairs on the other, as to exactly how OCHA is adding value to coordination overall. UNSCO's initial suggestion is that it is as follows (not necessarily in order of priority):

By providing 'real time' information on humanitarian and emergency response needs. Clearly, this is what the HIC can do. The information and analysis it generates will be useful to (and in some cases obtained from) a broader range of actors, some of whom would describe themselves as more 'developmental' than humanitarian – but this is a plus, not a minus.

By ensuring that the donor community and LACC are fully informed of emerging humanitarian needs and are provided guidance/suggestions in meeting them.

This will require the production of timely papers and presentations on emerging scenarios, the activities of the aid community in meeting humanitarian needs, and suggestions as to what the donor community can do to assist, whether in terms of policy interventions or financial support. However, as things stand, as UNRWA has its own discrete fundraising regime, this does not require the preparation of Appeals; more useful at this stage is ensuring that damage assessments by the PA, donors and the UN take into account social and humanitarian needs and are not limited to physical and institutional damage.

By supporting NGO coordination and being a bridge between the co-chairs and the local and international NGO community. The LACC and UN are supportive of NGO efforts; however, NGOs (whose importance as service providers may increase as PA municipal capacity diminishes) continue to face coordination problems. OCHA can play a role in assisting them both by engaging on policy matters and providing modest financial support to NGO coordination entities.

By providing practical coordination services for actors meeting humanitarian needs on the ground. OCHA's value added is in bringing the actors together around practical challenges in the field; the importance of this role is likely to increase as UNRWA, WFP, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and others step up their relief activities.

By supporting a coherent approach in the aid community to dealing with the central problem of closures and access. Donors now want to support a dynamic information gathering and dissemination system, not least with a view to providing a better basis for engaging with Israeli authorities. They are turning to the co-chairs for leadership; there is an opportunity for OCHA to support UNSCO, UNRWA and the broader donor community on this, and to support the international community's ***humanitarian advocacy*** efforts. UNRWA has indicated its support for this and is willing to provide premises in its Jerusalem office for an Access Information center; there are obvious tie-ins between this and HIC.

First background document : In-Depth Country Review –Occupied Palestinian Territory

(At the IASC, UNSCO will briefly review the current situation on the ground; how the international community responded to the most recent crisis in the West Bank and Gaza; and how OCHA can add value to the work of the UN and broader international community in the coming months.)