
The United Nations and non-governmental organizations on the question of Palestine

(Information note)

September 2002

Issue 6

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
I. The network of NGOs on the question of Palestine	3
II. International meetings and conferences for NGOs on the question of Palestine	5
III. Related activities	6
Annex. Application for accreditation with the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People	8

Introduction

The contribution of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to the shaping of the world in recent years has been increasingly acknowledged by Governments and international organizations alike. Today, many sectors and organizations of the United Nations prize the experience, expertise and innovative thinking of NGOs and seek to involve them in their activities in a variety of ways.

Consultative arrangements have been established with the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies, the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, and various United Nations organs, agencies and programmes. Large numbers of NGOs have participated in the global conferences on social and economic issues organized since the early 1990s, as well as in their follow-up activities. Cooperation with NGOs is an essential element in humanitarian relief missions and in development assistance programmes.

NGO cooperation with the United Nations on the question of Palestine covers the entire spectrum from advocacy and solidarity, on the one hand, to humanitarian relief and development assistance, on the other. Some NGOs, particularly those providing aid to refugees, have been active on this issue practically since the beginning of the conflict in 1948. Following the occupation of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem in 1967 and the intensification of efforts to achieve a just settlement, many new NGOs were established and became active in mobilizing public opinion in support of the Palestinian cause at the national and local levels. During the 1990s, many NGOs supported the peace process and provided assistance to the fledgling Palestinian institutions in the self-rule areas. With the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000, NGOs again are calling for confronting the root causes of the conflict, namely to end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. NGOs are in the forefront of the providers of emergency relief. They closely monitor the developments on the ground and introduce ground-breaking, yet modest measures of protection to the Palestinian people.

The main United Nations forum where all NGOs interested in this issue can meet periodically to exchange information and experience and to make new contacts with like-minded groups and individuals is that provided by the [Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People](#).

A subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, the Committee was established in 1975 to make recommendations for a solution of the question of Palestine based on the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Subsequent to its inception, the Committee was requested to promote the greatest possible dissemination of information on its recommendations through NGOs. It was later mandated to establish closer cooperation with them and to help expand the network of NGOs active on the question of Palestine, particularly by organizing symposia in all regions, as well as international meetings of NGOs.

Since the mutual recognition by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization and the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in September 1993, the Committee has expressed its support for the peace process, which it considers a historical milestone in the long struggle of the Palestinian people to achieve its inalienable rights and to reach a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East. The

Committee has also undertaken activities to promote the effective implementation of the agreements reached by the parties and to mobilize international assistance for the social and economic development of the Palestinian territory. At the same time, the Committee has expressed grave concern at the many obstacles and delays in the negotiations, the acts of violence by extremists, the expansion of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the serious deterioration of the Palestinian economic situation due to prolonged military closures, which have threatened the continuation of the peace process and caused the outbreak of the second intifada. Since September 2000, the Committee has been increasingly concerned over the escalation of the crisis, the tragic loss of innocent lives, the wide-scale destruction of Palestinian institutions and property in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and the rapid deterioration of the Palestinian economy. In light of the difficulties in the peace process, the international community has to intensify its engagement with both sides, so as to bring about the resumption of negotiations which would lead to a permanent settlement. Moreover, the Committee believes that the international community has a moral duty towards achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The role of civil society organizations in educating their respective constituencies about the fundamental issues of the question of Palestine and in mobilizing public support for the Palestinian cause remains very important.

In view of these developments, the General Assembly has reaffirmed that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international legitimacy, and has continued to renew the Committee's mandate as the organ dealing with the question. The Committee has intensified its efforts to promote wider international understanding and support for the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people which will have to be met in any settlement to be just, comprehensive and lasting. Its programme of work has been streamlined and refocused in order to enhance the Committee's contribution during the difficult stages towards statehood faced by the Palestinian people.

Since the early 1980s, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council have also taken steps to expand existing United Nations activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to develop a comprehensive programme of assistance to the Palestinian people that would reach beyond assistance already provided to refugees. This programme was greatly increased following the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993 and the establishment of the self-governing Palestinian Authority in 1994. Several United Nations agencies and programmes are cooperating closely with NGOs active on the ground that have long-standing experience in providing development assistance to Palestinians and have played an important role in supporting the growth of Palestinian institutions.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has programmes in the areas of primary and preparatory education, vocational and teacher training, primary health care, relief and social services, environmental infrastructural development and income generation. The UNRWA-NGO partnership dates back to the establishment of the Agency in 1950. NGOs have complemented UNRWA's education, health, relief and social services to refugees by pioneering work in assisting people with disabilities and launching community self-help and income-generation programmes. They have given financial aid, assistance in elementary schooling, staff training and maternal and child health care and have distributed food and medical supplies. They run pilot projects in new domains and in emergency situations. For its part UNRWA helps NGOs by giving direct financial aid or by sharing expertise, technology and information and through joint training workshops. The agency also participates in NGO meetings, assists with their fund-raising campaigns and supports the development of community organizations.

The activities of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) concentrate on the provision and improvement of basic infrastructure, enhancing Palestinian capacity in the areas of governance and public administration, strengthening the economic base of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, particularly in agriculture, industry and trade, and information exchange among donor Governments and international organizations. In implementing its programme, the coordination with NGOs is essential. UNDP activities are decided jointly with the Palestinian Authority, but in many instances they are implemented by NGOs or in close cooperation with them, for they are often the only actors on the ground.

The programme of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) emphasizes strengthening community-level structures, particularly among disadvantaged groups in areas such as primary health care, basic education, physiotherapy and psychological trauma. UNICEF's education programme is implemented through three main projects focusing on formal and non-formal education: early childhood development/psychosocial health; primary education; and youth and community development. To improve the quality of life of Palestinian children and women, UNICEF supports maternal and child health programmes and appropriate primary health care services. The implementation of these programmes is coordinated with those NGOs whose activities are aimed at similar target groups.

In 1994, the Secretary-General of the United Nations appointed a Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO) who serves as a focal point for all United Nations economic, social and other assistance to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territory. In September 1999, the Secretary-General appointed Terje Rod Larsen as the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and his Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. He facilitates coordination among the respective United Nations programmes and agencies that are operating in the Palestinian territory, so as to ensure an integrated and unified approach towards economic and social development. In this connection the Special Coordinator maintains constant contact with the United Nations programmes and agencies, as well as NGOs and the donor community in general.

I. THE NETWORK OF NGOS ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

Through the years, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has developed a network of more than 1,000 NGOs from all regions active on the question of Palestine. National and international NGOs, political and humanitarian organizations, NGOs promoting human rights or economic and social development, solidarity-, charitable- or action-oriented groups, churches, trade unions and professional associations, organizations with special focus on women, children, refugees and detainees are part of the network.

To join this network of NGOs on the question of Palestine, organizations need to become accredited to the Committee. In view of developments in the peace process and in order to promote broader participation, revised criteria for accreditation were adopted in 1994, as follows:

"The NGO should:

"(a) Be a recognized local, national or international non-profit organization;

"(b) Support the Charter of the United Nations, the principles of international law and the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily its right to self-determination;

"(c) Have demonstrated that it has concrete programmes or the serious intent to establish such programmes in support of the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

"Organizations whose mandates preclude advocacy but whose work encompasses humanitarian ends and programmes, including development, benefiting the Palestinian people, are welcome to participate."

Interested NGOs are requested to submit an application form (see annex) to the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat, which will submit it for approval to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Accredited NGOs will be invited to all relevant international meetings held under the auspices of the Committee, to participate in the discussion and to make statements. They may submit reports, written statements and other relevant documents for circulation among Committee members and observers. They will have the opportunity to display, after prior screening by the Secretariat, their own publications at the site of meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee. Accredited NGOs will be invited to participate in the preparation and conduct of NGO meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee, i.e. to make suggestions for the agenda, to participate in steering and drafting groups, to nominate officers of the meeting, etc. Whenever appropriate, members of the Committee and/or staff members of the Division will consult with these NGOs on issues related to the question of Palestine. They will receive all publications issued by the Division and other relevant information distributed by the Secretariat.

Accredited NGOs have the responsibility to support the work and objectives of the Committee and to respect the Committee's mandate as defined by General Assembly resolutions. They shall respect the United Nations rules of procedure, as well as the guidelines, procedures and practice established by the Committee. Finally, they shall report informally to the Division/Committee on their planned and accomplished activities; and submit to the Committee once every four years a formal report detailing their activities on the question of Palestine.

Organizations that, for one reason or another, feel they cannot subscribe to the accreditation criteria but have expressed interest in the activities of the Committee can request to be recognized as observers.

NGOs in observer status will be invited to attend meetings held under the auspices of the Committee. They may speak in NGO meetings held under the auspices of the Committee, and they will be part of the mailing list of the Division. NGOs in observer status have the responsibility to respect the United Nations rules of procedure, as well as the guidelines, procedures and practice established by the Committee and to report informally to the Division/Committee on their planned and accomplished activities.

ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

The Committee invites civil society organizations to all international meetings and conferences organized under its auspices. It encourages them to use those events as a platform for discussing their own initiatives and campaigns, and for bringing forward their views and ideas on the issues at hand. The participation of Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in those events provides civil society with a unique opportunity to support and strengthen, in particular, those positions and initiatives that are geared towards the realization by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights.

Moreover, specific NGO meetings in support of the Palestinian people are being organized every year under the auspices of the Committee. In the 1980s and 1990s, annual NGO symposia and international NGO meetings had been organized in New York and Geneva or Vienna. More recently, NGO meetings in solidarity with the Palestinian people have been organized in conjunction with international meetings in Paris (2000), in Madrid (2001) and in Nicosia (2002). Regional meetings usually include a one-day workshop of NGOs, in order to discuss the relevant issues and to encourage participating organizations to adopt a plan of action for the foreseeable future in support of the Palestinian cause. Such workshops have been held in 2000 in Hanoi, in 2001 in Havana and in 2002 in Rabat. An International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People will be held in September 2002 at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

NGO workshops, meetings and conferences bring together numerous organizations active on the question of Palestine, including Palestinian and Israeli NGOs. Panel discussions, usually held in plenary, serve to provide information and analysis on current political developments, to focus on the needs of the Palestinian people and to improve networking among NGOs. Where appropriate, part of the meetings is devoted to action-oriented workshops, where NGOs working on specific issues and campaigns have an opportunity, in a small group setting, to exchange experience and expertise with kindred groups and elaborate common strategies and proposals. Speakers in panels and workshops are drawn from the academic community, from among parliamentarians, government representatives and the media and from within the NGO community. NGO symposia and meetings may adopt a final document and a set of specific recommendations for action by NGOs.

The reports of symposia and international meetings are issued as publications of the Division for Palestinian Rights; a summary is included in the annual report of the Committee to the General Assembly. These documents are widely disseminated, not only to the network of accredited NGOs, but also to Governments, intergovernmental and United Nations family organizations, experts who have participated in the meetings and others interested in the issue. They are also posted on the Internet as part of the United Nations home page.

The Committee encourages cooperation, coordination and networking among civil society organizations. Through the Division it liaises with national, regional and international coordinating mechanisms. It holds periodically consultations with various organizations on ways and means to enhance its programme of cooperation with civil society. Representatives of the Committee or staff members of the Division participate in some of the conferences and meetings organized by NGOs that are of particular relevance to the mandate of the Committee.

III. RELATED ACTIVITIES

Each year, on 29 November, the international community observes the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977. The Day commemorates the adoption in 1947 of Assembly resolution 181 (II), known as the "Partition Plan for Palestine", which provided for the establishment of a Jewish State and an Arab State, with a special international status for the City of Jerusalem. The observance takes place at United Nations Headquarters in New York, at the United Nations offices at Geneva and Vienna and elsewhere. It includes special meetings at which statements are made by high-level personalities, the display of exhibits, film showings and other activities, depending on the location. At the United Nations offices, NGO representatives invited by the Bureau of the Committee address the meetings on behalf of the international community of NGOs accredited to the Committee. Many NGOs send messages of solidarity, which are then reflected in a bulletin containing the proceedings of the event. In many countries, United Nations information offices have also assisted NGOs in organizing their own commemoration by supplying posters, documentation and information about the observance.

The Division for Palestinian Rights maintains two web sites dedicated to the issue. The main page, entitled "Question of Palestine", can be accessed either through the United Nations home page at www.un.org or directly at:

<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/qpal>

It contains a host of useful background information about the issue as well as the latest documents adopted by the United Nations or one of its organs. A specific web site is devoted to the cooperation with NGOs. Its title is "NGO Network on the Question of Palestine" and it can be found at:

<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/ngo>

This site serves as the central tool for the exchange of information and communication between the United Nations and civil society. It contains *NGO Action News*, a periodical publication about recent or forthcoming activities by NGOs with regard to the question of Palestine, distributed electronically via email and the Internet, the Calendar of Events, and useful links to many of the organizations accredited to the Committee.

As a main reference source, the Division for Palestinian Rights has developed a computer-based United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL). The system is designed to store and provide United Nations documentation, current and historical, on the various aspects of the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as studies and publications issued by the Division for Palestinian Rights. UNISPAL can be accessed on the Internet at:

<http://domino.un.org/unispal.NSF>

Further information on the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the NGO network on the question of Palestine, as well as the application for organizations interested in becoming accredited with the Committee can be obtained from the Division for Palestinian Rights. The Division also encourages NGOs to send information and documentation about their own activities, with a view to sharing it with other NGOs in the network.

The address is: Division for Palestinian Rights
United Nations Secretariat, Room S-3350
New York, NY 10017
United States of America
Fax (1-212) 963-4199

E-mail dpmgo@un.org

Internet <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/ngo>

Criteria for accreditation of NGOs

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has established the following criteria for the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in activities and meetings organized under its aegis:

“The NGO should:

“(a) Be a recognized local, national or international non-profit organization;

“(b) Support the Charter of the United Nations, the principles of international law and the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily its right to self-determination;

“(c) Have demonstrated that it has concrete programmes or the serious intent to establish such programmes in support of the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

“Organizations whose mandates preclude advocacy but whose work encompasses humanitarian ends and programmes, including development, benefiting the Palestinian people, are welcome to participate.”

1. Name of your organization:
Street City State/Country Zip 2. Address:
3. Telephone number: () 3a. Telefax number: ()
4. E-mail address: 4a. Web page:
First, Last
5. Contact person's name:
6. Contact person's title:
7. Principal Officers: Name, Title (i) _____ (ii) _____ (iii) _____
8. Date of founding:
9. Membership (size, constituency):
10. Official languages:
11. Preferred working languages:
12. Does your organization adhere to the criteria outlined on page one? [] Yes [] No
13. Are you affiliated with any national or international non-governmental organizations or any of the coordinating committees for NGOs on the question of Palestine? [] Yes [] No Name of the organization/coordinating committees to which you are affiliated:
14. Are you accredited or do you maintain contact with an international organization, a United Nations agency or body other than the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights? [] Yes [] No Please specify:
15. Have you attended any of the United Nations regional symposia or international NGO meetings on the question of Palestine? [] Yes [] No Please specify:

16. Area of activity/interest of your organization (please check one or more):
--

<input type="checkbox"/> Arts	<input type="checkbox"/> Human Rights	<input type="checkbox"/> Refugees
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Industry	<input type="checkbox"/> Relief
<input type="checkbox"/> Assistance	<input type="checkbox"/> Information/Media	<input type="checkbox"/> Research/Analysis
<input type="checkbox"/> Children/Youth	<input type="checkbox"/> International Law	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Services
<input type="checkbox"/> Culture	<input type="checkbox"/> Labour/Union Rights	<input type="checkbox"/> Trade
<input type="checkbox"/> Development	<input type="checkbox"/> Law	<input type="checkbox"/> Women
<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Lobbying	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):
<input type="checkbox"/> Environment/Water	<input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> General Solidarity	<input type="checkbox"/> Peace	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Health/Medical	<input type="checkbox"/> Publications	_____

17. Description of your organization and its objectives:
18. Description of the current activities and programmes of your organization:
19. Scope of your organization: <input type="checkbox"/> local (please specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> national (please specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> international (please specify in which countries)

<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
<div>20. Which type of publications, if any, does your organization issue, and with what frequency?</div> <div></div>
<div>21. Title of your publication:</div> <div></div>
<div>22. Comments or requests:</div> <div></div>