

Meeting with Abu Ala, Maher al-Kurd and Hassan Azfour with Yair Hirschfeld and Ron Pundik; Sarpsborg, January 21, 1993.

Abu Ala's Statements:

Present Difficulties

We believe that we are passing in these days and weeks a very important and critical phase, requiring from both of us, Israelis and Palestinians, courage and fruitful thinking. To be very frank, we feel that if we together will not make (successful) use of the present stage, we will both lose and our people will suffer. The only alternative (to an Israeli-Palestinian understanding) is more conflict. We very strongly and seriously seek an understanding; we want to make peace.

You may have observed that the present state of frustration has enforced growing opposition. For instance the activities of the ten organisations working from Damascus and their channels have become very active inside the West Bank and Gaza. Their supports in various Arab and Islamic countries, mainly Iran, have gained from this state of affairs. Iran, of course, has serious pretensions in the region. Under present conditions Iran manipulates the Palestinian course and the problem of Jerusalem in order to achieve its selfish aims.

We are convinced that if we find a just solution, a country like Iran will lose its main weapon.

Going back to the phenomenon of frustration, you have to be aware, that this frustration is reflected in three aspects:

- First, it relates to the nature of Israeli policies and practices in the area. We believe that the time has now arrived to create a sense of relaxation in the area (the West Bank and Gaza);
- Second, negotiations have not reached tangible achievements;
- Third, the ongoing drastic deterioration of social and economic conditions of the population of the West Bank and Gaza is creating great grievances, hardship and radicalisation.

In case our intentions are genuine, we can coordinate measures to relax and resolve these three aspects (of frustration).

The Impact of the Gulf War

After the Gulf War we have passed through difficult times. Our position has often been misinterpreted. May be, we "exaggerated" our position. However, our relations (with the former anti-Iraq coalition countries) have drastically improved. I refer particularly to the last visit of Abu Mazen

and his delegation to Qatar, Oman and Saudi Arabia. Of course, the positions expressed by Abu Mazen and his delegation had been totally supported and endorsed by Arafat and the highest Revolutionary Council. Yassir Arafat openly supported a policy of improving relations with these countries.

Our international relations with Europe are good. These relations have recovered and the pre-Gulf crisis state of affairs has been reestablished in our dealings with the European Community, with Canada, with North and East European states.

Unfortunately the relationship with the USA has not seen any progress. We expected that the dialogue between the US government and the PLO would be resumed. May be you share our view that such a dialogue with the USA can be conducive to peace.

The PLO Contribution to the Peace Process

We have proven our good intentions and our constructive attitude in the participation in the peace process, although unjust conditions have been imposed on us. We will remain committed to the peace process, as long as it has a chance of success. (emphasis added) We will strive to improve the terms of Palestinian participation.

In our opinion we are presently facing a crisis and a deadlock in negotiations. The main weakness of the process is that no change has occurred. Moreover, our people understood that negotiations have been limited in time to one year. One year of negotiations is over and we have not obtained an agreement.

We have submitted many proposals. No adequate response has been received from the Government of Israel. This makes our position shaky within the Palestinian public and leadership.

We need to examine carefully the details of the gap. I will give some suggestions:

We have submitted detailed proposals to Mr. Gargirian. regarding principles of agreement. Another proposal was submitted in a different way to the Israeli delegation. An agreement on these principles with some cosmetic alterations will help progress in the negotiations. It is deemed crucial to reach a clearly defined frame of reference for the interim-period..

Jurisdiction

Regarding jurisdiction. We feel we can avoid conflict. Our understanding was that jurisdiction (of the interim self-government) will cover the territories occupied in 1967; and negotiations should concentrate on exceptions, provided that such exceptions are not contrary to the context of resolution 242. It is also our understanding that 338 calls for the implementation of 242.

Security

Regarding the security issue. We put that issue high up on our agenda. Your requirements and ours have to be well taken care of and an understanding on strategic issues obtained. The implementation of security entails the personification of peaceful coexistence in the area and the search for mutual interests. This way, the security issue, (which has a negative aspect in the experience of our people), will obtain a positive content that will make all of us interested in preserving it.

Elections

We understand that the Interim Palestinian Council will be formed by general, free and direct elections of all of the population on the West Bank and Gaza, that are registered in the statistics of June 4, 1967. Naturally, the elections shall take place under the supervision of agreed upon international bodies.

Legislation

The Interim Palestinian Council will be empowered to legislate for all the authorities that are mutually agreed upon to be delegated to it. Taking into consideration a review of all laws and regulations.

Confidence Building Measures

We believe that the Israeli Government can take the initiative and create confidence building measures that will serve both sides and will not cause any harm to the Israeli side:

a. We believe the first step in this direction is an immediate solution of the deportee question.

In order for the Israeli Government to regain its good reputation in the international arena, it should permit other deportees to return, especially personalities, whose presence in the West Bank and Gaza would be conducive to the peace process. I refer to people like Hana Nasr (from Bir Zeith University) or

like Muhammad Milhem (former mayor of Halhul). (responding to our question: not to Akram Haniye).

b. The second issue is to reinstal the role of the PLO; permit the PLO role in the peace process to be a direct one. This will be conducive to the peace process.

c. The third issues; we believe that a way copuld be devised that the G.o.I will do some convincing steps to end the settlements.

d. Another issue relates to human rights. A list of points has been offerred by our delegation.

e. We need measures to alleviate restrictions on economic development. There is a long list of issues which have been mentioned by the delegation in Washington.

Gaza First

Mr. Rabin, Mr. Peres as well as Mr. Arens have spoken in the past about a possible withdrawal from Gaza. This is a welcome step. We can start immediately with several activities and economic cooperation in the Gaza Strip. Gaza needs a Mini-Marshall Plan. There can be a free-zone area and it can be extended to Ashdod. There can be joint operations, serving the entire area with two seaports, (Ashdod and Gaza); this will enable you and us to enhance trade, tourism and other areas of development.

This is one of the several cooperation schemes we have in mind. We can start by commissioning studies very discretly. These studies can be done by us, by you, or by a third side. Many of these studies can be done by you, as you are better than we are in these things.

These are ideas that come to our mind and can be translated into action; however it cannot be openly discussed.

The implementation of such a proposal could enable us to solve the social problems in Gaza and take care of related hardship elsewhere. Such an idea is worth considering.

(Israeli-Palestinian) cooperation in Gaza could be a model for future cooperation. We can imagine many other forms of cooperation and know that such projects can be interwoven in the economic structure of the region as a whole: Several industries and refineries can be established; light industries can be developed and projects for re-export planned. We can consider a joint Israeli-Palestinian car manufacture enterprise to serve the entire region.

We understand that any hypothetical withdrawal from Gaza will create a constructive mechanism that will lead to progress also on the West Bank. It is an important step in the right direction and it can create a magical effect on the enhancement of the entire peace process.

The Multilateral Negotiations

The Government of Israel can give a very effective push to the multilaterals. I understand that in the multilaterals you (Israel) are compensated for concessions in the bilaterals. For us this is good, as we gain twice: we will improve our situation in both the bilaterals and the multilaterals.

If you make it easier for us in the multilaterals we will make it easier for you in your contact with other Arab states. For instance let us consider a list of misunderstandings that could be prevented and a list of CBM's.

CBM's

We suggest to obtain from Israel a license

- a. to start the cement factory in Hebron;
- b. to start to work on a sea port in Gaza;
- c. to establish a Palestinian Development Bank; and
- d. to permit the implementation of the Teddy Kollek Plan: enabling the construction of 7 500 housing units for Palestinians preferably on public owned land.

Such positions and attitudes would be very helpful in the multilaterals and would remove obstacles for progress. All these are hypothetical suggestions.

Water Resources

It is difficult for us to understand the logic behind the Israeli refusal, to recognize our water rights. This particular issue is blocking progress.

(The Israeli position was explained)

Another thought would be in this context - as a token of good will - if Israel would double the quantity of water in the territories for the Palestinians; that would create high political returns for us.

Although in the context of water resources, reference should be made to the Johnston Plan. Would it be possible to consider the construction of the Western Gor Canal?

We should obtain at first agreement with you (Israel) and then we can deal with the Jordanians.

It is necessary to enable the establishment of a Palestinian Water Authority; there could be an understanding between the delegations and it would serve mutual interests.

Refugees

For various reasons - humanitarian, social and political - it is necessary to deal more seriously with the issue of Family Reunification and the return of deportees. There are so many ways that we can deal with it. It will enable us to move to all other issues. (We explained the need to deal with the issue of Family Reunification in the context of bilateral talks).

Environment

We have suggested to establish a Palestinian Institute for the Protection of Environment. I don't see the ratio of opposing this.

Security and Arms Control

We will be careful to follow the formula of representation; the Palestinian delegation will be led by Dr. Zayigh and Ziyad Abu Zayyad will be a member.

Steering Committee

We suggested to form a sub-committee on Jerusalem. (It was explained to them, why this was impossible). The participation of Syria and Lebanon should be encouraged. In the committee on security and arms control Lybia and Iraq should be encouraged to participate in order to have them as partners for security arrangements in the area.

Trilateral Activities

Steps to promote the implementation of the Red - Dead Sea Canal, or preferably the Med-Dead Sea Canal should be encouraged.

For the future trilateral Israeli-Palestinian-third country activities should be planned. Several trilateral projects could be planned in the Dead Sea area, in regard to Chemical Industries, Tourism etc.

Also in the Jordan Valley - a free trade zone should be arranged; enabling the development of major trade activities to and from the Arab world.

All other projects mentioned in the paper "Dividends of Peace" (written by Abu Ala; see appendix) should be considered.

Maher el-Kurd: Many of the projects, such as described by the Armand Hammer Institute of the University of Tel Aviv, or by Palestinian Institutes should also be considered.

An interesting suggestion is the construction of a desalination and electricity generating plant on the border between Gaza, the Negev and Egypt.

Abu Ala: It would be useful to revive the old Tap-line, which originally transferred oil to Haifa. We want to construct a 30 inch pipeline from Mafrag (Jordan) to Gaza - Ashdod; the costs involved amount to US \$ 50 000 000,-. This and other ideas can be gradually studied together.

Postponement of the Multilaterals

In case the deportee question should not be solved on time; the Palestinians would prefer to postpone the multilateral meetings, in order not to be forced to remain outside.

2nd Meeting with Abu Ala; (Oslo)

The way to proceed in promoting the Gaza-First Plan would be as follows:

First, organise another meeting, or several meetings - with Norwegian assistance - in order to sum up the details of a coordinated Israeli-Palestinian strategy;
second, involve the US-government: coordinate a scenario with them and permit the US government to lead the way (publicly). American Government support is also important in order to obtain enough financial support from the international community and the Arab world);
third, involve the Government of Egypt, discuss with them the details of implementation;
fourth: go public (until then keep the operation completely secret).