



## **Pugwash Consultations in Ramallah and Jerusalem**

### **On the future of Palestine**

**16-17 November 2014**

## **REPORT**

On 16-17 November 2014 Pugwash convened a number of meetings and consultations addressing questions related to the future of Palestine and current policy options. The exercise was organized with the intent of better understanding the priorities of Palestinian political leaders and experts and gaining a sense of life on the ground for Palestinians in the wake of the latest Gaza war. The present report is a summary of the main topics discussed, prepared by the rapporteurs.<sup>1</sup>

## **MAIN POINTS:**

**The situation in Gaza was described as a national priority, which risks exacerbating the already poor humanitarian conditions as well as breeding fundamentalism. Other priorities must include greater freedom of movement and the lifting of the blockade on Gaza.**

Nonetheless, the fragmentation of authority significantly hampers possibilities not just for development but also for humanitarian relief. Gaza is a possible ground to foster partnership with an increasingly sympathetic international community, as demonstrated by the generous commitments at the donors' conference in Cairo. However, it also highlights the inescapable necessity for cooperation by the bordering states of Israel and Egypt as well as for national reconciliation. Aid and materials for reconstruction are simply not getting into Gaza at the rate required to make an impact on the lives of its population. There was concern expressed by Fatah in the West Bank that following the war Hamas would have 100% power in Gaza but 0% responsibility for the welfare and reconstruction projects so badly needed. With donor money coming through the Palestinian Authority the case was made that any delays and

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<sup>1</sup> The rapporteurs for this report were Poul-Erik Christiansen, Projects Assistant, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, and Roberta Mulas, GEM Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctoral Candidate at Warwick & LUISS Universities. Please note that the views presented here represent a range of opinions expressed in the meetings, and they do not necessarily reflect the personal views of the rapporteurs, nor of the Pugwash Conferences as an organization; however, a large majority of the participants was from Palestine, and this is reflected in the views contained in this report. The meeting was held according to traditional Pugwash/Chatham House rules to enable an open exchange of perspectives and exploration of creative possibilities for ways forward. Thus, the substance of the discussions can be reported out, but no item discussed can be attributed to any one individual. There was no attempt to seek consensus, and in fact the sharing of diverse views was encouraged.

failures would easily be blamed on politicking by Fatah. It was suggested that, for example, the national unity government could work with EU governments on procurement projects with private European firms – however, as well as Israeli cooperation, this initiative requires greater political will from Fatah.

**The most critical challenge for Palestinians at the moment is national unity. The national consensus government is still functioning but is under serious strain.**

The importance of reconciliation was underscored particularly in the wake of the attacks to Fatah's leaders in the Gaza Strip. Both Fatah and Hamas need to better learn how to share power; while a federal solution should be avoided, a national charter going beyond the Fatah-Hamas division would be a positive initial step. Points of unity that should take focus include upholding the right to self-determination for the Palestinian nation and the wellbeing of the population. Without more concerted effort, Fatah may risk being perceived as ignoring the plight of the Gazans.

**Palestinians must look to Europe to play a greater role in the campaign for the international recognition of Palestine, considering the recent and upcoming expressions of support and recognition by several European Parliaments.**

Prospects for support of the UN bid by the US are slim, despite the cooling down of relations between the Netanyahu and Obama governments. Without the US onboard, Europe was viewed as the major 'game-changer' for the Palestinians. Furthermore, the involvement of the UN and the EU in the delivery of aid to Gaza gives the international community the opportunity to face Israeli obstructionism there. Serious concern was raised regarding delay and cancellation to the implementation of Palestinian infrastructure projects, particularly in the area of water, not just in Gaza but also throughout the West Bank.

**Concern was expressed at the religious framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by the Netanyahu government and far-right groups in Israel, which risks perpetuating it as an unsolvable existential struggle.**

Instead, the conflict has had a potentially negotiable character since 1988, when Arafat recognized Israel's right to exist. As the religious conflict is being fuelled by political figures in Israel, steps should be taken to tone that down and to increase common understanding of the problem by allowing greater communication between the two sides. The situation at the Temple Mount has become of great concern, as access has been increasingly restricted for the Muslim population, while claims to the right of use of the site by the Jewish community have been advanced and put in practice with the support of military forces. This is contributing to the growing tensions throughout the city of Jerusalem and across the West Bank, which is seen by some as a prelude to a new intifada.