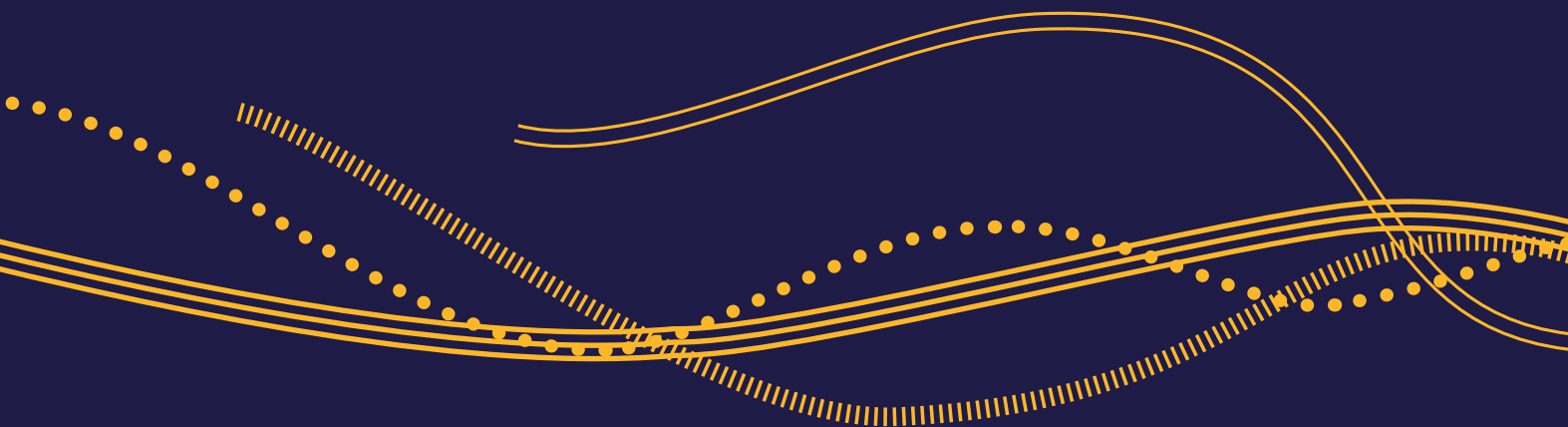


# **The Status of Youth in Palestine**









# Acknowledgment

This Report could have not been prepared without the devotion and resilience of those listed below, In addition to the many courageous, frank and passionate, young women and men that participated actively in all focus groups and interviews conducted during the research period.

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*Opinions expressed in this report represent Sharek Youth Forum only. The report is self financed by Sharek no outside funding were solicited.*

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgment</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 Methodological Note	8
<b>2. Participation</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 Fear and Disillusionment: Palestinian Political Parties	11
2.2 Civic and Associational Life	13
2.3 Barriers to Participation	14
2.4 Critiques of the Approach of Youth Organisations	16
2.5 Sports, Culture and Recreation	16
2.6 Summary	17
<b>3. Education/ Knowledge</b>	<b>18</b>
3.1 The Importance of Education	18
3.2 Education in Palestine	19
3.3 The Importance of Education with respect to National Identity	21
3.4 Access and Cost	22
3.5 The Curriculum	23
3.5.1 Difficulties Identified with the New Curriculum	23
3.6 Quality of Education	25
3.6.1 Limited Resources – Increasing Demand	25
3.6.2 Teacher Quality	25
3.6.3 Appropriateness of Schooling to Life Requirements	27
3.6.4 ‘Wasta’	28
3.6.5 The Government Response	28
3.7 The Link between Education and Employment	29
3.7.1 Educational Competencies and the Demands of the Labour Market	30
3.7.2 The Role of the Public Sector	31
3.7.3 Public and Private Sector Participation	31
3.7.4 Governmental Responses	32
3.8 Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET)	33
3.9 Summary	34



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<b>4. Poverty and Unemployment</b>	<b>35</b>
4.1 Poverty	35
4.2 Employment/ Unemployment	36
4.2.1 Rates of Unemployment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip	37
4.2.2 'Wasta'	38
4.2.3 Unemployment as a Driver for Memberships in Armed Groups	40
4.2.4 Unemployment as a Driver of Emigration	40
4.2.5 Microfinance and Sustainability	41
4.2.6 Gender and Employment	42
4.2.7 The Impact of Employment/Unemployment on Youth Transition	44
4.3 Summary	45
<b>5. The Health of Young Palestinians</b>	<b>47</b>
5.1 The Social Determinants of Health	47
5.2 The Health and Wellbeing of Young Palestinians: key indicators	49
5.2.1 Chronic Disease Rates	50
5.2.2 Mental Health Indicators	52
5.5 Health Interventions for Young Palestinians	54
5.5.1 Health Promotion	54
5.5.2 Access to Health Services: coverage and quality	55
5.5.3 Access to Mental Health Services	56
5.6 Summary	58
<b>6. Justice and Security</b>	<b>59</b>
6.1 The Rule of Law and Justice	60
6.1.1 The Lack of Faith in the Government's Ability to Protect	62
6.1.2 Gender	65
6.2 Internal Division	66
6.3 The Impact of the Occupation	68
6.4 The Limiting Effects of Insecurity	70
6.5 Summary	71
<b>7. The Future Knocking at the Door?</b>	<b>72</b>







## 1. Introduction

*"...they are destined to guide the fortunes of mankind."<sup>1</sup>*

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UN General Assembly Resolution 2037 (XX), 1965.



# 1. Introduction

*"...they are destined to guide the fortunes of mankind."*<sup>1</sup>

Youth's vital role in the development of society was formally recognised by the United Nations in General Assembly Resolution 2037, which stated that youth play an important part "in every field of human development ... they are destined to guide the fortunes of mankind."<sup>2</sup> This

Youth's vital role in the development of society was formally recognised by the United Nations in General Assembly Resolution 2037, which stated that youth play an important part "in every field of human development ... they are destined to guide the fortunes of mankind."<sup>2</sup> This recognition, and the critical importance of youth to society, is perhaps best expressed by paraphrasing UNICEF: 'unless the investment in youth is made, all of humanity's fundamental long-term problems will remain fundamental

long-term problems.'<sup>3</sup>

Today, Palestinian youth comprise approximately 27 percent of the total population, and recent demographic trends indicate that, in the future, youth will constitute an ever increasing proportion of Palestinian society.<sup>4</sup> As a result of the current reality in Palestine – primarily attributed to Israel's brutal and longstanding occupation, but also related to internal division and societal norms – the reality of life for youth is beset by oppression, violence, and deprivation. However, this report does not intend to cast youth as victims; despite these hardships youth exhibit a resilience, commitment and drive that is perhaps more inspiring given the circumstances from which it has emerged. As will be discussed below, youth have consistently been the drivers of radical change in Palestinian society, from their consolidation into political groups and activists following the *Nakba*,<sup>5</sup> to their fundamental role in bringing Israel to the negotiating table in the

<sup>3</sup> Paraphrased from, "Unless the investment in children is made, all of humanity's most fundamental long-term problems will remain fundamental long-term problems. UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children*', (1995).

<sup>4</sup> Youth defined by PCBS here as 15-29 year olds. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Palestine Youth: Figures and Statistics*, 2006

<sup>5</sup> The uprooting of the Palestinian people from their land in 1948 upon the creation of the State of Israel.

<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 2037 (XX), 1965.

aftermath of the first *intifada*.

In recognition of the specific nature of youth issues, and the interconnection between these issues and the overall political, economic and social challenges faced by Palestinian society, the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and other national, regional and international organisations have noted that youth issues must be placed centrally on their agendas.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, while youth play a fundamental role in the development of society under normal conditions, it is perhaps in situations of occupation, injustice and oppression that the potential and power of youth takes on a fundamental and critical importance. Throughout history and across the globe, youth have been at the forefront of revolutions, fighting for justice, freedom and equality. This year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tiananmen Square when one million Chinese youth took to the streets and shook a seemingly invincible State to its core. The brutality of the Chinese government's response is an embodiment of their fear in the face of youth empowerment. The

power and potential of youth has also been evident in the anti-Vietnam war movement and the million man march in the United States, in the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, and in the defining role of youth resistance to the apartheid regime in South Africa, as epitomised by the actions of high-school students in Soweto in 1976.

This power and potential has also been witnessed in Palestine. In 1987, Palestinian children and youth became among those etched in the annals of history when they rose up, armed only with stones, self-belief and community solidarity, and forced a major military power to the negotiating table. The involvement of Palestine's young in the resistance movement was unusually intense, prominent and sustained.<sup>7</sup> The institutions of Palestinian society, over the course of four decades of occupation, expulsion and exile, had empowered their youngest members. The symbolic power of Palestinian universities as 'national' institutions extended their role beyond providers of education to bearers of national

6 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Palestine Youth: Figures and Statistics*, 2006, p. 4.

7 Barber, B.K. *Political violence, family relations, and Palestinian youth functioning*, Journal of Adolescent Research, 14, 1999.

consciousness.<sup>8</sup> Neighbourhood and popular committees, constituting true forms of participatory democracy, allowed for the fullest realization of human creative potential.<sup>9</sup> A new pragmatic unity took hold, enabling Palestinians of diverse ideological persuasions, class backgrounds and geographic locations to work together.<sup>10</sup> Adopting their society's agenda of freedom and self-determination was the driving force behind youth involvement in the uprising. These young people made fundamental ideological commitments regarding social and political needs and placed their lives on the line to attain them.<sup>11</sup>

However, the resultant Oslo process and the return of the Palestinian leadership from exile in Tunis began a process of disempowerment and disenfranchisement. The power of youth was curbed, both by the Israeli occupation, as actions were taken to crush the potential and spirit of

youth, and by the nascent PNA which sought to co-opt youth into existing hierarchical systems.<sup>12</sup> Thus, while the second *intifada*, begun in September 2000, had the same essential cause as the first – namely an end to Israeli occupation and colonialism – the role of youth was fundamentally different. The popular resistance of the first *intifada* was replaced by armed force, and confrontations took place not in the community, but at Israeli checkpoints on the borders of Palestinian land. Tayseer Mohsein, Gaza-based youth researcher has characterised this revolution as “an explosion without direction”,<sup>13</sup> save for “massive candlelight marches and funeral processions within the cities, the population at large”<sup>14</sup> was left with “virtually no active role in the uprising.”<sup>15</sup> Instead of leaders, and activists driven by ideology, empowerment and a belief in national liberation, youth in the second *intifada*

8 Christa Bruhn, *Higher Education as Empowerment: The Case of Palestinian Universities*, 49 *American Behavioral Scientist*, 1125 (2006).

9 Penny Johnson and Eileen Kutta, *Where Have All the Women (and Men) Gone? Reflections on Gender and the Second Palestinian Intifada*, *Feminist Review*, No. 69, 2001.

10 Jonathan Kuttub, *The Children's Revolt*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1988.

11 Barber, B.K. *Political violence, family relations, and Palestinian youth functioning*, *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 14, 1999.

12 See, Graham Usher, *Facing Defeat: The Intifada Two Years On*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol 32, No 2, 2003; and Penny Johnson and Eileen Kutta, *Where Have All the Women (and Men) Gone? Reflections on Gender and the Second Palestinian Intifada*, *Feminist Review*, No. 69, 2001.

13 Interview with Tayseer Mohsein, 15 June, 2009, Gaza City.

14 Remma Hammami and Salim Tamari, *The Second Uprising: End or New Beginning?*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, (2001), p. 17.

15 Remma Hammami and Salim Tamari, *The Second Uprising: End or New Beginning?*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, (2001), p. 17.



were either predominantly excluded or used by the political factions as tools in an armed struggle within which they lacked an authoritative voice.<sup>16</sup>

During the period of lawlessness which followed the legislative elections of 2006, and the internal fighting which resulted in the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, youth were again used in a similar way. From symbols of national liberation and resolute defiance in the first *intifada*, they had become the killers and the killed.<sup>17</sup>

The disempowerment of youth and their radicalisation and co-option into armed movements, where they lack voice and decision making capacity, can evidently have profoundly negative and violent results. One need only look to Sierra Leone, East Timor, or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for examples of the destructive potential of disempowered youth involved in armed conflict. Indeed, in this regard disempowerment is

the very antithesis of the productive and radical possibilities of empowered youth, as the destructive – and not creative – potential of youth is used by those pursuing political or ideological agendas. In the current Palestinian context, a reality characterised by internal division, violence, unemployment, poverty, and marginalisation, disempowerment has the all too real potential to spark a fresh outbreak of conflict and destruction.

As noted by the UN General Assembly, youth “are both a major human resource for development and key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation.”<sup>18</sup> The importance of youth is thus evident, as an ill-prepared youth may impact negatively on societal cohesion, national security and the developmental process.<sup>19</sup> In this regard, the involvement of young people in society, and their engagement not only as beneficiaries, but also as participants and problem

16 Penny Johnson and Eileen Kutta, *Where Have All the Women (and Men) Gone? Reflections on Gender and the Second Palestinian Intifada*, *Feminist Review*, No. 69, 2001, p. 35.

17 Interview with Tayseer Mohsein, 15 June, 2009, Gaza City.

18 UN General Assembly, Resolution on World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, UN. Doc. A/50/728, §12.

19 See, Jamil Rabah, *Mapping of Youth Organizations Working with youth in the oPt*, A Study Conducted on Behalf of UNDP, (2008), p. 8 and The Status of Youth Report, *Young People in South Africa*, 2003, p. 42.

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solvers, is a key element in the process of youth development.<sup>20</sup> A concept of youth transition has thus been realised, which – while regarding youth as a crucial developmental phase in its own right<sup>21</sup> – sees youth as a period of transition from childhood to self-sufficiency, independence, and full and active participation in society.<sup>22</sup> The concept of youth transition is in keeping with the ‘evolving capacities’ of the child, first realised in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, whereby direction and guidance provided to children must take into account “the capacities of the child to exercise rights on his or her own behalf”;<sup>23</sup> i.e. the transition to autonomy.

The importance of youth as a developmental phase in its own right is thus central to this report. Youth is presented as a time of learning, emerging confidence and participation, and increased self-

sufficiency and independence. It is noted that, in Palestine, youth traditionally ends at marriage, typically the first time that young people are allowed to establish their own household.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, the concepts inherent in youth transition – the preparation for adult life – remain pertinently relevant. For ease of analysis, and in keeping with international standards, youth are defined as young persons between the ages of 15 and 24. Where necessary, this definition may be expanded, either for statistical reasons or in light of the specific cultural context.

This report addresses Palestinian youth in the West Bank including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. This focus is not intended to separate these youth from the Palestinian population at large, whether it be in what is now known as Israel (Palestinians with Israeli citizenship) or the Diaspora. Rather, it is in keeping with Sharek’s mandate, and in light of the particular reality of youth living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In addition, given Israel’s illegal annexation of East Jerusalem and extension of its jurisdiction there, many of the issues addressed in this report, such as school education

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20 The Status of Youth Report, *Young People in South Africa*, 2003, p. 42.

21 The Status of Youth Report, *Young People in South Africa*, 2003, p. 37.

22 See for example, Djavad Salehi-Isfahani & Navtej Dhillon, *Stalled Youth Transitions in the Middle East: A Framework for Policy Reform*, The Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper No. 8, 2008.

23 UNICEF, *The Evolving Capacities of the Child*, 2005, p. ix.

24 [http://www.euromedyouth.net/IMG/pdf\\_07-EuroMedJeunesse-Etude\\_PALESTINE-090325.pdf](http://www.euromedyouth.net/IMG/pdf_07-EuroMedJeunesse-Etude_PALESTINE-090325.pdf)

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policies, are of limited immediate relevance to East Jerusalem youth.

Section 2 notes the importance of youth participation and highlights the increasing disillusionment of youth with their national democratic institutions; in particular government and political parties. The chapter goes on to argue that in the current context, opportunities for civic engagement and participation in leisure, recreation and sport must be urgently scaled up. The role of youth organisations in facilitating civic engagement is highlighted, along with several concerns about barriers to youth participation in these organisations.

Section 3 summarises the current status of education in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, highlighting the role of education in Palestinian society, its importance with respect to national identity, and key concerns relating to access and cost, the new Palestinian curriculum, overall quality of education, and the link between education and employment.

Section 4 then addresses poverty and unemployment in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip presenting key indicators, and addressing issues

relating to *wasta*,<sup>25</sup> unemployment as a driver for membership in armed groups or emigration, and the impact of gender discrimination on youth's employment opportunities.

Section 5 highlights the relative lack of information available regarding youth-specific health issues before presenting the key social determinants of the health of youth in the oPt. Available youth health indicators are then presented along with several concerns related to youth health promotion and access to health services in the oPt.

Section 6 relates to justice and protection, here youth's feelings – as determined from focus groups conducted for this report – are presented. Key issues highlighted by youth, relate to the rule of law and justice, the internal division, the Israeli occupation, and the limiting effects of insecurity.

## 1.1 Methodological Note

This report is based on an extensive review of secondary research, including several national opinion

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<sup>25</sup> Roughly translated as 'mediation', *wasta* refers to a system of corruption and cronyism, where either bribery or a connection with a person of influence is essential in order to obtain employment



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polls, and ten focus groups conducted with 15 – 25-year-olds throughout the oPt; six in the West Bank and four in the Gaza Strip. Sharek sought to ensure the participation of youth from diverse political and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as an equal gender balance, in these sessions. While efforts were made to involve young people as respondents, time and resource constraints limited the extent of youth involvement. This report does, however, depend heavily on youth survey data in order to ensure the views of youth themselves are presented. One of the biggest challenges in writing this report was the dearth of available data for topics such as youth health, employment and poverty. More importantly, there were few evaluations of youth programs and policies for many of the issues covered in the report especially with regards Government in Gaza policies. Thus, a key finding of this report is the need for further youth research, as well as routine disaggregation of national statistics to capture youth data.













## 2. Participation

*"To engage in dialogue and joint decision making means to be willing to change the adult ways and experiment with new solutions...We cannot play with the voices of youth, accept them as long as they fit our programmes...and reject them when they do not. Youth participation is not a technique; it is a willingness to engage in intergenerational dialogue."<sup>26</sup>*

<sup>26</sup> Gil G. Noam, Editor-in-Chief, *New Directions for Youth Development Journal*  
Quoted in United Nations Development Programme, *Youth in Turkey (Human Development Report)*, 2008

## 2. Participation

The vital role that young people can play in the development of society was formally recognized at the international level for the first time in a 1965 United Nations General Assembly Resolution; the 'Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples.'<sup>27</sup> This resolution officially acknowledged the importance of youth engagement in addressing global development issues. Several decades later, the World Programme of Action for Youth for the Year 2000 and Beyond, adopted by the General Assembly in a December 1995 resolution, identified the "full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making" as one of ten priority areas requiring action by Governments, the international community, civil society and the private sector.<sup>28</sup>

There are countless conceptions of the meaning and purpose of youth

<sup>27</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/20/2037, 1965

<sup>28</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/50/81, 1995

participation. The 'citizenship' conception views participation as the means by which the young come to learn about the skills and attitudes that enable them to function as citizens in a democratic state. The 'realization' conception refers to the realization of rights; that is, participation is a right in itself and also a means through which to realize other rights. A more 'radical' formulation – the formulation employed in this report – views youth participation as key to transformation and empowerment: participation is the means through which the young are empowered to transform the structures, practices and attitudes which exclude them socially, culturally, politically and economically.<sup>29</sup>

As noted in the introduction to this report, the participation of Palestinian youth in the development of their society and the struggle for national liberation and self-determination perhaps reached its peak during the first *intifada* when young Palestinians, armed only with stones, self-belief and community solidarity brought a world power to the negotiating table. While there are significant

<sup>29</sup> Definitions based on conceptualisations presented in Jason Hart, *Empowerment or Frustration*, Children, Youth and Environments 17 (3), 2007

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exceptions, two decades later, many young Palestinians are increasingly disillusioned with political life, fearful of factional engagement, unable to secure employment and struggling even to fill their free time. Their inability to strive towards and achieve even the most basic of goals has major ramifications; not only on the youth themselves but also on wider society, with evident implications on youth's transition to adulthood.

This section suggests that in a context of continuing factional conflict, and consequent declining trust in party politics and governmental structures, opportunities for youth engagement in civic and associational life and participation in leisure activities such as sports and culture, must be urgently scaled up. As well as reaping significant rewards in terms of the physical and mental wellbeing of young Palestinians, this approach has the potential to strengthen community ties, rebuild shattered confidence and divert the most disempowered from behaviours which may ruin their futures.

## **2.1 Fear and Disillusionment: Palestinian Political Parties**

Palestinian youth are perhaps the most politicized young people in the world; every party or 'faction' has a youth organization, student council elections are followed by the political classes as signals of tendencies in the country, youth voting rates remain high and many young people continue to demonstrate daily – at great personal risk – against Israeli occupation.

While remaining acutely aware of the political forces that affect their lives, a majority of Palestinian youth are increasingly disillusioned with, and even fearful of engaging with, Palestinian party politics. In a 2008 survey, nearly 70 percent of young Palestinians defined themselves as politically inactive or nearly politically inactive. Youth in Gaza saw themselves as more politically active than their West Bank peers – around 37 percent of Gaza youth stated they were politically active versus 26 percent of youth in the West Bank. Young men are also significantly more politically active than young women – 36 percent of young men viewed themselves as

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active or somewhat active in politics versus just 25 percent of young women. Only 30 percent of young Palestinians stated they would work for a candidate's campaign in an upcoming election.

Intended voting rates, however, remain relatively high when compared with other countries. In the same survey, 61 percent of young Palestinians indicated an intention to vote in upcoming national elections and 15 percent stated they might vote. These figures, in conjunction with the relative political inactivity of youth, indicate that just three years after the first national Palestinian multiparty elections, the engagement of the young in the national democratic process has been to a significant extent reduced to an intention to vote; a development which has grave implications for the future of Palestinian democracy.

This disengagement from party politics relates in part to disillusionment; a disbelief in and mistrust of Palestinian factions. Even before the Palestinian internal conflict came to a bloody climax in June 2007, only 33 percent of surveyed youth expressed a high or medium trust

in political parties.<sup>30</sup> As one Sharek focus group participant explained: *"The youth feel bored about party issues. From time to time we fight, we try to make a solution, but they, the parties, still don't reach any solution. We want a real solution for the situation. Because of the situation of the parties, we think we may be disappointed."*<sup>31</sup>

Many other participants in Sharek focus groups felt unable to either change the nature of Palestinian factions, or to trust Palestinian factions to support and realize their needs and interests. They also expressed disillusionment with Palestinian government – in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank: *"The Government's role in the life of youth is almost non-existent,"*<sup>32</sup> explained one participant and another said: *"The government, the decision-makers, don't care about youth. Most of the areas that affect youth, the government just doesn't care about them. This is the reality."*<sup>33</sup>

Many young Palestinians are also deeply fearful of engaging in party

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30 The 2006 survey

31 Sharek focus group, Gaza City, 15 – 19 year-olds, 11 July 2009

32 Sharek focus group, 17 – 21 year-olds, Salfeet, 9 July

33 Sharek focus group, Gaza City, 15 – 19 year-olds, 11 July 2009



politics. In a Sharek focus group, one young man who reported being detained and tortured by Government in Gaza security forces explained: *"We can't participate freely; the parties don't accept contradicting opinions; if you want to express yourself freely, you may be in danger, you might get hurt."*<sup>34</sup> Another explained: *"It is difficult to give your opinion, you may be heard by other people, and that can be very dangerous."*<sup>35</sup> School aged participants also reported being forbidden by their parents from participating in politics:

*All parents stop their children being involved in such [political] activities, because they are afraid for them; they may get hurt. If the parents work with parties, the youth can work with the same party, but if parents don't work with parties, it is hard to do anything. If our parents are affiliated, maybe we will be protected because of that.*<sup>36</sup>

National opinion polls indicate that this fear is widespread. In a 2009 national survey, only a third of

18 – 24 year olds said they would never be afraid of expressing their views on a political subject. Nearly 40 percent said they would often be afraid and nearly 20 percent said they would sometimes be afraid.<sup>37</sup> These fears are far from unfounded. Both the Government in Gaza and the Government in Ramallah are coming under increasing criticism by national and international human rights groups for cracking down on political opposition.<sup>38</sup>

While disillusionment may be driving many young Palestinians away from factional politics, disempowerment, poverty and disaffection may be drawing others in. Sara Roy has argued that young men with no jobs, no hopes for the future, little education and no history of political activism have joined the armed wings of Palestinian factions; becoming the 'gangs of the wanted.'<sup>39</sup> One Sharek focus group participant explained that: *"I know young men who have gone the wrong way just to get 100 dollars so*

34 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

35 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

36 Sharek focus group, Gaza City, 15 – 19 year-olds, 11 July 2009

37 UNDP's Palestinian Human Security Survey April 2009.

38 See: Independent Commission for Human Rights, *The Status of Human Rights in Palestinian-Controlled Territory: Fourteenth Annual Report Executive Summary*, 1 January – 31 December 2008 <http://www.ichr.ps/pdfs/ear14.pdf> (accessed 20 August 2009)

39 Sara Roy, *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*, 2007

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*they can pay for their jawal [cell phone] cards and cigarettes. They become part of a faction just to get 100 dollars to pay for drugs, just for a packet of cigarettes; the conditions around us are so restricted; young people just think about how to get a jawal card and cigarettes. No-one can help us.*"<sup>40</sup>

While resistance, including armed struggle, is a right under international law, the militarization of youth under a cloud of despair and poverty - and at a time when renewed internal violent conflict remains a real risk - presents grave dangers to the whole of Palestinian society. Tayseer Mohsein argues that when youth are motivated to take up arms in order to feel empowered, rather than because they feel empowered, they will be unable to be in control of their actions and will instead be directed, as if by 'remote control,' by Palestinian factions.<sup>41</sup>

Mohsein's premise is substantiated by several studies which note an association between conflict, economic hardship, disillusionment

and a large youth population.<sup>42</sup> While these factors do not directly fuel violence, they do increase the likelihood that unemployed youth will seek social and economic advancement by alternative means.

## 2.2 Civic and Associational Life

*[Civic engagement]...has re-emerged as a viable means for young people to develop and exercise leadership while effecting concrete changes in their communities. In recognizing that young people are capable of addressing societal problems and concerns and providing a forum for them to do so, civic engagement can be a dynamic and powerful strategy. Through civic engagement, young peoples' ideas and energy can contribute meaningfully as they participate in community building, work toward social change, and apply their leadership skills, all the while gaining access to services, supports, and opportunities that facilitate their own development.*<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See for example: Sherod, Lonnie, *Youth Activism: an international encyclopaedia*, volume 2, and United Nations Development Programme, *Youth and Violent Conflict*, 2006 [http://www.undp.org/cpr/whats\\_new/UNDP\\_Youth\\_PN.pdf](http://www.undp.org/cpr/whats_new/UNDP_Youth_PN.pdf) (accessed 20 August 2009)

<sup>43</sup> Mohammad, I and W Wheeler, *Broadening the Bounds of Youth Development: Youth as Engaged Citizens*, Ford Foundation and The Innovation Centre for Youth and Community Development, 2001 [www.theinnovationcenter.org/r\\_ydev\\_civeng.asp](http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/r_ydev_civeng.asp) (accessed 20 August 2009)

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<sup>40</sup> Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Tayseer Mohsein, 15 June 2009, Gaza City

With few appealing alternatives available to young people from political groups or factions, many Palestinian youth have become engaged in civil or community development work in the hope of contributing towards change in their communities.<sup>44</sup> The importance of supporting existing initiatives and extending their reach cannot be overstated. Providing opportunities for young Palestinians to engage in meaningful activities will reap benefits in terms of their physical and mental health (see Section 5) and may also divert the most disaffected from potentially harmful behaviours, while renewing community ties.

In the Palestinian setting, the promotion of active participation, including in community life, can mostly be found in the non-formal sector.<sup>45</sup> The oPt boasts a huge variety of youth organizations – in 2006, there were over 500 youth clubs and centres, and around 250 other youth organizations or organizations which offer youth programmes in the West Bank and

the Gaza Strip.<sup>46</sup> A 2008 survey of 500 such organizations found that most focus on social, women's, cultural and sports issues and activities but few on health or human rights and democracy (six percent and three percent respectively). When asked about their main activity, organizations highlighted sports and arts, followed by social services and capacity building.

The presence and engagement of large numbers of non-government organizations with young Palestinians in a context of extreme isolation, rising poverty and political turbulence is a significant achievement in itself. Young people spoke to Sharek about their appreciation of these efforts. One explained: *"many youth organisations actually care about us these days,"* and another added, *"they are listening to us, and trying to adopt our ideas."*<sup>47</sup> These efforts must be supported and expanded. However, recent studies and Sharek focus groups note several areas of concern in terms of youth civic engagement. As explained below, traditional values restrict young people's

<sup>44</sup> Hammad, Suzanne and Tareq Bakri, *'Learning by Doing: The Experience of Popular Achievement in Palestine,'* Children, Youth and Environments 17(3): 24-48 (2007)

<sup>45</sup> Euromed Youth III Programme, *Studies in Youth Policies in the Mediterranean Partner Countries – Palestinian Occupied Territories* (undated)

<sup>46</sup> Rahhal, *Youth and Youth Institutions, Structures, Projects and Clubs*, 2006

<sup>47</sup> Both quotations from Sharek Focus Group, Halhul, 18 – 26-year-olds, 20 July 2009



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and especially young women's participation in civic life. In the Gaza Strip, there appears to be increasing governmental interference in youth activities. In addition, in many youth associations, it is older males, rather than young men and women, who remain in the driving seat.

## 2.3 Barriers to Participation

Many youth organizations are concentrated in major population centres such as Ramallah and are unable to reach youth living in isolated villages and small towns.<sup>48</sup> Sharek focus group participants throughout the oPt noted this lack of reach: *"Many youth don't know how to participate, or are unaware of who to talk to in order to participate. Youth organizations should be active in attracting these inactive powers and guiding them to participate in useful activities."*<sup>49</sup> The geographical concentration in major population centres affects girls and young women in particular as since the outbreak of the second *intifada* their mobility has

been restricted by relatives fearful for their safety.<sup>50</sup> Transportation costs also prohibit the very poorest from attending youth centres outside of their immediate locality. A youth from Salfeet explained that: *"Living standards don't allow us to travel to other cities and villages. These extra expenses form a big obstacle in our way to communicate with youth from neighbouring villages and cities."*<sup>51</sup>

Cultural norms also continue to restrict young people in general, and girls and women in particular, from participating in certain activities. Many youth clubs and centres serve only male youth and even when such facilities are mixed, many young women often find that the activities are dominated by the *shabaab* (male youth) or are forbidden to attend by their families.<sup>52</sup> Sharek focus group participants throughout the Gaza Strip highlighted this restriction: *"Parents in general are against co-ed activities. Girls are not allowed to participate in camps, lectures or other activities if the parents know"*

48 Euromed Youth III Programme, *Studies in Youth Policies in the Mediterranean Partner Countries – Palestinian Occupied Territories* (undated)

49 Sharek focus group, 17 – 21 year-olds, Salfeet, 9 July

50 Rita Giacaman, Ghada Naser and Will Boyce, *Normalising the Abnormal: Palestinian youth and the contradictions of resilience in protracted conflict*, Health and Social Care in the Community (2008) 16 (3), 291–298

51 Sharek focus group, 17 – 21 year-olds, Salfeet 9 July

52 Jason Hart, *Empowerment or Frustration*, Children, Youth and Environments 17 (3), 2007

*there will be guys in the same room or place.”*<sup>53</sup>

Young women in the Gaza Strip were more explicit in noting the impact of broader societal pressure on their parents' decisions. One school-aged girl from Gaza City explained: *“our parents will prevent us from making groups, as society will object to us.”*<sup>54</sup> Another noted: *“Our treatment by parents depends on the traditions of society, sometimes, in some issues, parents are convinced with the issues, but because society refuses, they go along with that.”*<sup>55</sup>

Several young women consulted during this research did note, however, their belief that the position of women and girls in society has advanced: *“For us, freedom of speech has improved a lot. Girls in the past did not have that much space to express themselves. Families and the surrounding community spoke for the girl, while her opinion had minimal attention. These days we can speak more freely, I’m not saying 100 percent freedom, but much better compared to in the past.”*<sup>56</sup>

53 Sharek focus group, 17 – 21 year-olds, Salfeet, 9 July

54 Sharek focus group, Gaza City, 15 – 19 year-olds, 11 July 2009

55 Sharek focus group, 15 – 20 year-olds, Rafah district, 18 July 2009

56 Sharek focus group, 15 – 20 year-olds, Rafah district, 1

Of significant concern to several focus group participants in the Gaza Strip was escalating governmental interference in youth civic participation. One young woman from North Gaza explained that: *“The government is the biggest thing that is not convinced with mixed groups. They try to find them. I did a project with a mixed group, and the government came and intervened. It was in Beit Hanoun, we had a project with Mercy Corps [an international NGO]. It was a community service project. We went at 8am; there were about 30 of us, 15 girls and 15 boys. The government came and prevented the activity. They took all of our names. They took the person responsible for the project, and investigated him.”*<sup>57</sup> Another young man from the same area explained that the interference can also be more subtle: *“They may not directly prevent the activity by coming and closing it down, but they have indirect ways to do it. For example, for mixed group activities, they prevent them by not giving us a license.”*<sup>58</sup>

A number of studies also indicate that even within youth organisations, there are limited possibilities for

57 July 2009

us group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

58 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

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young people to participate in the decision-making process. One researcher has argued that, “in spite of idealistic statements included in these [the organizations’] bylaws, they are often just words that have no practical implications.”<sup>59</sup> Leading positions are often, in contradiction of the bylaws, not elected but appointed and therefore deprive young people of the chance to reach such a position.<sup>60</sup> Several researchers attribute these limits to dominant patriarchal values which stipulate that the young should respect their seniors and that it is unthinkable that they should sit ‘chair-to-chair’ with them in the decision-making sphere.<sup>61</sup>

The arguments of these researchers are supported by survey findings which indicate obedience to parental authority remains high in the oPt. In a 2008 survey, only 7 percent of surveyed youth said they make their own decisions even if their parents disagree and 35 percent said that parents make decisions on their

behalf. The gap between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is significant here: 25 percent of Gaza youth say they obey their parents on all issues compared to 15 percent of youth in the West Bank.<sup>62</sup>

In practice therefore, many youth organizations continue to be exclusively run by much older males. In youth centres in refugee camps, for example, it is common to find an administrative committee composed of men in their fifties or sixties with a few younger men taking a more junior role.<sup>63</sup>

## 2.4 Critiques of the Approach of Youth Organisations

Several recent studies have challenged the approach taken by many youth organisations in empowering young people. In ‘Empowerment or Frustration,’ Jason Hart argues that many youth organisations concentrate on building citizenship values rather than engaging seriously with the empowerment of young

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59 Rahhal, *Youth and Youth Institutions, Structures, Projects and Clubs*, 2006

60 Euromed Youth III Programme, *Studies in Youth Policies in the Mediterranean Partner Countries – Palestinian Occupied Territories* (undated)

61 *Empowerment or Frustration*, Children, Youth and Environments 17 (3), 2007

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62 Awrad (opinion poll), *Palestinian Youth: Politics, Information and Media*, June 2008

63 Jason Hart, *Empowerment or Frustration*, Children, Youth and Environments 17 (3), 2007



people towards the transformation of their environment.<sup>64</sup> He associates this trend with the programming tendencies of international donor agencies, suggesting that they concentrate on building a Palestinian citizenry respectful of human rights and democracy without acknowledging the very real constraints that face young Palestinians. For instance, donor agencies continue to support youth democracy awareness programmes in a context where young Palestinians are fully conscious that electing the 'wrong' party will provoke international boycott and isolation. Consequently, for many organisations, young people's participation remains in a 'virtual box,' incapable of realizing real change through engagement in the systems of wider society and not merely in youth specific projects.

## 2.5 Sports, Culture and Recreation

*"There are no places for entertainment; the borders are closed; these things affect*

<sup>64</sup> Jason Hart, *Empowerment or Frustration*, Children, Youth and Environments 17 (3), 2007

*us in a big way psychologically."*<sup>65</sup>

It is perhaps unsurprising that Palestinian policy-makers, absorbed in the struggle for national reconciliation and self-determination, have failed to place the provision of sports, cultural and recreation activities at the top of their agendas. Yet the unavailability of such activities has serious implications. Threats to the well-being of the young, such as participation in conflict or criminal activity, are very much linked to the projects and programmes that may or may not be available in their daily lives. Recreational activities can contribute greatly to the development of the physical, intellectual and emotional well-being of young people. They can even counter to some extent the mental health problems caused by conflict and violence.<sup>66</sup> A youth from Salfet explained to Sharek: *'Playing soccer is entertaining, it helps me relieve some of my tension. Otherwise there is no other source of entertainment. I wish there were*

<sup>65</sup> Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

<sup>66</sup> Rita Giacaman, Ghada Naser and Will Boyce, *Normalising the Abnormal: Palestinian youth and the contradictions of resilience in protracted conflict*, Health and Social Care in the Community (2008) 16 (3), 291–298

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*public parks, movie theatres, and active clubs to attend.'*

As well as improving physical and mental well-being, sport improves social skills, values such as teamwork and cuts across religious beliefs, economic status and political affiliation. Cultural activities can bridge conflict and promote tolerance and going out with a friend to see a film and have a coffee can bring relief from a day spent at checkpoints.<sup>67</sup>

While some efforts are being made, such as the organization of annual summer camps, access to leisure activities for young Palestinians is still wholly inadequate. In 2005, 77 percent of Palestinian youth reported spending their leisure time at home and participants in Sharek focus groups overwhelmingly stressed the need just 'for something to do.'<sup>68</sup> Palestinian authorities and their international donors must recognize the importance of sports, cultural and recreational activities for the development of the young and scale up such programmes. Emphasis

must be placed on out-of-reach areas such as smaller towns, camps and villages.

In addition, efforts to restrict young people's participation in sports and recreation must be prevented. The international community must bring pressure to bear on Israel and compel it to cease unlawful military practices common throughout the oPt, which restrict youth participation in recreation activities, for example, by preventing them from travelling abroad. For instance, on 22 July 2009, the Israeli army arrested Palestinian national soccer team player, Mahmoud Kamel As-Sarsak at Erez crossing and prevented two of his teammates - Ibrahim Al 'Amour and Haytham Al-Shareef - from leaving Gaza.<sup>69</sup>

## 2.6 Summary

As this section underlines, while some major avenues for youth participation are heavily restricted, others, in particular opportunities for engagement in sports, recreation

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<sup>67</sup> Excerpts from United Nations, *World Youth Report*, 2005 <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wpayleisure.htm>

<sup>68</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Youth, Culture and Free Time: current status and attitudes*, July 2005, p. 123.

<sup>69</sup> Al Mezan Press Release, *IOF Arrest Palestinian National Team Player and Prevent Two from Leaving Gaza*, 2009 [www.mezan.org/en/details.php?id=8960&dname=IOF&id\\_dept=9&p=center](http://www.mezan.org/en/details.php?id=8960&dname=IOF&id_dept=9&p=center)

and civic life remain underexplored or neglected. Palestinian policy-makers and their international donors must recognise the dangers arising from escalating youth disempowerment, its psychological effects, and destructive potential on broader Palestinian society. Expanding appropriate avenues for youth participation is fundamental to human development and can reap major rewards in terms of physical and psychological health and well-being, bridging internal conflict, and diverting the most vulnerable from harmful behaviours.









A photograph showing the backs of two children sitting on the floor, focused on drawing on a large white sheet of paper. They are using various colored markers. Several markers are scattered on the paper and floor around them. The child on the left is holding a dark marker, while the child on the right is holding a pink one. The scene is brightly lit, and the floor is a light-colored wood or laminate.

### **3. Education/ Knowledge**

## 3 Education/ Knowledge

### 3.1 The Importance of Education

*“Every State should provide its young people with opportunities for obtaining education, for acquiring skills and for participating fully in all aspects of society, with a view to, inter alia, acquiring productive employment and leading self-sufficient lives”<sup>70</sup>*

Education plays a significant role in the lives of youth, and has been highlighted at the international level as a key area of focus and concern. Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights confirms the human right to education, while the UN General Assembly’s ‘World Programme of Action for Youth’ (quoted above) includes education as the first of ten priorities for youth development. As illustrated by the obligation codified in the General Assembly Resolution, education affects all aspects of a youth’s life, from employment opportunities, to the ability to participate in society,

<sup>70</sup> UN General Assembly, Resolution on World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, Doc. A/50/728.

and the capacity to live a self-sufficient life. Crucially, the benefits of education – and the costs of an inadequate educational system – can also be felt throughout society. Indeed, education is considered one of the “most critical tools for either the development or impairment of human capacities. It is the mirror which reflects the degree of poverty and the pace of achieving more human development.”<sup>71</sup> Equally, although education may be “one of the most ordinary aspects of modern life”,<sup>72</sup> it is central to shaping the culture, individual and communal development, social stratification, economy, and politics of any society.<sup>73</sup> Schools and universities not only educate, they function as instruments of social integration, and have been identified as a key factor in the development of a national identity;<sup>74</sup> a factor which is

<sup>71</sup> Gihan Abu-Zeid, *Arab Youth and Globalisation*, in UNDP, *Arab Youth: Strategising for the MDGs*, p.27.

<sup>72</sup> Ismael Abu-Saad and Duane Champagne, *Introduction: A Historical Context of Palestinian Arab Education*, 49 *American Behavioral Scientist*, 1035, 1035 (2006).

<sup>73</sup> Ismael Abu-Saad and Duane Champagne, *Introduction: A Historical Context of Palestinian Arab Education*, 49 *American Behavioral Scientist*, 1035, 1035 (2006).

<sup>74</sup> Sven Morch, *Youth and Education*, *Young*, 49 (2003), p. 65, and Christa Bruhn, *Higher Education as Empowerment: The Case of Palestinian Universities*, 49 *American Behavioral Scientist*, 1125 (2006).



crucially important in the Palestinian context given the existence of a long-standing belligerent occupation and the absence of a sovereign Palestinian state.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has recognized the fundamental, cross-sectional importance of education. The Ministry's first five year plan, covering the years 2000-2005, regarded education as, *inter alia*, the basis for citizenship, a tool for social and economic development, the basis for values and democracy.<sup>75</sup>

Education is also widely regarded as a core component of successful 'youth transition'. Education is expected to facilitate the transition to employment, and consequently to self-sufficiency and 'adulthood'.

Within Palestinian society, significant importance has traditionally been attached to education. Continuous occupation, political turmoil, and the lack of sovereignty over natural resources have contributed to make human resources, and thus education, the most important foundation for social progress,

<sup>75</sup> Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007.

economic development, and cultural identity.<sup>76</sup> The status of education in Palestine today is reflective of this importance; approximately 1,097,957 Palestinian children and youth are enrolled in primary and secondary-level education,<sup>77</sup> with enrolment rates attaining virtual gender parity. At the tertiary level, Palestine has a higher university enrolment rate (25-30 percent)<sup>78</sup> than the average found among other Arab and developing States; rates comparable to countries such as Mexico (21 percent), Costa Rica (21 percent), and Malaysia (25 percent).<sup>79</sup> Female participation at third level is also significant, and there are currently more females than males enrolled in university.

There are signs, however, that the traditional respect for education is being somewhat eroded. Sharek focus group participants in both

<sup>76</sup> Ramzi A. Rihan, *The Palestinian Educational Development Plan. Promise for the Future.*, Vol 8 no 2 of??

<sup>77</sup> AWRAD, Palestinian Youth: Politics, Information and Media, Results of an Opinion Poll, 2008.

<sup>78</sup> Adriana Jaramillo and Hiromichi Katayama, *Lessons from West Bank and Gaza: An Innovative Student Loan Scheme*, World Bank, Fast Brief No 17, January 2009, and MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008

<sup>79</sup> Adriana Jaramillo and Hiromichi Katayama, *Lessons from West Bank and Gaza: An Innovative Student Loan Scheme*, World Bank, Fast Brief No 17, January 2009.

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the West Bank and Gaza Strip were unanimous in their criticisms of the education system, particularly with respect to the quality of teaching, and the capacity/capabilities of the education system itself. Such frustration may be linked to the worsening economic situation and high unemployment rates, and may also be a consequence of the shift in focus of education. While prior to the first *intifada* universities were focused on national liberation and Palestinian identity, after the Oslo Peace Accords this focus shifted towards preparing for a State-building role.<sup>80</sup> The failure of the Oslo process means that this focus is no longer immediately relevant to the lives of Palestinian youth, a potential cause of the apparent disillusionment. Significantly, although disillusionment is evident, enrolment rates remain high, and Sharek focus group participants still intended to attend, or were attending, university, seeing it as a prerequisite to employment.

This section will begin by detailing the status of education in Palestine, noting the pervasive negative

impact of the Israeli occupation. Key issues have been identified from the literature and primary research – access to, and cost of education, the secondary school curriculum, quality of education, and the link between education and employment – these issues will be analysed in further detail.

### 3.2 Education in Palestine

In 1994, the newly created Palestinian Ministries of Education, and Higher Education took over responsibility for education from the Israeli occupation administration. This was the first time in modern history that control of Palestinian education had passed into Palestinian hands, and education was the largest single activity transferred to the nascent PNA. Prior to this point education had been governed by the Ottomans, the British Mandate, the Egyptians (in the Gaza Strip), the Jordanians (in the West Bank), and the Israeli occupation. In addition to governing primary, secondary and (to some extent) third level education, the MoEHE also provides a supervisory role in early childhood education,

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<sup>80</sup> Christa Bruhn, *Higher Education as Empowerment: The Case of Palestinian Universities*, 49 American Behavioral Scientist, (2006).

and is responsible for developing the technical and vocational education training (TVET) system.

At inception, the MoEHE faced a number of problems, among which was a lack of resources. For example, it has been reported that the heavy dependency on international aid and cooperation to formulate and implement education reforms, complicated the process of developing a coherent, indigenous educational policy.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, there were numerous problems arising from the uncertainty of the Oslo years. As noted by Jarbawi, with respect to the development of a new curriculum:

*“What Palestine do we teach? Is it the historic Palestine with its complete geography or the Palestine that is likely to emerge on the basis of possible agreements with Israel? How do we view Israel? Is it merely an ordinary neighbour, or is it a state that has arisen in the ruins of most of Palestine? This may well be one of the most difficult questions, but the answer to it need not be the most difficult. The new Palestinian curriculum should be creative, pragmatic, and truthful*

*without having to engage in historical falsifications.”<sup>82</sup>*

Despite these obstacles, by 2000 the PNA had made significant progress. There was a working education system, extensive school construction, and a new Palestinian curriculum. However, extensive human rights and humanitarian law violations have inevitably affected access to education and the quality of education itself. As noted by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education in 2005, “military occupations are another appreciable curb on the right to education, the most egregious example being the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”<sup>83</sup> During the second *intifada*, Israeli forces reverted to the first *intifada* policy of targeting Palestinian education as a means of collective punishment. In terms of human losses alone, since the outbreak of the second *intifada*, 37 teachers and 662 students have been killed, 197 teachers and 828 students detained, and 55 teachers and 3,620 students injured.<sup>84</sup> The

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in, F. Moughrabi, *The politics of Palestinian textbooks*, Journal of Palestine Studies, XXXI(I), p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Annual Report 2005, U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/2005/50, §124.

<sup>84</sup> MoEHE, *The Effect of the Israeli Occupation on the Palestinian Education from (28/9/2000 – 15/4/2009)*, 2009. Statistics refer only to primary and secondary school students.

<sup>81</sup> Ismael Abu-Saad and Duane Champagne, *Introduction: A Historical Context of Palestinian Arab Education*, 49 American Behavioral Scientist, 1035 (2006).



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Independent Commission of Human Rights reported that, in 2008, approximately 100 schools suffered disruption as a result of measures enacted by the occupation forces, resulting in the loss of at least 150 school days. Israeli measures were also reported as having resulted in the death of more than 40 Palestinian students (33 in the Gaza Strip), while more than 180 school students, 60 university students, and 18 teachers and personnel members were arrested. These figures are expected to be significantly worse in 2009, as a consequence of, *inter alia*, the Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip (27 December 2008 – 18 January 2009), and the continuing illegal closure. During the offensive, 150 of 384 public schools in the Gaza Strip were attacked by Israeli forces; 8 schools were heavily damaged, of which 5 were rendered inappropriate for use. Forty-six private schools and kindergartens were also damaged; 7 completely destroyed, and 41 significantly damaged.<sup>85</sup> The effects of the offensive also disrupted school activities for the remainder of the school year, as students and teachers attempted to restore some semblance

<sup>85</sup> The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, *Targeted Civilians*, 2009.

of 'normality'.

In the West Bank, the MoEHE has identified four major consequences of the construction of the Annexation Wall:

- The absence of teachers and the inability to provide substitute teachers cause the students to leave earlier.
- The disruptions usually cause the students and teachers not to complete the curriculum assignment for the year, and a large part of the textbook is never studied, especially in the final secondary school-grades.
- Cancelling of the extra-curricular informal activities such as after-school sports activities, field trips, and summer camps.
- Inability of school employees from the district offices to reach their district schools cause sharp decline in organization and coordination between the schools and the districts.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Ministry of Education & Higher Education, *Expansion & Annexation Wall and its impact on the Educational Process*, 2004, p. 3.

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### 3.3 The Importance of Education with respect to National Identity

The importance of education with respect to the formation of national identity is recognised at the governmental level, with a guiding principle of the MoEHE being that “education should contribute to national identity and the national heritage.”<sup>87</sup> Equally, UNESCO and Save the Children UK found that, with respect to Palestine, “a national curriculum is a visible indicator of identity and plays an important role in building confidence in the education system.”<sup>88</sup> In this respect it is interesting to note the experiences of the Palestinian university system. Christa Bruhn has found that, “The Palestinian context provides a unique manifestation of the university in that Palestinian universities serve as national institutions in the absence of a State.”<sup>89</sup> In the pre-*intifada* era, universities provided a safe-

haven where Palestinians could have access to higher learning, while at the same time exploring and developing a Palestinian identity, focused on the attainment of an independent Palestinian State. Palestinian universities were the only forum wherein Palestinian communities were able to hold elections, and a heavily politicised student body focused on issues of national liberation. In the post-1993 period, the emergence of the PNA has had a detrimental impact on the independence of national universities. Donor aid has been channelled through the PNA, affecting university’s autonomy; the PNA has been regarded as operating towards expanding its own power and influence rather than supporting the independence and public utility of the universities.<sup>90</sup> In addition, the focus of universities shifted from national liberation to state-building, resulting in the sacrifice of an overarching philosophical framework in the pursuit of an increasingly elusive goal.

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87 MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008.

88 Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p.95.

89 Christa Bruhn, *Higher Education as Empowerment: The Case of Palestinian Universities*, 49 American Behavioral Scientist, 1125 [2006], p. 1126

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90 See further, Christa Bruhn, *Higher Education as Empowerment: The Case of Palestinian Universities*, 49 American Behavioral Scientist, 1125 (2006).

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### 3.4 Access and Cost

The level of educational attainment in the oPt is significantly high; 2008 figures indicate that a total of 1,097,957 Palestinian children and youth were enrolled in primary and secondary-level education,<sup>91</sup> with approximately 180,000 enrolled in post-secondary level study.<sup>92</sup> In terms of youth-specific participation rates, approximately 75 percent of 15 – 19 year olds, and 20 percent of 20-29 year olds are enrolled in full time education.<sup>93</sup> As noted previously, third-level participation rates (approximately 25-30 percent) are the highest in the region. Figures from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) also indicate that the average number of years in schooling is 10 for adolescents – equivalent to the basic, or mandatory, school cycle – and 12 for 20-24 year olds.<sup>94</sup>

Gender participation rates are also encouraging; of the total number of Palestinians enrolled in primary

and secondary level education, 49.9 percent are male, and 50.01 percent female. These rates are similar to those found in government run schools, (49.1 percent male, 50.8 percent female). This level of participation is reflected in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, where female enrolment rates stand at 50.4 percent, and 51.68 percent respectively. Secondary-school statistics are more specifically relevant to youth, and these rates are broadly in line with the previous figures; in government-run secondary schools, 46.4 percent of the students are male, and 53.5 percent are female. Again, gender-based participation levels are broadly equivalent in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, where 54.5 percent and 52.26 percent respectively of the students are female.<sup>95</sup>

While these figures are encouraging, with respect to overall access to education, gender-equal participation, and overall number of years of schooling, dropout rates are quite high. The PCBS estimates the dropout rate – which includes both those who enrolled in education and subsequently left, and those who

91 AWRAD, Palestinian Youth: Politics, Information and Media, Results of an Opinion Poll, 2008.

92 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Palestine Youth: Figures and Statistics*, 2006.

93 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Palestine Youth: Figures and Statistics*, 2006.

94 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Palestine Youth: Figures and Statistics*, 2006.

95 AWRAD, Palestinian Youth: Politics, Information and Media, Results of an Opinion Poll, 2008.



did not enrol at all – at 32 percent for 15-29 year olds; 35 percent for males and 29 percent for females. For 15-19 year olds, the dropout rate was 16 percent, 21 percent for males and 11 percent for females.<sup>96</sup> A 2009 survey by Sharek indicated that, for males, the predominant factor in stopping education related to cost; 24 percent of male respondents stopped education as they could not afford it or needed money, while 38 percent dropped out to support their families. Thus, a total of 62 percent of males cited economic/cost related reasons, compared to 18 percent of females. For women, the single most significant factor was marriage, with 46 percent of female respondents dropping out to get married, compared to 3 percent of males. Thirteen percent of women dropped out as their parents did not want them to continue education, compared to 4 percent of males. Thus, for women, cultural norms, perhaps related to patriarchy, and not cost, seems to be the most decisive factor with respect to leaving education early.

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<sup>96</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Palestine Youth: Figures and Statistics*, 2006.

### 3.5 The Curriculum

A new Palestinian curriculum has been progressively introduced in schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 2000. This curriculum represents the first unified Palestinian curriculum and, importantly, the first time that control of the Palestinian curriculum has passed into Palestinian hands; prior to 2000, a Jordanian curriculum had been used in the West Bank, and an Egyptian curriculum in the Gaza Strip. In developing the new curriculum, the MoEHE intended to ensure a uniquely Palestinian identity, basing the core contents on national values, Islamic religion, national heritage, customs and traditions and the Declaration of Independence.<sup>97</sup> The new curriculum introduced important developments with respect to the subjects offered, with new subjects including civic education, technology, home economics, and health and the environment. In addition, both Arabic and English are taught from the first year of schooling, and a subsequent elective third language is encouraged.

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<sup>97</sup> Quoted in, Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 87.

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The development and introduction of the new curriculum has been noted as one of the MoEHE's most considerable achievements. An independent review, commissioned by Belgian Technical Cooperation in 2005, found that it has had a clear positive impact on students' enthusiasm to learn and on teachers' sense of ownership.<sup>98</sup> It represents an important step towards affirming a uniquely Palestinian identity. However, despite the fact that the production of a unified curriculum remains a considerable success, particularly in light of the uncertainties of the post-1993 era, (see Jarbawi, section 3.2) a number of difficulties and problems have been identified.

### 3.5.1 Difficulties Identified with the New Curriculum

Criticisms of the new curriculum include the fact that it focuses on the Palestinian community living within the oPt, with "no mention of the millions in the Diaspora",<sup>99</sup> and

the relative lack of attention paid to life skills; a particularly pertinent issue given the challenges associated with high population growth. One teacher interviewed for the purposes of a UNESCO, Save the Children UK report commented that "there is no space for us to teach children about reproductive health";<sup>100</sup> see further Section 5. School's extracurricular health programmes are intended to cover these issues but, in reality these programmes rarely touch on the subject.<sup>101</sup>

However, the most significant problem identified in the literature, and endorsed by findings from focus groups conducted for the purpose of this report, relate to the length and difficulty of the curriculum. Criticisms have been voiced by both parents and students that the curriculum is over-difficult, and aimed more towards the more intelligent students.<sup>102</sup> A survey conducted by the MoEHE, found that "there is a strong opinion

98 R. Avenstrup, P. Swarts, O. Abu-Hommos, *Peace is our dream: an impact study of the Palestinian curriculum*, Belgian Technical Cooperation, 2005, p. 42. Available at, [www.pdcd.edu.ps/impact%20study%20report.pdf](http://www.pdcd.edu.ps/impact%20study%20report.pdf).

99 Palestinian teacher, quoted in Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 81.

100 Palestinian teacher, quoted in Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 87.

101 Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 87.

102 Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 89.

among students, parents, teachers and principals that many topics are difficult and that the curriculum is too long.”<sup>103</sup> Parents, all of whom were educated under the previous curriculums, have difficulty helping students with their homework. One parent from Gaza, emphasized this point: “We used to be able to teach the old curriculum and help our children. Now we struggle to learn along with them.”<sup>104</sup> This problem is further illustrated by the fact that teachers – in keeping with the new curriculum’s goals – attempt to focus more on activity based training, but are unable to do so as a result of the demands placed on them by the curriculum. As one teacher noted, “Teachers might be more activity-based in the first part of the year because of what they learnt in training, but in the last half of the year, when they realize they still have to finish two thirds of the book, all that is over.”<sup>105</sup>

103 MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008, p. 33.

104 Quoted in, Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 89.

105 Quoted in, Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 89.

Sharek focus group participants expressed frustration that non-*Tawjihi* related subjects, such as physical education and art, were dropped in order to try to meet the demands of both the curriculum and the *Tawjihi* examination. This perception is supported by existing research which has found that, sports, playtime and arts subjects are often removed in order “to compensate for lost days and catch up on curriculum requirements.”<sup>106</sup> Such subjects form an essential component of a well-rounded curriculum, and may be particularly important in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, in light of the stress which youth are subject to as a consequence of the Israeli occupation and internal violence; see further Section 5.

The MoEHE in Ramallah has explicitly acknowledged this problem, and noted that “there is a need to review the curriculum.”<sup>107</sup> In the Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, the MoEHE has pledged to review the entire curriculum for

106 Save the Children, *Growing up under curfew: Safeguarding the basic rights of Palestinian children*, Save the Children UK and Save the Children Sweden, 2006, p. 25.

107 MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008, p. 33.

grades 1-13, and to modify the textbooks accordingly.

Overall perceptions of the curriculum are mixed, with roughly equal numbers of Palestinians viewing it as very good (22 percent of males, 25 percent of females) and average (25 percent of males, 25 percent of females). Significantly a sizable minority view the curriculum as 'bad' (15 percent of males, 15 percent of females) or 'very bad' (5 percent of males, 4 percent of females). Of youth, between the ages of 18 and 24, 33 percent view it as very good, 31 percent as good, 21 percent as average, and 15 percent as either bad (11 percent) or very bad (4 percent).<sup>108</sup> These figures – in particular the significant levels of support for each category – seem to reflect overall perceptions of the curriculum and its suitability to certain students at the expense of others.

## 3.6 Quality of Education

### 3.6.1 Limited Resources – Increasing Demand

One of the key challenges faced by the education system in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip relates to meeting the ever-increasing demand generated by a growing population, while maintaining and improving the quality and relevance of education.<sup>109</sup> Universities appear to have borne the brunt of this surge in demand; between 1994/1995 and 2002/2003 third-level enrolment rates increased by approximately 232.3 percent,<sup>110</sup> while the World Bank estimates that enrolment in third-level institutions more than tripled in the decade between 1995 and 2006.<sup>111</sup>

As a result of the current financial circumstances in the oPt, public financing for third-level education is weak. This means that the third-level

<sup>108</sup> Sharek, *Perception of Education in Palestine*, 2008.

<sup>109</sup> Adriana Jaramillo and Hiromichi Katayama, *Lessons from West Bank and Gaza: An Innovative Student Loan Scheme*, World Bank, Fast Brief No 17, January 2009, p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> Dr. Mahmoud Al-Jafari & Doreen Lafi, *Matching Higher Education Graduates with Market Needs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip*, Research Summary, 2006.

<sup>111</sup> Adriana Jaramillo and Hiromichi Katayama, *Lessons from West Bank and Gaza: An Innovative Student Loan Scheme*, World Bank, Fast Brief No 17, January 2009, p. 1.



system relies heavily on student fees, which provide approximately 60 percent of universities running costs.<sup>112</sup> This has raised concerns that universities are reducing the quality of education, by encouraging higher student enrolment, without making the associated investment in resources. As expressed by one focus group participant, “universities now are turning commercial. Tuition fees are going so high, and the quality of education is not going up at all.” This perception is confirmed by the MoEHE, who found that increasing demand, coupled with insufficient financial resources, is negatively affecting the quality of education.<sup>113</sup>

### 3.6.2 Teacher Quality

While a lack of resources is undermining the quality of education in the oPt, the quality of teaching has also been identified as an area of key concern. The education system currently employs approximately 46,000 teachers; each year, in response to increasing demand, 1,800 new

teachers are employed.<sup>114</sup> It has been noted that there is an over-supply of teachers – in 2003/2004, 1,800 posts were filled from a pool of 15,000 applicants<sup>115</sup> – the conclusion has therefore been reached that it is not “a shortage of teachers that effects education quality, but rather the standard of teachers themselves.”<sup>116</sup> Jacqueline Sfeir, who worked in teacher training at Bethlehem university, summed up some of the occupation-related problems facing new teachers, and indeed all students:

*“Those who were in the first year of school during the beginning of the first intifada are now, if they have chosen to become teachers, likely to be in their fourth year of university. The first five years of schooling were interrupted by repeated closures, sometimes up to several months or even years at a time. Then they had a period of relative stability, but just before their final Tawjihi exam,*

112 Adriana Jaramillo and Hiromichi Katayama, *Lessons from West Bank and Gaza: An Innovative Student Loan Scheme*, World Bank, Fast Brief No 17, January 2009, p. 1.

113 MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008, p. 16.

114 Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 95.

115 UNESCO, Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, *Assessment “15” – the effect of the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian education 28/9/2000 – 9/7/2006*, 2006.

116 Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 95.

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*the second intifada began. Exams were delayed, and for the few years following, there have been regular interruptions to university life.”<sup>117</sup>*

In the oPt, 11 universities and 25 community colleges train approximately 130,000 students. According to the MoEHE and UNESCO, these institutions “prepare teachers in often quite different ways,” necessitating that “a special in-service program is delivered each year for newly recruited teachers to ensure that they are minimally prepared for work in the classroom.”<sup>118</sup> This finding implies that teacher training is, by and large, inadequate and unsuited to the specific demands of the Palestinian education system. In particular, research has found that the focus in the majority of teacher training programmes is on theory, rather than practice. The World Bank noted that, “there is inadequate emphasis on the practicum experience [and that] even teaching methods

courses can be unduly academic”.<sup>119</sup> This system results in teachers who are inadequately prepared for the rigours of class room life.

In the absence of an improved teacher training system – and until such improvements can be put in place, and have effect – the current situation presents a significant and pertinent demand for in-service training. However, it would appear that this is a somewhat neglected area. This is not entirely surprising given that under the Israeli occupation, “teacher training was not a common phenomena and very few discrete training services were offered.”<sup>120</sup> In 1994, when the PNA took over the education system, there were 185 supervisors; by 2002 this number had increased to 345. Traditionally, these supervisors served a regulatory and control function, however, the MoEHE has shifted the focus of these supervisors towards a more supportive and developmental role. However, according to teachers

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<sup>117</sup> Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 98.

<sup>118</sup> Quoted in, Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 11.

<sup>119</sup> World Bank, *Project appraisal document on a proposed trust fund credit in the amount of US\$ 7.0 million to the West Bank and Gaza for an education action project*, Human Development Sector, Middle East and North Africa Region, 2001, p.82.

<sup>120</sup> S. Assaf, *Education disruption and recovery in Palestine*, in S. Tawil, *Educational destruction and reconstruction in disrupted societies*, pp. 51-61, 1997, p. 53.

interviewed for a UNESCO, Save the Children UK Report, “much of the traditional hierarchical and not-participatory approach to teacher training remains entrenched.”<sup>121</sup>

These findings were reinforced by focus group attendees in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank; participants expressed frustration at the quality of teaching, in particular the prevalence of “spoon-feeding” and rote-learning, which does not critically engage the students. Improved pre, and in-service teacher training is one remedy to this problem.

As a result of the internal political divisions, students in the Gaza Strip also face additional, Gaza-specific problems with respect to teacher quality. Following the Hamas takeover in June 2007, PA employees in a number of sectors, including education, decided to stay at home, while continuing to receive their PA salaries. These teachers have necessarily been replaced by inexperienced appointees; *“The teachers are not good enough, this is a shame. The current teachers have no*

<sup>121</sup> Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 99.

*experience.”*<sup>122</sup> Students involved in the focus groups expressed their frustration at this situation, with particular reference to the impact on their *Tawjihi* preparation. *“The original teachers who have experience stay in their houses and the new teachers from Hamas came and have no experience with the curriculum. We don’t depend on the teachers.”*<sup>123</sup> Another student emphasised this point, *“An engineer came to teach us physics, but he has no experience in physics or in the curriculum.”*<sup>124</sup>

### 3.6.3 Appropriateness of Schooling to Life Requirements

Research has shown that, upon graduation, many students lack necessary skills required by the workforce. Al-Jafari and Lafi attributed graduates’ lack of skills to: traditional teaching methods based on didactic approaches, programmed learning, the infrequent use of computers, and to a general failure to use methods of inquiry, exploration

<sup>122</sup> Sharek focus group, 15 – 20 year-olds, Rafah district, 18 July 2009.

<sup>123</sup> Sharek focus group, 15 – 20 year-olds, Rafah district, 18 July 2009.

<sup>124</sup> Sharek focus group, 15 – 20 year-olds, Rafah district, 18 July 2009.

and problem solving.<sup>125</sup> This finding correlates to general criticisms of the education system, whereby schools “are still seen as teacher- and book-centred, with students learning by rote and sitting exams to test recall.”<sup>126</sup> However, it has been pointed out that this is not necessarily a problem with the curriculum, but with the teachers themselves, and their training. Lamis Alimi, former head of education for UNRWA explained that, “Yes, the curriculum does offer teachers a new way to teach, however, there has not been the kind of support teachers need to use the new methodologies properly.”<sup>127</sup>

Consultations with the public and private sector indicated that employers require computer, analytical, and communication skills, and work discipline.<sup>128</sup> These skills can be effectively taught and nurtured

within the education systems by providing access to computers, and by adopting more inclusive teaching and learning methodologies. Indeed, the skills required by employers, and the identified problems with respect to teaching methods, correlate to students own criticisms as referred to above.<sup>129</sup>

### 3.6.4 ‘Wasta’

*Wasta*, which roughly translates as ‘mediation’, refers to a system of corruption and cronyism, where either bribery or a connection with a person of influence is essential in order to obtain employment. Although this issue is discussed further below,<sup>130</sup> it is worth mentioning here given the impact it has on youth’s perceptions of the value of education. As noted by one focus group participant in the West Bank, “*Education is supposed to qualify us to work, but wasta is a much easier way to work. I hear people talking about the right person in the right position. Where is that in our community?*”<sup>131</sup> The frustration at the prevalence of *wasta*, and the consequent devaluation

125 Dr. Mahmoud Al-Jafari & Dareen Lafi, Matching Higher Education Graduates with Market Needs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Research Summary, 2006, p. 15.

126 Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 89.

127 Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 89.

128 Dr. Mahmoud Al-Jafari & Dareen Lafi, Matching Higher Education Graduates with Market Needs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Research Summary, 2006.

129 See Section 3.6.2.

130 See Section 4.

131 Sharek focus group, 17 – 21 year-olds, Salfeet, 9 July



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of education, was underlined by another participant from the Gaza Strip, *“Even if you are well qualified and skilled, you have to be supported by wasta to get a job opportunity.”*<sup>132</sup>

### 3.6.5 The Government Response

In the Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, the MoEHE in Ramallah acknowledged the concerns relating to teacher quality. While the first five year plan focused – largely successfully – on access, the current programme is primarily aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning.<sup>133</sup> The Ministry has targeted a number of programmes aimed at achieving this goal, the two principal targets being improved teacher training (achieved by enhancing the educational supervision system) and periodic curriculum review and development.<sup>134</sup>

In an effort to improve teacher quality, the MoEHE intends to train all new teachers for 60 hours per year

<sup>132</sup> Sharek focus group, 20–24 year olds, Khan Younis, 18 July 2009

<sup>133</sup> MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008, p. 53.

<sup>134</sup> MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008, p. 53.

per trainee, and to train 52 percent of teaching staff in schools for 24.7 hours each per year. In addition, teaching supervisors will receive 20 hours of training annually, and it is intended that the teacher/supervisor ratio will be reduced from 59:1 to 50:1 by 2012.<sup>135</sup>

In order to address students’ lack of practical skills, new modes and approaches to teaching such as ICT, E-learning, blended-learning, and so on, will be introduced. These improvements are primarily aimed at the post-secondary level.

Specific information regarding the Government in Gaza’s plans was unavailable, and it is unclear as to how students, and the education system in Gaza, will be affected.

## 3.7 The Link between Education and Employment

The link between education and employment has been highlighted as a key area of concern. While the

<sup>135</sup> MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008, p. 55.

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relationship between skills learned during education and those required by the workforce have already been touched upon, this section focuses on the appropriateness of courses offered – and studied – at third level with respect to the demands of the labour market.

Speaking of the Middle East in general, Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon have found that the “demand for higher education does not reflect, or result from an increased demand for graduates in the local economic sectors.”<sup>136</sup> Research has found that many students choose their course of study based on social factors, traditions and norms – perceived “good” jobs/careers – rather than labour market indicators.<sup>137</sup> The key factors influencing students’ choice of degree course have thus been listed as: the specialization suits the academic potential of the student, the need to obtain a job with high returns after graduation, the need to obtain a job with social status, the desire

to pursue post-graduate education within the same specialization and, finally, the need to obtain a job that provides extra income in addition to the regular income.<sup>138</sup>

Youth consulted during focus group sessions reinforced this perception to a certain extent, with most choosing academic courses based on what they could afford, or qualify for. In many instances women chose teaching as their major, as this was the only course wherein they could find acceptable work outside of the home. “*Females either finish school and get married, or go to the university. If you go to the university, then where are you going to work? Away from your family? We can’t do that, and then we end up working as teachers.*”<sup>139</sup>

During Sharek focus groups, youth acknowledged that insufficient attention was paid to the demands of the labour market. However, this was predominantly attributed to a lack of career guidance and support, particularly in secondary-school. Students thus felt that they chose a

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<sup>136</sup> Djavad Salehi-Isfahani & Navtej Dhillon, *Stalled Youth Transitions in the Middle East: A Framework for Policy Reform*, The Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper No. 8, 2008, p. 6.

<sup>137</sup> Dr. Mahmoud Al-Jafari & Dareen Lafi, *Matching Higher Education Graduates with Market Needs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip*, Research Summary, 2006, p.14.

<sup>138</sup> Dr. Mahmoud Al-Jafari & Dareen Lafi, *Matching Higher Education Graduates with Market Needs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip*, Research Summary, 2006, p.20.

<sup>139</sup> Sharek focus group, 18 – 22 year olds, Ramallah, 4 August 2009

major without adequate advice or support.

Al-Jafari and Lafi have noted that there “are no specific determinants or previously made plans by students when they enrol in higher education. Rather they take this step to achieve a personal aspiration, irrespective of their knowledge about the jobs or income they could potentially obtain after graduation.”<sup>140</sup> However, while potentially true, this finding must be looked at in light of the current economic climate in the oPt, in particular the high levels of unemployment. It is unclear as to whether there are labour shortages in certain areas. So, although it is evident that labour market indicators should be used to a far greater extent when choosing a major, it is perhaps more important that universities teach students the skills necessary to survive in, and adapt to, the demands of the labour market in the oPt.

<sup>140</sup> Dr. Mahmoud Al-Jafari & Dareen Lafi, Matching Higher Education Graduates with Market Needs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Research Summary, 2006, p.22.

### 3.7.1 Educational Competencies and the Demands of the Labour Market

In light of the challenges posed by the labour market in the oPt (*inter alia*, high unemployment, likelihood of working outside of field of specialization, mismatch between graduates overall abilities and the demands of the labour market), it is essential that education prepare students with necessary, well-rounded, skills and capacities.<sup>141</sup> Research conducted in 2006 indicated that 61.2 percent of graduates felt that they lacked the ability to adapt to the work environment and external conditions, 60.4 percent indicated that they lacked sufficient knowledge and up-to-date information related to their specialization, 59.2 percent stated that they lacked the ability to solve different work-related problems, while 53 percent lacked essential computer and other technological skills.<sup>142</sup>

The benefits of such skills in terms of securing and maintaining

<sup>141</sup> Tarek Haq, *Youth Employment and Labour Markets in the Arab States*, in UNDP, Arab Youth: Strategising for the MDGs, 2006, p. 50.

<sup>142</sup> Dr. Mahmoud Al-Jafari & Dareen Lafi, Matching Higher Education Graduates with Market Needs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Research Summary, 2006, p.13.

employment are evident; they form part of the core requirements of employers worldwide and are consistent with the goals of education. Research confirms this conclusion, in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, reducing the waiting period between graduation and employment (for youth working outside their field of specialization), depended upon, *inter alia*, practical experience, command of the English language, and computer and internet skills.<sup>143</sup> These findings are also consistent with the non-academic requirements of employers (such as problem solving, communication skills, and so on) discussed above.<sup>144</sup>

A consistent conclusion of both the available literature and focus groups was that youth are taught in an overly traditional manner, lacking in creative engagement. This means that, upon graduation, youth lack essential skills related to independent thinking, problem solving, and communication. Further, a lack of experience with, and exposure to, information technology during

education meant that youth lacked essential computer literacy skills. Such skills can be taught prior to entering the work force, however, this requires modifying teaching methods or student culture to ensure that youth learn to work and think independently, and to creatively engage in their specialization. As noted by one university student in the West Bank, *“in order to improve education we need to change the ways of teaching and to depend on external sources in education.”*<sup>145</sup> Another university student in the Gaza Strip felt that, *“in the university system, teaching is not practical. After we work and do training in our major or specialization it supports our skills and information. We should have practical subjects at university so that we can have practical experience.”*<sup>146</sup>

### 3.7.2 The Role of the Public Sector

The significant role of the public sector with respect to employment in Palestine has been highlighted as an area of concern. Currently, the public sector – which includes national and local government – accounts for

<sup>143</sup> Dr. Mahmoud Al-Jafari & Dareen Lafi, *Matching Higher Education Graduates with Market Needs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip*, Research Summary, 2006, p.15.

<sup>144</sup> See Section 3.7.

<sup>145</sup> Sharek focus group, 18–22 year olds, Ramallah, 12 July 2009

<sup>146</sup> Sharek focus group, 20–24 year olds, Khan Younis, 18 July 2009



approximately 23 percent of total employment; 16.9 percent in the West Bank and 38.1 percent in the Gaza Strip.<sup>147</sup>

It has been noted that “the lure of secure government jobs, often with better pay and benefits”,<sup>148</sup> influences the type of skills which parents and students invest in. Currently, public sector wages are approximately 13 percent higher than those in the private sector, although it has been noted that, in the Gaza Strip, this gap is much more pronounced.<sup>149</sup>

Thus, consequent to public sector hiring and compensation practices, ‘good jobs’ are widely perceived as requiring a degree, rather than an investment in a specific skill; “you have to study a certain major to avoid disgrace from the relatives.”<sup>150</sup> This will have a direct influence on the uptake of TVET, discussed below. Equally, this means that the private sector – which employs the

majority of Palestinians – currently has a limited role with respect to influencing skill formation.<sup>151</sup>

### 3.7.3 Public and Private Sector Participation

One potential solution to the mismatch between graduate competencies and employer’s requirements is increased private and public sector participation in the education system. If employers are given the opportunity to signal which skills they require (and thus will reward with employment) then universities will have the ability to tailor their courses and teaching methods, improving the overall quality of education and benefiting skill formation.<sup>152</sup>

During research conducted in 2006, 76.7 percent of employers responded positively towards cooperating on the need to modify specializations at university, while 72.4 percent expressed a willingness to use Masters theses to address problems

147 International Labour Conference, Report of the Director-General, Appendix, 95<sup>th</sup> Session 2006, p. 23.

148 Djavad Salehi-Isfahani & Navtej Dhillon, *Stalled Youth Transitions in the Middle East: A Framework for Policy Reform*, The Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper No. 8, 2008, p. 17.

149 International Labour Conference, Report of the Director-General, Appendix, 95<sup>th</sup> Session 2006, p. 27.

150 Sharek focus group, 18 – 26 year olds, Halhul, 20 July 2009

151 Djavad Salehi-Isfahani & Navtej Dhillon, *Stalled Youth Transitions in the Middle East: A Framework for Policy Reform*, The Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper No. 8, 2008, p. 17.

152 Djavad Salehi-Isfahani & Navtej Dhillon, *Stalled Youth Transitions in the Middle East: A Framework for Policy Reform*, The Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper No. 8, 2008, p. 8.

faced by their own organizations.<sup>153</sup>

Understandably, employers were reluctant to allocate financial resource for student training. However, seniors and managers in both the public and private sector have expressed their willingness to help adapt the content of specializations on offer to better correspond to the requirements of the labour market and to contribute to developing academic programmes.<sup>154</sup>

Capitalising on such interest would appear to offer an opportunity for university's to augment the theoretical components of courses with practical experience, while at the same time offering students the opportunity to engage more creatively with their chosen specialization, preparing them more effectively for the workforce. It is not proposed that education exclusively prepare students for specific positions within the workforce, this would be contrary to the overall benefits and purposes of education. However, it is clear that a serious mismatch exists

between graduates' competencies and employers demands which must be addressed. Equally, the use of case studies, and practical problems in university courses may help universities to better reflect the reality and practical application of each subject.

### 3.7.4 Governmental Responses

The government in Ramallah appears to have recognized the deficit in graduate competencies, and improved relevance is one of the goals of the new Education Development Strategic Plan. This goal has been highlighted by the MoEHE "due to the fact that the incompatibility between the demand and supply is of paramount significance to overcome and a genuine challenge for all higher education institutions."<sup>155</sup> The issue of relevance is thus "an important challenge that should be addressed immediately."<sup>156</sup>

With respect to IT skills, the MoEHE in Ramallah intend to develop a higher education science and technology

<sup>153</sup> Dr. Mahmoud Al-Jafari & Dareen Lafi, Matching Higher Education Graduates with Market Needs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Research Summary, 2006, p.18.

<sup>154</sup> Dr. Mahmoud Al-Jafari & Dareen Lafi, Matching Higher Education Graduates with Market Needs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Research Summary, 2006, p. 20.

<sup>155</sup> MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008, p. 61.

<sup>156</sup> MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008, p. 61.

policy, with attention being paid to the expansion and utilization of information and communication technology at all levels.<sup>157</sup>

The MoEHE also intends to encourage an increased role for the private sector, particularly as this relates to policy advice.<sup>158</sup> Al-Jafari and Lafi have suggested that faculty members should be lent or delegated to public and private institutions, in order that they may become more knowledgeable on the specific realities and demands of the labour market.<sup>159</sup>

### 3.8 Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET)

TVET is included briefly in order to highlight the inadequacies of the current system; it is positioned following the discussion on graduate oriented employment in order to highlight alternatives to the

traditional, university-based, route to employment.

The National TVET strategy stated that: "A considerable socio-economic development in Palestine is impossible without a sufficient number of TVET outputs released from demand-driven specializations at the 5 TVET levels."<sup>160</sup> Despite this realization, however, the relevance of the TVET system to socio-economic developments has been found to be "rather weak."<sup>161</sup> According to Abu-Nahleh, gaps in TVET can be identified in three respects:

- Politically, as a result of being affiliated to various agencies and lacking an integrative approach,
- Organizationally, due to staff employment policies which result in an over-representation of women in the lower administrative echelons....,
- Economically, being 'almost non-functional' and disconnected from infrastructure and labour market needs; and methodologically, as they lack any research-based approach,

<sup>157</sup> MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008.

<sup>158</sup> MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008.

<sup>159</sup> Dr. Mahmoud Al-Jafari & Dareen Lafi, Matching Higher Education Graduates with Market Needs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Research Summary, 2006, p. 24.

<sup>160</sup> Quoted in, MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008, p. 62.

<sup>161</sup> MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008, p. 16.



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rendering [TVET] programs socially and gender insensitive.<sup>162</sup>

Current TVET courses include computerscience, hotel management, fashion design, draughtsmanship, electrical engineering, and agricultural science. The percentage of students undertaking TVET is, however, noticeably low. In 2008, the MoEHE in Ramallah estimated that only 5.08 percent of students are involved in TVET.<sup>163</sup>

It would appear that the principal obstacle affecting the development of TVET (apart from insufficient funds and government attention) is a prevailing negative societal attitude towards technical and vocational education.<sup>164</sup> In 1997, Hisham Kuheil, then Deputy Minister for Higher Education explained that: “In our society, vocational training is generally considered to be for

those who have failed”.<sup>165</sup> It is perceived as a ‘last resort’, catering for ‘low achieving students.’<sup>166</sup> This is consistent with the previously discussed societal importance placed on university education, and the importance of a ‘good’ job/career. However, it is apparent that, in light of the mismatch between graduate competencies and the demands of the labour market and chronic unemployment, alternatives such as TVET must be investigated and encouraged.

### 3.9 Summary

There are numerous problems facing the education system in Palestine. In particular, the current educational system does not adequately prepare students for life and employment, focusing instead on rote-learning, and preparation for exams. This problem is noted by employers, who have found that new employees are often under-qualified, particularly with respect to independent thinking, and computer literacy

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162 Cited in, Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 81.

163 MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008, p. 16.

164 MoEHE, Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012, Towards Quality Education for Development, July 2008, p. 39.

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165 Quoted in, Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 81.

166 Susan Nicolai, *Fragmented Foundations: education and chronic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, UNESCO, Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 81.

skills. This reality is attributable to two principal factors: the curriculum and the quality of teaching. In order to redress the situation, significant resources will need to be spent on reworking the existing curriculum, and on ensuring that pre-service teacher training is appropriate both to the demands of classroom life and the Palestinian education system.

Insufficient attention is also paid to the demands of the labour market when it comes to choosing a major in university, with a significant number of youth choosing academic courses based on what they can afford, or

social constraints. This situation can be redressed to some extent, by improved career guidance services in secondary school. However, although it is evident that labour market indicators should be used to a far greater extent when choosing a major, it is perhaps more important that universities teach students the skills necessary to survive in, and adapt to, the demands of the labour market in the oPt. In this regard, it is important that universities capitalise on the public and private sectors expressed interest in contributing to the education system.



Wissam Nassar







#### 4. Poverty and Unemployment



## 4. Poverty and Unemployment

### 4.1 Poverty

Poverty is an issue that affects all of society. However, it is also a youth specific issue, given that youth is typically regarded as a time of transition from family-dependence to self-sufficiency. Poverty affects the options available to youth, restricting education opportunities and consequently the scope of available employment. Poverty negatively affects an individual's fundamental right to live in basic human dignity, with inevitable psychological consequences.

It is now widely accepted that poverty refers to more than a lack of income, being dependent on multiple dimensions of deprivation. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals reflect this broader view, referring to diverse factors such as health, hunger and income. This construction is consistent with Amartya Sen's view of poverty as various forms of "unfreedom"

which combine to prevent individuals from realizing and developing their capacities.<sup>167</sup> This more holistic definition of poverty thus draws in the unified system of human rights, being equally dependent on the achievement of civil and political, and economic, social and cultural rights. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has noted that this "more dynamic view of poverty is often more applicable to young people due to the obstacles most of them face in seeking to achieve adult status."<sup>168</sup>

Poverty levels are a primary indicator of living conditions,<sup>169</sup> and must be regarded "as the antithesis of economic and human security; to live in poverty infers perpetual insecurity and strain."<sup>170</sup> In 2008, the World Bank estimates that 51.8 percent of households in the Gaza Strip, and 19.1 percent in the West Bank live below the poverty line.<sup>171</sup> However,

<sup>167</sup> Quoted in, ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, 2006, p. 23.

<sup>168</sup> ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, 2006, p. 6.

<sup>169</sup> ICHR, *The Status of Human Rights in Palestine*, 2007, p. 186.

<sup>170</sup> The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, *Respect for Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: An Internal Analysis*, UNDP Human Development Report Background Paper, 2009, p.7. Unpublished.

<sup>171</sup> World Bank Group, 'West Bank and Gaza Update', 16 (Oct. 2008).

these statistics mask the true extent of the problem. If remittances and food aid are excluded, and poverty is calculated solely on the basis of income, then the poverty rates in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank would rise to 76.9 percent and 47.2 percent respectively; deep poverty rates would increase to 69.0 percent and 37.3 percent.<sup>172</sup> In the Gaza Strip, in 2007, 80 percent of families were found to be dependent on food and direct assistance.<sup>173</sup>

Although these poverty levels are extremely high, findings indicate that poverty in the oPt is increasing. In 2007, for example, monthly poverty gaps – the estimate of the amount of additional assistance that would raise poor household consumption levels to a designated line – increased from USD\$ 147 in 2006 to USD\$ 189.4. The monthly poverty gap for the average deep poor household increased from USD\$ 105.3 in 2006, to USD\$ 141 in 2007.<sup>174</sup>

172 Palestinian Central Bureaux of Statistics, 'On the Eve of International Population Day 11/7/2009' (2009).

173 ICHR, The Status of Human Rights in Palestine, 2007, p. 187.

174 UNRWA, Poverty in the occupied Palestinian territory 2007, Briefing Paper 2009, p. 3.

## 4.2 Employment/ Unemployment

In 2006, the UN Secretary General called upon Heads of States to work to put an end to the “vicious circle”<sup>175</sup> of youth unemployment, stating that “Youth is our most valuable asset – our future. We must nurture it.”<sup>176</sup> Unemployment affects all levels of society, however, it has a particularly dramatic and devastating impact on the lives of youth. Indeed, due to a lack of work experience, youth are often the most vulnerable elements of society in times of high unemployment;<sup>177</sup> today, youth make up a quarter of the world’s population, yet they account for one half of the unemployed.<sup>178</sup>

Unemployment is one of the major causes of poverty, “holding youth

175 UN Secretary-General, *Secretary-General’s Address to the 4<sup>th</sup> European Union/Latin America and Caribbean Heads of State Summit*, Vienna, 12 May 2006. Available at: <http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=2030>.

UN Secretary-General, *Secretary-General’s Address to the 4<sup>th</sup> European Union/Latin America and Caribbean Heads of State Summit*, Vienna, 12 May 2006. Available at: <http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=2030>.

177 ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, 2006, p. 19.

178 UN Secretary-General, *Secretary-General’s Address to the 4<sup>th</sup> European Union/Latin America and Caribbean Heads of State Summit*, Vienna, 12 May 2006. Available at: <http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=2030>.

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hostage”<sup>179</sup> at a crucial time in their lives. Youth is typically regarded as a time of transition from dependence on family to self-sufficiency, and from childhood to active membership in society. Yet, “[t]he crisis of youth unemployment deprives young people of the opportunity to secure independent housing or the accommodations necessary for the establishment of families and participation in the life of society.”<sup>180</sup>

In addition to economic hardship, unemployment creates a wide array of social ills, with youth particularly susceptible to its damaging effects.<sup>181</sup> Unemployment can contribute to low self-esteem, marginalisation and impoverishment,<sup>182</sup> and to feelings of vulnerability, uselessness and idleness.<sup>183</sup> The most obvious benefit of combating youth unemployment is therefore the positive impact

this will have on the lives of youth themselves; employment provides youth with an opportunity to live a life of human dignity, and to complete the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Combating youth unemployment also has a second, significant, advantage; recapturing “the productive potential” of youth has a direct economic benefit. The ILO has noted that youth are a costly group. Not only does unemployment deny youth the opportunity to contribute to the economic welfare of society, their dependency also translates into an erosion of savings and a reduction in consumer demand. Money spent supporting youth leaves less for spending and investment at the individual household level, societies lose their investment in education, and governments fail to receive contributions to social security, while having to increase spending.<sup>184</sup> This situation presents a threat to the development potential of economies, as stated by the ILO: “Focusing on youth, therefore, makes sense to a country from a costs-benefit point of

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179 Gihan Abu-Zeid, *Arab Youth and Globalisation*, in UNDP, *Arab Youth: Strategising for the MDGs*, 2006, p.7.

180 UN General Assembly, Resolution on World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, UN. Doc. A/50/728, §34.

181 UN General Assembly, Resolution on World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, UN. Doc. A/50/728, §34.

182 UN General Assembly, Resolution on World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, UN. Doc. A/50/728, §34.

183 ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, 2006, p. 1.

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184 ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, 2006, p. 2.

view.”<sup>185</sup>

The right to work is recognised as a fundamental human right in Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The importance of the right to work is also reflected in the Palestinian Basic Law, Article 25 of which states that “work is a right, duty and honor ... *The Palestinian National Authority shall strive to provide it to any individual capable of performing it*”. However, the ILO has noted that the existing labour law has a number of significant deficiencies: “*it does not specify a minimum wage; it does not provide a pension scheme as such; nor does it oblige employers to provide health insurance. In addition, current Palestinian labour legislation excludes large segments of the population, including own-account workers, seasonal workers, contributing family workers, domestic workers, and those involved in unpaid work at home, including a number of activities for self-consumption.*”<sup>186</sup>

<sup>185</sup> ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth, 2006, p. 2.

<sup>186</sup> ILO, Protecting Workers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Policy Brief 2, p. 3.

#### 4.2.1 Rates of Unemployment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

Of labour force participants, (the economically active), total unemployment in the first quarter of 2009 stood at 25.4 percent; 19.5 percent in the West Bank and 37.0 percent in the Gaza Strip.<sup>187</sup> Significantly, with respect to the focus of this report, unemployment in the Gaza Strip stands at approximately 60 percent for young persons aged between 15 and 30.<sup>188</sup> The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has noted that the unemployment rate in Gaza is among the highest in the world.<sup>189</sup> However, it appears that actual unemployment, particularly in the Gaza Strip, may be higher as the PCBS records workers who are not formally unemployed, but who do not work and do not receive salaries as “temporarily absent employees” rather than as unemployed.<sup>190</sup>

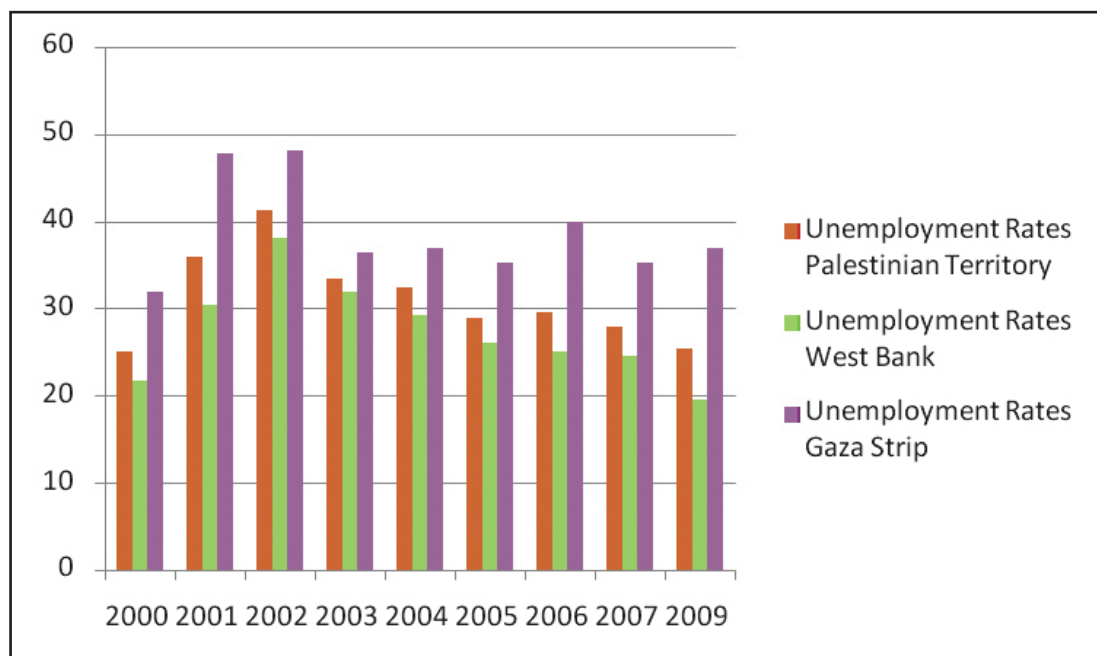
<sup>187</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, ‘On the Eve of International Population Day 11/7/2009’ (2009).

<sup>188</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Locked In: The Humanitarian Impact of Two Years of Blockade on the Gaza Strip*, 2009, p. 5.

<sup>189</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Locked In: The Humanitarian Impact of Two Years of Blockade on the Gaza Strip*, 2009, p. 5.

<sup>190</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Locked In: The Humanitarian Impact of Two Years of Blockade on the Gaza Strip*, 2009, p. 5.





Source: PCBS, Labour Force Participation Rate and the Unemployment Rate in the Palestinian Territory by Region (Relaxed Definition) 2000- 2007, and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 'On the Eve of International Population Day 11/7/2009' (2009)

The dramatic increase in unemployment rates in the Gaza Strip has been directly linked to the effects of the illegal Israeli closure. Given the widespread devastation caused by the 27 December 2008 – 18 January 2009 Israeli offensive – in particular the widespread destruction of industry and agriculture – it is to be expected that this situation will only deteriorate further.

It is presented that the current situation with respect to youth unemployment is dire, particularly in the Gaza Strip. In addition, current outlooks are bleak. The oPt is in a state of economic crisis, with significantly high levels of unemployment, and poverty. The continuing existence of a belligerent occupation, and the impact of the illegal closure regime on the economy, mean that economic recovery is a complicated, if not

impossible task. As stated by one youth at a focus group conducted in the Gaza Strip, *"We have great capacities but there is siege. I have many abilities but no resources. The day of youth was in the past; I can't even get married today; I think about leaving; all the opportunities inside the country are closed"*.<sup>191</sup>

#### 4.2.2 'Wasta'

In an opinion poll conducted in 2008, 31 percent of youth stated that they faced obstacles in accessing the job market.<sup>192</sup> Results of the focus groups conducted for the purposes of this report, reinforced and emphasised these findings. The majority of youth believed that it would be difficult to find a job, while the majority of focus group participants who had finished secondary school education, and who were looking for work were unemployed. As noted in the education section, part of the difficulty in attaining employment was attributed to a mismatch between graduates skills, and the demands of the labour market. However, focus groups were virtually unanimous

<sup>191</sup> Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

<sup>192</sup> AWRAD, Palestinian Youth: Politics, Information and Media, Results of an Opinion Poll, 2008.

(in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank) in attributing the principal difficulty in finding employment to the prevalence of *wasta*. *Wasta*, which roughly translates as 'mediation', refers to a system of corruption and cronyism, where either bribery or a connection with a person of influence is essential in order to obtain employment. From the focus groups, it appears that *wasta* is both widespread and pervasive, and is now considered to form part of the job application process; *"When I finished studying, I was looking for a job, I was told I needed a wasta. Someone sent an email to the education ministry, talking about how miserable he was, and he couldn't get a job, he was told, 'you don't have a wasta? You can't even have a glass of water without a wasta!' I was shocked."*<sup>193</sup>

Students' statements during the Sharek focus groups are illustrative in this regard, and given the apparent prevalence of *wasta*, and the lack of attention paid to this phenomenon in the literature reviewed for the purposes of this report, they are quoted here in some detail.

#### The prevalence of *wasta*, illustrated

<sup>193</sup> Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

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by the above mentioned statement referring to the Ministry of Education, is evident; *“Wasta is there in every house; every authority; organizations belong to factions; its spreading like a fire, in a big way; we need years to change; we can’t change in a day.”*<sup>194</sup> As noted by another focus group respondent in the West Bank, *“The base of all these problems we are facing with employment is “Wasta”. People these days need it more than even being educated. Anyone with the right connections will get a job even if he does not fit the description, or even doesn’t know anything about it.”*<sup>195</sup>

Significantly, *wasta* also appeared to have a significant impact on youth’s enthusiasm to work, and their hopes of finding a job; *“Wasta has a great role in the confidence, and excitement to work. I know people who failed their school or didn’t even study, and are currently working... people hire their relatives and friends.”*<sup>196</sup> This issue is particular relevant in light of its impact on youth’s enthusiasm, optimism, and outlook for the future. As simply stated by a focus group attendee in the West Bank, *“Wasta is killing our*

*innovative potential and suppressing our abilities.”*<sup>197</sup>

In a final expression of the disillusionment caused by the apparent institutionalisation of *wasta*, certain youth felt that it even affected their ability to agitate for change, *“A lot of people that do not have capacities or good skills, they have jobs because they have wasta. If we demand our rights, without wasta, no change will come.”*<sup>198</sup>

In a reflection of the reality of the internal division, although youth in the Gaza Strip felt that they were from the same background as youth in the West Bank, they believed that they face drastically different opportunities with respect to employment; *“in the West Bank they don’t have the same economic problems as we do. The political situation here is the same as there; but they have resources; they have an economy; they are open to others; they can travel; people can visit them; this is what develops a person; Gazan society has left me like this; we’ll drown ourselves. The young man in Palestine is the same whether in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. Why would*

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194 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

195 Sharek focus group, 17 – 21 year-olds, Salfeet, 9 July

196 Sharek focus group, 18 – 22 year olds, Ramallah, 4 August 2009

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197 Sharek focus group, 18 – 22 year olds, Ramallah, 12 July 2009

198 Sharek focus group, 20—24 year olds, Khan Younis, 18 July 2009

*he succeed there but not succeed here? Some of the traditions are different; but they have achievements, projects, a private sector; they are open. I mean economically, it's like a driver."*<sup>199</sup>

#### **4.2.3 Unemployment as a Driver for Memberships in Armed Groups**

Within the focus groups in the Gaza Strip, participants expressed the belief that unemployment was a contributing factor in motivating youth to become members of armed groups. As stated by one participant, *"I know young men who have gone the wrong way [joined an armed group] just to get USD\$ 100 a day, so they can pay for their jawwal cards and cigarettes."*<sup>200</sup> This perception was confirmed by Tayseer Mohsein; he explained that, as a result of the current situation, youth "need to feel more powerful, by holding a gun, or through more money. Now youth are going to the factions for the financial benefits."<sup>201</sup>

Although no hard data relating to the true extent of this phenomenon are

<sup>199</sup> Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

<sup>200</sup> Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

<sup>201</sup> Interview with Tayseer Mohseen, 15 July 2009, Gaza City.

available, it is an issue that must be highlighted and is one worthy of future research. If found to be widespread, this phenomenon has potentially worrying long-term implications for Palestinian society, leading to, *inter alia*, increased militarization and the possible further deterioration in law and order. If ideology is replaced by financial motivation, this may also have a detrimental impact on overall Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation, affecting the broad-based participatory nature of resistance, and potentially giving armed groups an increasing role, at the expense of widespread public participation in issues of national liberation; see also Section 2.

#### **4.2.4 Unemployment as a Driver of Emigration**

*"I want to benefit my country. But I find that no-one helps me, they harm my dignity. I keep my passport on me all the time, if the crossings open I will escape from the country."*<sup>202</sup>

In light of the current economic situation, and the lack of available jobs, a large number of youth felt that emigration was the only viable option

<sup>202</sup> Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009



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open to them; “... the only solution is emigration. Most youth think they will have to emigrate after graduation.”<sup>203</sup> Youth pointed to the example set for them within society, and the grim reality of the current crisis: “I am in school now, but when I think of people that I know who have graduated, and some of them have Masters, and see that they don’t have a job, it’s a good reason for me to leave.”<sup>204</sup> This reality was bleakly underlined by a West Bank participant, “every year the conditions are getting worse and worse, and this will eventually break our hopes and dreams.”<sup>205</sup>

There is little available information regarding unemployment-driven emigration. However, a survey conducted for the UNDP Human Development Report 2009, indicated that, since the outbreak of the second intifada in 2001, more families have had members emigrate (13 percent of the refugee population, 16 percent of the non-refugee population), than move internally (9 percent of both the refugee and non-refugee population). Significantly, the predominant

factor linked to migration - either internally or abroad - is the search for employment (33 percent of the refugee population, and 42 percent of the non-refugee population).<sup>206</sup>

These findings also indicated that, when asked ‘if you had the means to leave the oPt, would you emigrate or would you want to stay’, young persons between the ages of 18 and 24, represented the highest segment of society who would choose to leave, with 40 percent opting for emigration, against an average of 26.4 percent who would choose to leave across all age groups.<sup>207</sup>

These focus group findings indicate that this topic should be highlighted as an area of concern and future research. The reality of the illegal closure regime imposed by Israel, and the impact of the economic crisis, means that figures regarding actual emigration, particularly from the Gaza Strip, may mask the underlying problem. The frustration and despair inherent in this desire, however, demand attention, given the evident immediate implications on the lives and well being of youth, and Palestinian society as a whole.

<sup>206</sup> UNDP Human Development Report Survey, 2009.

<sup>207</sup> UNDP Human Development Report Survey, 2009.

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<sup>203</sup> Sharek focus group, 15 – 19 year olds, Gaza City, 11 July 2009

<sup>204</sup> Sharek focus group, 15 – 19 year olds, Gaza City, 11 July 2009

<sup>205</sup> Sharek focus group, 18 – 26 year olds, Halhul, 20 July 2009

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#### 4.2.5 Microfinance and Sustainability

Microfinance initiatives have been cited as a potential remedy to the economic and youth unemployment crisis in Palestine, given their success in counties such as Bangladesh, and India. Further research, beyond the scope of this report, is necessary to determine the appropriateness and effectiveness of this form of intervention in the current Palestinian context. For example, given the dramatically high levels of poverty, is the economy capable of sustaining new businesses? Additionally, given the reality of the occupation – and the illegal closure regime in particular – and the absence of a sovereign State, what type of businesses can be supported?

Tayseer Mohsein has proposed that, if microfinance schemes are to be successful, and importantly, beneficial, in the current context, then they must learn from the lessons of the past. Such schemes should focus on self-sustainability and internal Palestinian capacity, i.e. a reduction in the overall dependence on Israeli and other foreign imports, so that livelihoods

can be secured independently of political developments; “We need to depend on local limited resources of families, as coping strategies, to utilise available resources and build on them.”<sup>208</sup> Importantly, such schemes could also serve as a means of reintegrating youth into the workforce, and actively engaging them in Palestinian society.

Given the long-standing dependence on foreign aid, and the extremely limited developmental results which massive financial assistance has achieved, this approach would seem pertinently appropriate in the current context, and an essential requirement in order to reintegrate individuals into economic life, or to reduce their dependence on food aid and coupons. In the broader political sense, this approach is also advantageous as it will reduce Palestinians’ economic dependence on Israel, a tool which the State of Israel has levered with devastating effect over the course of the occupation, and particularly since the outbreak of the second *intifada*.

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<sup>208</sup> Interview with Tayseer Mohseen, 15 July 2009, Gaza City.

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#### 4.2.6 Gender and Employment

The United Nations has noted that young women in the Middle East and North Africa “are doubly disadvantaged, as both age and gender considerations tend to limit their employment opportunities.”<sup>209</sup> This analysis is undoubtedly applicable to Palestine. However, based on statistical analysis, it would appear that a third factor is also at play. This factor would appear to be linked to a culture of patriarchy prevalent in Palestinian society, whereby married women are discouraged from participating in the labour force. Given the early age of marriage in some communities, this means that the majority of young women are economically inactive.

Female labour force participation currently stands at 15.4 percent in the oPt; 16.5 percent in the West Bank and 13.5 percent in the Gaza Strip.<sup>210</sup> This figure is very low when compared to the average male participation rate of 66.9 percent.<sup>211</sup>

Analysis of the reasons behind female economic inactivity indicates that for youth, 36.5 percent were outside the labour force as they were students, while 57.1 percent were full-time housewives. When looking at the age group 25-34, however, these figures shift dramatically, and 95.4 percent of women are economically inactive as they are full-time housewives, a remarkably high figure.<sup>212</sup>

These figures, and the lack of female participation in the labour force, which stands at 6.6 percent for youth, and 13.9 percent for young women between the ages of 25 and 34,<sup>213</sup> are explained by the fact that young women are traditionally expected to withdraw from the labour force upon marriage, or when childbearing begins.<sup>214</sup> This fact has evident repercussions for young women who are denied the opportunity to live independent lives, and serves to increase women’s economic dependency on men. As noted in a UN report:

#### “Gender roles and power imbalances

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209 United Nations, *Labour market participation among youth in the Middle East and North Africa and the special challenges faced by young women*, p. 115.

210 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, ‘On the Eve of International Population Day 11/7/2009’ (2009).

211 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, ‘On the Eve of International Population Day 11/7/2009’ (2009).

212 PCBS, *Not Economically Active Population 15 Years and Over in the Palestinian Territory by Reason, Sex and Age*.

213 PCBS, *Not Economically Active Population 15 Years and Over in the Palestinian Territory by Reason, Sex and Age*.

214 United Nations, *Labour market participation among youth in the Middle East and North Africa and the special challenges faced by young women*, p. 128.

both in the household and in the public sphere work together to perpetuate the dependency of women and to limit their options and opportunities for participation in society. Although the boundaries between the public and private spheres may be porous and flexible, the hierarchies of gender and age that permeate the family, social, political and economic structures are constant, and they define the nature and breadth of female citizenship and participation. Women's economic citizenship is determined by the State but is mediated by the family (or more specifically, by one or more of its male members) ... The preservation of female modesty and the family honour is considered part of the male domain, so many of the choices and life decisions faced by young women are controlled by male relatives and reinforced by older females in the family. The dynamics of these relationships determine the extent of young women's participation in society; more practically, they serve to limit economic, political and other opportunities."<sup>215</sup>

#### 4.2.6.1 Women in the Workforce

Of those women who are economically active, employment

<sup>215</sup> United Nations, *Labour market participation among youth in the Middle East and North Africa and the special challenges faced by young women*, p. 129.

rates are roughly equivalent to male figures.<sup>216</sup> However, women undoubtedly face discrimination within the work-force. In interviews conducted by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), the Union of Women's Workers reported that, "salaries for women in private companies are significantly less than male counterparts... sex discrimination is so entrenched in the oPt that women believe themselves to be worth less than men."<sup>217</sup> This conclusion is reinforced by statistics from the PCBS which indicate that the average daily wage for employees is significantly different, in 2008 male employees earned an average of 94.1 NIS per/day, while women earned an average of 76.6 NIS.

Both the Democracy and Workers Rights Center and the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) reported that Palestinian labour laws are

<sup>216</sup> PCBS, *Population 10 Years and Over in the Palestinian Territory by Age, Sex and Activity Status*, Available at: [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/\\_pcbs/labor/lab\\_cens\\_lab\\_c1.aspx](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/_pcbs/labor/lab_cens_lab_c1.aspx)

<sup>217</sup> PCHR interview with Reema Tarazi, Union of Women Workers, Ramallah, 18 Dec. 2008. Quoted in, PCHR, *Respect for Human Rights in the occupied Palestinian territory: An Internal Palestinian Analysis*, UNDP Human Development Report Background Paper, 2009.



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discriminatory against women.<sup>218</sup> An example given by PCHR illustrates that the provisions on paid leave for pregnancy in the oPt fall short of ILO standards (10 as opposed to 14 weeks); “in practice, at least in the private sector, it was suggested that no paid leave is offered to pregnant women.”<sup>219</sup>

The patriarchal system prevalent in the West Bank and Gaza Strip also means that young women are constrained both by the type and location of work available to them. The UN has reported that, with respect to the Middle East and North Africa in general, “social norms, including perceptions regarding the vulnerability of women and the need to protect them from danger, are largely responsible for limiting the mobility of women.”<sup>220</sup> These

restrictions are based on the perceived suitability of the workplace, for example, conditions in the informal and private sector are often deemed inappropriate for women,<sup>221</sup> based primarily on the intermingling of the sexes in a small environment. As noted by Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon, “[s]mall firms do not give women a sense of security such as larger, more populated workplaces in most public sector settings. Fear of sexual harassment in smaller work settings is thus one of the main reasons why female graduates decide to stay at home or wait for public sector employment.”<sup>222</sup> However, this analysis must be tempered by the realisation that, in many – if not the majority of instances – it is not women’s own individual choice which influences their decision, but rather societal pressure or parental control.

Young women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are thus predominantly restricted to specific professions, as

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218 PCHR interview with Dr. Fathhi Souroughi, Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS), Ramallah, 30 Dec. 2008; PCHR interview with Mahmoud Ziad, Federation of Trade Unions, Democracy and Workers Rights Center, Ramallah, 18 Dec. 2008. Quoted in, PCHR, *Respect for Human Rights in the occupied Palestinian territory: An Internal Palestinian Analysis*, UNDP Human Development Report Background Paper, 2009.

219 PCHR interview with Mahmoud Ziad, Federation of Trade Unions, Democracy and Workers Rights Center, Ramallah, 18 Dec. 2008. Quoted in, PCHR, *Respect for Human Rights in the occupied Palestinian territory: An Internal Palestinian Analysis*, UNDP Human Development Report Background Paper, 2009.

220 United Nations?, *Labour market participation among youth in the Middle East and North Africa and the special challenges faced by young women*, p. 131.

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221 Djavad Salehi-Isfahani & Navtej Dhillon, *Stalled Youth Transitions in the Middle East: A Framework for Policy Reform*, The Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper No. 8, 2008, p. 23.

222 Djavad Salehi-Isfahani & Navtej Dhillon, *Stalled Youth Transitions in the Middle East: A Framework for Policy Reform*, The Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper No. 8, 2008, p. 23.

explained by one female focus group participant in the West Bank: *“Females either finish school and get married, or go to the university. If you go to the university, then where are you going to work? Away from your family? We can’t do that, and then we end up working as teachers.”*<sup>223</sup> Societal restrictions also affect the ability of women to travel to work, and it has been reported that during times of increased violence in particular, women are not allowed to leave the home alone.<sup>224</sup>

#### **4.2.7 The Impact of Employment/ Unemployment on Youth Transition**

Employment has a significant impact on youth’s transition, in particular the transition from the dependence of childhood to self-sufficiency and active participation in society. An income is an essential component of independence, and the UN has concluded that economic participation “represents one of the most fundamental and rewarding ways in which young

people can become involved in their communities and make a positive contribution to development.”<sup>225</sup> Unemployment is a major cause of poverty, and will negatively affect the attainment of all human rights, including the right to live in basic human dignity. As expressed by one focus group participant in the West Bank, *“Getting a source of income to live is the most important thing for us. We studied in order to increase our chances to work and receive income to live. How are we expected to actively participate in the community if we don’t have a job to get our income?”*<sup>226</sup>

While youth transitions are the outcomes of several interconnected factors such as education, housing and marriage, it is evident that employment plays a significant, if not catalytic, role.<sup>227</sup> Without an independent income, youth will not have the funds necessary to buy or rent a house of their own, and will lack the financial security required to start a family. As noted by Tarek

223 Sharek focus group, 18 – 22 year olds, Ramallah, 4 August 2009

224 Rita Giacaman, Ghada Naser and Will Boyce, *Normalising the Abnormal: Palestinian youth and the contradictions of resilience in protracted conflict*, Health and Social Care in the Community (2008) 16 (3), 291–298

225 United Nations, *Labour market participation among youth in the Middle East and North Africa and the special challenges faced by young women*, p. 115.

226 Sharek focus group, 17 - 21 year olds, Salfeet, 9 July 2009

227 Djavad Salehi-Isfahani & Navtej Dhillon, *Stalled Youth Transitions in the Middle East: A Framework for Policy Reform*, The Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper No. 8, 2008, p. 20.

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Haq, “the pressure of unemployment is demonstrably harrowing for youth. Its bitterness intensifies with the approach of marriage and the relative independence of the family. Coupled with poverty and limited support provided by family and social solidarity networks, the consequences of unemployment are unquestionably felt most by youth.”<sup>228</sup>

Crucially, early experiences of unemployment have been found to have a long-term detrimental impact on the lives of youth, as “it is the initial transition to the labour forces that is the most significant in determining the economic (and social) well-being of the individual”.<sup>229</sup> In this respect, it is interesting to return to the societal value placed on the importance of a ‘good job’. It has been noted that these societal norms often place a higher value on unemployment – in the pursuit of a good job – than employment in low status positions that “may send the wrong signals about [the youth’s] long-term ability

as a provider.”<sup>230</sup>

### 4.3 Summary

The potential negative consequences of the dramatically high unemployment and poverty rates in the West Bank and Gaza Strip cannot be overstated; they fundamentally undermine youth’s transition, holding them hostage at a crucial time in their lives. Both poverty and unemployment affect the lives of youth in myriad ways, preventing them from attaining necessary education, from establishing independent households, and from participating fully in societal life. The youth-specific and society wide consequences are potentially dire, as illustrated by the increasing number of youth who turn to membership of armed groups as a source of income and status.

Internally, *wasta* must be identified as a pressing concern, and serious efforts must be taken to eradicate this problem. The prevalence of *wasta* negatively impacts on youth’s ability to obtain employment, and

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228 Tarek Haq, *Youth Employment and Labour Markets in the Arab States*, in UNDP, *Arab Youth: Strategising for the MDGs*, 2006, p. 47.

229 ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, 2006, p. 10.

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230 Djavad Salehi-Isfahani & Navtej Dhillon, *Stalled Youth Transitions in the Middle East: A Framework for Policy Reform*, The Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper No. 8, 2008, p. 24.

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on their enthusiasm to engage in the search for a job; the consequences of such disempowerment and disillusionment are discussed in Section 2 in more detail. Female's lack of participation in the labour force must also be addressed. This issue is not merely restricted to employment opportunities, it also negatively impacts on women's attainment of the entire range of human rights, affecting their participation, their role in the decision making process, and their ability to live their lives as they choose. The current reality is intrinsically related to the heavily patriarchal system prevalent in Palestinian society, necessitating both top-down and bottom-up solutions.

However, while the governments and civil society have an urgent and pressing role with respect to alleviating poverty and unemployment, the ongoing occupation – and the illegal practices of Israel as the Occupying Power – must be recognised both locally and by the international community, as the primary causal factor with respect to both unemployment and poverty. Until the occupation ends, poverty and unemployment cannot

be effectively combated. In this respect the international community has a pressing legal obligation to ensure Israel's compliance with international law, and to hold Israel accountable for its illegal actions.









A young girl with dark hair, wearing a colorful striped sweater and dark pants, is walking through tall green grass. She is holding a white circular object, possibly a plate or a small mirror, in her left hand. In the background, there are rolling green hills under a clear sky. Another person is partially visible behind her.

## **5. The Health of Young Palestinians**

## 5 The Health of Young Palestinians

According to the World Health Organisation, health is a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity.<sup>231</sup> It is also a fundamental human right protected by numerous widely ratified human rights treaties.<sup>232</sup> These treaties recognise that the right to health is closely related to and dependent on the realization of other human rights including the rights to food, housing, work, education, human dignity, life, non-discrimination, equality, the prohibition against torture, privacy and freedoms of association.<sup>233</sup>

If death-rates are the benchmark, the young are a particularly healthy

group; yet increased global interest in the health of adolescents and youth – manifested in expressions of commitment to their health and personal, social and physical wellbeing – is far from misplaced.<sup>234</sup> Youth conditions and behaviours have serious implications for health in later life. Worldwide, it is estimated that nearly two thirds of premature deaths and one third of the total disease burden of adults are associated with conditions faced or behaviour begun in youth.<sup>235</sup> In the oPt specifically, health has been identified as an area of particular concern for the population as a whole and a review of available evidence shows worrying trends in key youth health indicators such as rising chronic disease rates and deteriorating mental health indicators.

This section of the report highlights several areas of concern in terms of youth health in the oPt. First, it notes some of the key social determinants of the health of young Palestinians which include continued military

231 Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.

232 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Articles 7, 11 and 12; The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Articles 10, 12 and 14; The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Article 5 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 24

233 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment 14,

234 See for example the General Assembly Resolution on Policies and programmes involving youth: youth in the global economy – promoting youth participation in social and economic development (2007/A/RES/62/126)

235 United Nations, *World Youth Report 2007*, (<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wyr07.htm#wyr07>)

occupation as well as traditional values. Second, key health indicators using conventional evidence (national statistics and academic studies) and subjective measures based on experience and perceptions of health status and quality of life are presented. Third, this section discusses the appropriateness of youth health interventions in the oPt; including health promotion and access to services.

## 5.1 The Social Determinants of Health

The social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, including the health system. The WHO is explicit in acknowledging that these conditions are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels and as such require political as well as technical interventions.<sup>236</sup> The Israeli occupation and its various manifestations is a powerful social determinant of the health of young Palestinians. Their continued exposure to violence and humiliation is impacting negatively on their

mental health and well-being.<sup>237</sup> As explained in Section 6, not only are young Palestinians, and especially young men, more likely to be exposed to such experiences than older people, but the mental well-being of the young, particularly in the critical developmental stage of adolescence, is especially vulnerable. Escalating deep poverty levels caused in large part by Israeli imposed movement and access restrictions is causing rising food insecurity and associated malnutrition and anaemia. Spiralling unemployment, affecting a majority of Palestinian youth, leaves these already vulnerable, and often fragile young people without a sense of purpose and the ability to acquire the resources necessary to leave the nuclear household, marry and start an adult family life of their own.

The Israeli occupation heavily restricts access to vital health services. Entire communities living in 'seam zones' in the West Bank - hemmed in between the Wall and the 'Green Line' - have been cut off from schools and healthcare centres. In the Gaza Strip, since the imposition of the blockade

<sup>236</sup> World Health Organisation website (accessed 20 August 2009) [http://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/en/](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/)

<sup>237</sup> Rita Giacaman, Niveen M.E. Abu-Rmeileh, Abdullatif Hussein, Hana Saab, William Boyce, *Humiliation: the invisible trauma of war for Palestinian youth*, Public Health (2007) 121, 563–571



in 2007, health services have been declining at an alarming rate. One focus group participant from North Gaza noted: *“The Israeli occupation forces control our life. If Israel says no medicine for Gaza, we won’t have any medicine. All of our life is controlled by the Israeli government.”*<sup>238</sup> Palestinians, including youth, have even been prevented by the Israeli authorities from leaving Gaza to undergo life-saving medical treatment.

### **The Death of Maher Mohammed Ash-Sheikh, aged 17**

Seventeen-year-old Maher Mohammed Ash-Sheik died in Gaza on Sunday 25 January 2009 waiting for a permit to enter Israel to receive treatment for leukaemia. Maher was diagnosed with leukaemia the previous year, referred to Tel HaShomer Hospital in Israel and granted permission to enter Israel for treatment. After undergoing chemotherapy, he returned to Gaza and started to show signs of recovery. Then, in the second week of January his condition deteriorated rapidly. Doctors at Shifa Hospital in Gaza requested his immediate referral back to Tel HaShomer Hospital and Maher’s family submitted an urgent permit request. They never received a response and Maher died on 25 January.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>238</sup> Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

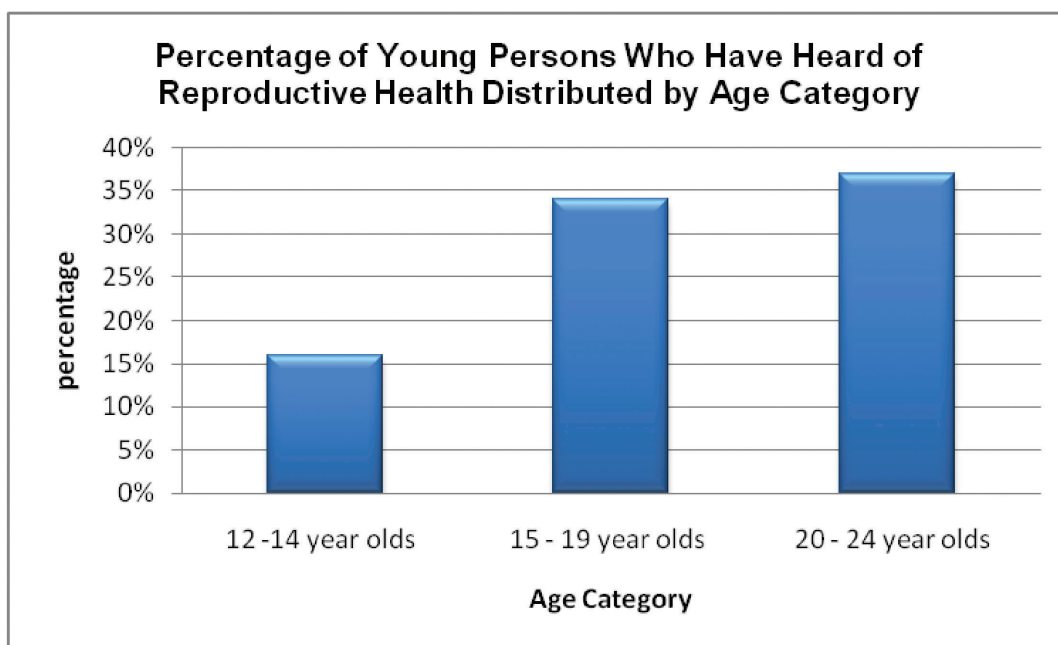
Traditional norms and values also impact negatively on the health and wellbeing of young Palestinians. While overall early marriage is in decline throughout the oPt, this phenomenon remains common in many communities.<sup>239</sup> Young teenage mothers face greater risks of maternal death and disability and their children have higher rates of morbidity and mortality.<sup>240</sup> They are also typically more socially isolated, lack knowledge about family planning and reproductive health services and perhaps also the power to make decisions over their own health if their husbands are much older.

As youth chronic disease prevalence rates continue to rise, fast becoming the major health challenge facing Palestinian policy-makers<sup>241</sup>, socially conservative families and communities continue to forbid girls and young women from engaging in

<sup>239</sup> PCHR, *Respect for Human Rights in the occupied Palestinian territory: An Internal Palestinian Analysis*, UNDP Human Development Report Background Paper, 2009.

<sup>240</sup> Population Reference Bureau, *Young People’s Sexual and Reproductive Health in the Middle East and North Africa*, (undated)

<sup>241</sup> Abdullah Hussein et al, *Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes mellitus, and cancer in the occupied Palestinian territory*, *The Lancet*, Volume 373, Issue 9668, pages 1041 – 1049, 21 March 2009



Source: Youth in the Palestinian Territory: A Statistical Picture, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006, (Arabic)

sports and exercise – activities proven to reduce chronic disease rates and enhance mental wellbeing. A high school student from Rafah explained to Sharek: *“when I was a child I used to do dabka, now I am prevented because I am older.”*<sup>242</sup>

## 5.2 The Health and Wellbeing of Young Palestinians: key indicators

In many countries, health data fail to monitor trends in youth health and wellbeing. The Palestinian Authority, through the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, is therefore to be commended for periodically collecting and disseminating youth disaggregated data on a range of health indicators including sexual

<sup>242</sup> Sharek focus group, 15 – 20 year-olds, Rafah district, 18 July 2009

and reproductive health awareness, disability and chronic disease rates and smoking rates. Palestinian and international academics and health practitioners have also published extensively on the mental health impacts of occupation, violence, instability and humiliation on young Palestinians. In spite of these efforts, however, when contrasted with child, maternal and adult health, relatively little is known about the health of youth in the oPt. The majority of mental health studies focus their attentions on adolescents or younger children, and PCBS data, although useful in noting trends, fails to present evidence which is sufficiently detailed to inform policy prioritisation.

This section uses the limited evidence available to present a picture of the health status of young Palestinians. It also highlights areas in which further research is required in order to better inform youth focused health policy and ensure equitable attention to this group.

### **?How healthy do you feel**

In a 2008 national survey, 92 percent of 16 – 25 year-old Palestinians said they enjoy good health. Notably, only 86 percent of camp residents said they enjoy good health versus 93 percent of city and village residents. When asked about their mental health, the picture is considerably less rosy. Only 55 percent of respondents said they enjoy good mental health, 29 percent said they enjoy average mental health and a full 16 percent of respondents said their mental health is bad.<sup>2</sup>

#### **5.2.1 Chronic Disease Rates**

Over the past century, as in many other developing countries, an epidemiological transition has occurred in the oPt with non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes and cancer, overtaking communicable diseases as the main cause of morbidity and mortality.<sup>243</sup> As well as presenting major risks to their future health, this trend is already noticeably affecting young Palestinians. Between 2000 and 2004 (the latest figures available) chronic

<sup>243</sup> Abdullah Hussein et al, *Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes mellitus, and cancer in the occupied Palestinian territory*, The Lancet, Volume 373, Issue 9668, pages 1041 – 1049, 21 March 2009

disease rates among Palestinian youth increased nearly doubled.

**Table: Rise in youth chronic disease rates 2000 – 2004 (percentage of 15 – 29-year-olds who have a chronic disease requiring ongoing treatment)**

Year	Percentage
2000	1.1%
2004	2.1%

Source: Youth in the Palestinian Territory: A Statistical Picture, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006, (Arabic)

One of the major challenges in the treatment and prevention of chronic diseases in the oPt is the dearth of reliable data.<sup>244</sup> Further research is therefore urgently required in order to examine the causes of the rise in chronic disease rates among young Palestinians and to inform evidence based preventative and curative programmes. However, some limited information on youth behaviours commonly associated with rising chronic disease rates in other country contexts, such as smoking, physical inactivity and poor diet, is already

available. This information should be further examined as a matter of urgency and form the basis of further research.

*Smoking Rates:* Smoking rates remain high among young Palestinian males. In 2006, 17 percent of 15 – 29 year olds smoked.<sup>245</sup> Earlier 2004 data indicate that men smoke considerable more than women: 33 percent of 15 – 29 year old males smoked versus 1.4 percent of females in the same age group. This may be due to cultural norms which restrict women from smoking, although the stigma associated with young women smoking also makes underreporting of this activity likely.

*Obesity and Poor Diet:* Youth specific studies on obesity rates and dietary habits are unavailable. However, one unpublished study indicates that adolescents in the oPt are slightly overweight or obese (girls more than boys) compared with those in Arab countries.<sup>246</sup> These figures may

<sup>244</sup> Abdullah Hussein et al, *Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes mellitus, and cancer in the occupied Palestinian territory*, The Lancet, Volume 373, Issue 9668, pages 1041 – 1049, 21 March 2009

<sup>245</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *The Palestinian Family Health Survey, 2007 (Arabic)* [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/\\_PCBS/Downloads/book1416.pdf](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_PCBS/Downloads/book1416.pdf) (accessed 4 August 2009)

<sup>246</sup> Mikki N, unpublished and undated, cited in Abdullah Hussein et al, *Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes mellitus, and cancer in the occupied Palestinian territory*, The Lancet, Volume 373, Issue 9668, pages 1041 – 1049, 21 March 2009



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provide some indicator for obesity rates among youth.

*Physical Inactivity:* Again, youth specific studies on physical activity rates are unavailable. However, a 2007 study found that Palestinian adolescents are relatively inactive with Palestinian boys more active than Palestinian girls, and West Bank residents more active than their Gazan peers.<sup>247</sup> Participants in Sharek focus groups placed a great emphasis on the lack of opportunity to participate in sports and physical exercise. School age participants in Gaza said that physical education has been dropped from school curricula and several young women complained that cultural norms prevent them from participating in sports or dance.

Given the sharp rise in chronic disease rates among youth, primary prevention should be urgently addressed by the Palestinian Authority. Regrettably, the most recent national strategic health plan for 2008 – 2010 did not give adequate

attention to this major trend.<sup>248</sup> While further medical research must be conducted, certain preventative steps, based on other country experience, can be put in place now to promote healthier lifestyles and discourage the harmful health behaviours described above.

In terms of policy aimed at discouraging smoking, of significant interest is the reported decline in youth smoking rates between 2000 and 2004. The causes of this trend – which could include increased poverty, rising religiosity or heightened concerns with health – should be examined in order to inform effective anti-smoking policy. Changes must also be made at the macro level; while the PLC has passed laws for anti-smoking and public health, it has yet to introduce fiscal policies, differential taxation and subsidies, and enforced prohibition of smoking in public places, although the Government in Gaza has had success in enforcing a smoking ban in governmental buildings.

Greater attention must also be paid to

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247 Al Sabbah H, Vereecken C, Kolsteren P, Abdeen Z, Maes L, *Food habits and physical activity patterns among Palestinian adolescents: findings from the national study of Palestinian schoolchildren*, Public Health Nutrition 2007; 10: 739–46.

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248 Abdullah Hussein et al, *Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes mellitus, and cancer in the occupied Palestinian territory*, The Lancet, Volume 373, Issue 9668, pages 1041 – 1049, 21 March 2009

the promotion of healthier lifestyles. Young women remain restricted from sports activities in many socially conservative communities in the oPt; a major barrier to health that could be addressed through the expansion of affordable single-sex exercise facilities and public health awareness campaigns. Young Palestinians in the Gaza Strip also reported that sports activities have been dropped from school curricula; a development which necessitates an examination of health promotion within the education system.

### 5.2.2 Mental Health Indicators

Since March 2002 until the present, how many times have you experienced the following?

- House searched
- House shot at
- House bombed or shelled
- Shelling in the neighbourhood
- Beaten by the Israeli army
- Used as a human shield
- Exposed to tear gas
- Body searched
- Shot at or hit
- Detained or arrested
- Interrogated
- Saw stranger being killed

- Saw family member being killed
- Saw friend/neighbour killed

This checklist of exposure to violent and humiliating events employed in a recent youth mental health study provides some indication of the scale of distressing experiences young Palestinians are exposed to on an ongoing basis.<sup>249</sup> While academics and mental health practitioners will continue to debate the impact of conflicts, violence and wars on the mental health of the young, a growing body of evidence strongly suggests that exposure to violence and humiliation can lead to high levels of fear, stress, anxiety and depression as well as symptoms of physical illness. In the Palestinian setting, exposure to systematic violence, long-term suffering, collective humiliation and deep poverty is chronic and as a result, post-traumatic stress and other psychological and behavioural disorders are an emerging health priority, especially for the young.<sup>250</sup>

249 Rita Giacaman, Niveen M.E. Abu-Rmeileh, Abdullatif Hussein, Hana Saab, William Boyce, *Humiliation: the invisible trauma of war for Palestinian youth*, Public Health (2007) 121, 563–571

250 World Health Organisation, *Health Conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory including east Jerusalem and in the occupied Syrian Golan*, 14 May 2009

Successive studies have highlighted the short and long-term negative effects of ongoing occupation and violence on Palestinian youth, including fear, difficulty in concentrating, eating and sleeping disorders, irritability, and increased anti-social behaviour. A 2009 report found that Palestinian students experience the lowest levels of self-satisfaction compared with 35 other countries.<sup>251</sup> In, 'Humiliation: the invisible trauma of war for Palestinian youth,' Giacaman et al surveyed nearly 3,500 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students from Ramallah district and found that exposure to violence, trauma and humiliation is significantly associated with subjective health complaints. These young people reported feeling depressed or low, irritable, nervous and dizzy, and also reported physical symptoms such as stomach ache, backache and sleeping difficulties. Among Palestine refugee children in the Gaza Strip the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder after major traumatic experiences is high. After a bombing in El-Bureij

refugee camp (central Gaza Strip) in February 2008, 68 percent of UNRWA students in the camp had symptoms consistent with the disorder. After the Israeli invasion of northern Gaza in March 2008, 39,000 Palestine refugee students were screened for psychosocial disorders and 94 percent showed significant post-traumatic reactions and the potential for developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>252</sup> The long-term impact of Operation Cast Lead, the latest and most destructive of Israel's offensives against the Gaza Strip, combined with continued closure, can only be imagined: *"I live in constant misery. I could stay in Gaza forever. Why bother getting 95 percent in the Tawjihi if I'm not going to be able to travel to study and if my father can't pay for the university fees."*<sup>253</sup>

As well as being highly distressing for Palestinian youth themselves, deteriorating mental health indicators among Palestine's future leaders have major implications for the whole of society. Young people, and especially young men, exposed to traumatic experiences are more

251 Giacaman R, Khatib R, Shabaneh L, Ramlawi A, Sabri B, Sabatinelli G, Khawaja M, Laurant T, *Health status and health services in the occupied Palestinian territory*, The Lancet, March 2009

252 Zaqout I. Community Mental Health Programme March 2008 Monthly Report.

253 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

likely to display aggressive and violent behaviour.<sup>254</sup> Palestinian youth exposed to regular traumatic experiences are also more likely to withdraw from social interaction in wider society.<sup>255</sup>

Some researchers have also expressed concern about the potential link between the indignities of ongoing humiliation and the 'hunger for retaliation'; feelings which can lead to disastrous consequences not only among the young people who have been humiliated but also for civilian populations on both sides of conflicts.<sup>256</sup>

## 5.5 Health Interventions for Young Palestinians

Progress in the health status of young Palestinians is possible. It should start with a commitment by all duty holders to protect and advance

the right to the highest attainable standard of health for all Palestinian citizens including youth; a right protected in international human rights law. It must also acknowledge that improvements in the health of Palestinian youth require parallel solutions: technical, economic, social and political. Expanding mental health services for young Palestinians will remain ineffectual as long as Israeli forces are allowed to break international law at will and humiliate, detain, impoverish and launch catastrophic military offensives against the Palestinian people. Extending health services to the out of reach in Gaza will have limited effect as hospitals continue to run out of basic supplies as a result of Israel's blockade. In parallel to applying political pressure aimed at upholding basic rights, urgent social and technical interventions can be implemented. Health promotion in schools and local communities should be stepped up, access to sports and exercise facilities expanded and youth focused mental and physical health services extended.

<sup>254</sup> World Health Organisation, *Health Conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory including east Jerusalem and in the occupied Syrian Golan*, 14 May 2009

<sup>255</sup> Barber, Brian K., *Political Violence, Social Integration and Youth Functioning: Palestinian Youth from the Intifada*, *Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 259–280 (2001)

<sup>256</sup> Rita Giacaman, Niveen M.E. Abu-Rmeileh, Abdullatif Husseini, Hana Saab, William Boyce, *Humiliation: the invisible trauma of war for Palestinian youth*, *Public Health* (2007) 121, 563–571



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### 5.5.1 Health Promotion

*We need organizations to concentrate more on the health awareness campaigns*<sup>257</sup>.

Health promotion has been defined as “the process of enabling people to increase control over and improve their health.”<sup>258</sup> It focuses on prevention rather than consequences and cures. Health promotion is particularly important for young Palestinians as the region has generally made the epidemiological transition from infections to chronic diseases and up to 50 percent of these can be prevented by behaviour change.<sup>259</sup>

Comprehensive information on national health promotion targeted at youth is scarce. The limited evidence available highlights two major areas of concern: ineffectual health promotion in schools and inappropriate health target area selection. Sharek focus group participants also noted the health education gap: “*we lack awareness*

*campaigns on even the smaller level, such as smoking and drugs.*”<sup>260</sup>

As the vast majority of young people in Palestine are attending school, it would be a missed opportunity not to provide correct information about health issues in school. Comprehensive information about the scope and quality of school health promotion programmes is unavailable, but figures available on the acquisition of sexual and reproductive health knowledge indicate that schools are not playing the role they could be (see Section 3). Statistics published in 2008 by the PCBS indicated that while 89 percent of young males (15 – 29 years) know of three changes occurring for males during puberty only 14 percent acquired this information through teachers.<sup>261</sup> Slightly lower numbers of females (83 percent) know of three changes occurring for females during puberty and of these only 11 percent said they acquired this information through teachers. Instead, these young people are learning about key

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<sup>257</sup> Sharek focus group, 17 – 21 year-olds, Salfeet, 9 July

<sup>258</sup> Ottawa Charter 1986

<sup>259</sup> Abdullah Hussein et al, *Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes mellitus, and cancer in the occupied Palestinian territory*, The Lancet, Volume 373, Issue 9668, pages 1041 – 1049, 21 March 2009

<sup>260</sup> Sharek focus group, 18 – 22 year olds, Abu Dis, 14 July 2009

<sup>261</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (Press Release), *Youth in the Palestinian Territory: Statistical Indicators*, 12 August 2009 <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/desktopmodules/newsscrollEnglish/newsscrollView.aspx?ItemID=664&mID=11170> (accessed 29 August 2009)

health issues through friends, books and family.

There is also some evidence to suggest that target areas for health promotion are being determined not by the real needs of young Palestinians but by donor agendas at the global level. Significant funding continues to be ploughed into youth-targeted HIV awareness and prevention programmes in a society where HIV transmission rates remain negligible.<sup>262</sup> For instance, UNICEF's 2009 adolescent programme for the oPt includes HIV/AIDS education but fails to mention nutrition education.<sup>263</sup>

While the importance of halting the global HIV/AIDS epidemic cannot be understated, equitable attention must be paid to the more immediate health risks facing Palestinian youth – spiralling chronic disease rates and deteriorating mental health. Young Palestinians themselves are significantly more concerned about the health risks of pollution, unclean water and expired food than they are about communicable diseases.<sup>264</sup>

262 Population Reference Bureau, *Time to Intervene: Preventing the Spread of HIV/AIDS in the Middle East and North Africa* (undated)

263 <http://www.unicef.org/oPt/adolescents.html> (accessed 20 August 2009)

264 Palestinian Human Security Survey (Unpublished)

### 5.5.2 Access to Health Services: coverage and quality

In the last 15 years, the numbers of hospitals, hospital beds and primary health care centres in the oPt have increased significantly.<sup>265</sup> This is a testament to remarkable Ministry of Health efforts to upgrade and expand the healthcare system infrastructure by institution building and human resource development upon inheriting a massively neglected health care system from the Israeli occupation authorities in 1994.

In spite of these efforts, in 2004, 28 percent of 15 – 29 year olds remained without any form of health insurance. Higher numbers of young Gazans (92 percent) and young refugee camp residents (94 percent) had health insurance than West Bank residents and village and city dwellers due to the availability of UNRWA coverage. More recent comparable figures are unavailable but when asked in a 2009 survey about health insurance coverage, 21 percent of 18 – 25 year olds said that no members of their

265 Giacaman R, Khatib R, Shabaneh L, Ramlawi A, Sabri B, Sabatinelli G, Khawaja M, Laurance T, *Health status and health services in the occupied Palestinian territory*, The Lancet, March 2009

household have coverage and 7 percent said that only some members of their household have coverage. Also of significant concern, is that in a 2006 survey, 3 percent of youth – perhaps the very poorest – said that they do not seek medical attention when ill.<sup>266</sup> Several Sharek focus participants expressed concerns about the high costs of healthcare: *“Hospital costs are ridiculous... going to the hospital to receive treatment, do x-rays, colored pictures as well as the price of the medicine.”*<sup>267</sup>

The quality of health care services available to young Palestinians must also be examined. When asked in a 2009 survey whether they and their household members normally received appropriate treatment, over a third, (35 percent), said no. The reasons given for this assertion overwhelmingly related to the unavailability of local services; 26 percent said there was an absence of required treatment in their area and 23 percent said there was an absence of required health services in their area. The other major reasons given were poor health services (18 percent)

266 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Youth in the Palestinian Territory: A Statistical Picture*, April 2006 (in Arabic)

267 Sharek focus group, 17 – 21 year-olds, Salfeet, 9 July

and the high cost of treatment (14 percent). These concerns were also highlighted in Sharek focus groups, both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip: *“Our doctors are not qualified enough to deal with severe injuries,” said a youth from Salfeet and another pointed out that, “there are no places for physical therapy.”*<sup>268</sup>

### 5.5.3 Access to Mental Health Services

*“The key to promoting youth mental health is through strengthening of the fundamental nurturing qualities of the family system and community networks while explicitly acknowledging the rights of young people.”*<sup>269</sup>

There are no statistics on access to mental health services targeted at youth; however, in Sharek focus groups in the Gaza Strip, nearly all of the participants stressed an urgent need for such services. Participants from North Gaza, an area subject to regular violent Israeli incursions, were particularly emphatic. Some West Bank participants also noted

268 Sharek focus group, 17 – 21 year-olds, Salfeet, 9 July

269 Patel, V, Fischer A.J., Hetrick S. & McGorry P, Mental health of young people: a global public-health challenge. *Lancet* **369**, 1302–1313, 2007

this service gap. In a society where stigma remains attached to seeking psychological help – *“people think that if you need a psychologist, you must be a mad person,”* explained a young person from North Gaza - the frankness with which these young people appealed for psychological support was surprising: *“We need psychological help. We need to get rid of the negative stereotypes around this issue. I can’t find psychological support.”*<sup>270</sup>

While young Palestinians living throughout the oPt are regularly exposed to highly distressing experiences, in the last four years, the scale of extreme violence levelled against young Gazans has been immense. Since the implementation of Israel’s unilateral disengagement plan in 2005, Israeli forces have launched countless incursions and several major invasions, killing hundreds and injuring thousands: between September 2005 – September 2006 Israeli attacks killed 525 Palestinians and injured 1,527<sup>271</sup>; during Operation Summer Rains (June – September 2006) Israeli

attacks killed 256 Palestinians and injured 848<sup>272</sup>; during Operation Autumn Clouds (November 2006) Israeli attacks killed over 400 Palestinians<sup>273</sup>; and in Operation Cast Lead, Israeli attacks killed at least 1,409 Palestinians.<sup>274</sup> These military offensives are exposing thousands of young Palestinians to extraordinary life experiences with potentially devastating mental health consequences.

270 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

271 OCHA, *Gaza Situation Report* (9 Nov. 2006): [www.ochaopt.org/documents/OCHA\\_Gaza\\_Situation\\_Report\\_8\\_nov\\_2006\\_eng.pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/OCHA_Gaza_Situation_Report_8_nov_2006_eng.pdf)

272 OCHA, *Gaza Strip Situation Report* (10 Oct. 2006): [www.ochaopt.org/documents/GazaStrip\\_10Oct06.pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/GazaStrip_10Oct06.pdf)

273 OCHA, *Protection of Civilians Monthly Tables*, [www.ochaopt.org/poc/POC\\_Monthly\\_Tables\\_October\\_2008.zip](http://www.ochaopt.org/poc/POC_Monthly_Tables_October_2008.zip) (last visited 20 Jun. 2009)

274 Al Mezan, *Cast Lead Offensive in Numbers* (14 Jun. 2009): <http://www.mezan.org/upload/8941.pdf>



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## The Impact of Israeli Military Attacks on Young Gazans

*"I still have lots of nightmares picturing the dead bodies of my family. I still live in that moment and I'll never forget."*

Testimony of Noor Salha, a 15-year-old survivor of an Israeli missile attack on his home on 9 January 2009.

*"It all happened really quickly. I heard the deafening sound of the rocket and ran as fast as I could to the house. I couldn't see anything except a fire ball and a dark cloud of dust and smoke. I was shocked when I saw the house. It was a huge wreck. Stones and bits of flesh were thrown around everywhere. None of my family members were there. It was really dark and the electricity was off because of the explosion.*

*I reached what used to be the entrance to our house. My brother Diya'...was lying still on the stairs. I smelled a strange smell and had the strangest feeling I've ever had. I couldn't reach his body because of the rubble...I tried to keep hold of myself and look for the others. I found my mother's body lying a few metres away. My sister Rana was beside her, and on her left side were the bodies of my aunt Fatima and my sister Rola. My brother Baha'...was next to them. I couldn't think what to do. The world seemed to have stopped.*

*I started screaming and calling for help. My two young uncles who had left the house with me got there first, then a number of neighbours started to gather...I had a strange feeling I don't know how to describe...*

*At around 4:00am I went back to the place and saw ambulance workers and neighbours looking for pieces of my family members' bodies. I saw them when they found my brother's [Baha'] head near Al-Herthani School and my sister's [Rola] head near the fence of a nearby house. I followed my family to Kamal Odwan Hospital. I was told there that my mother, my aunt and my sisters Diya', Baha', Rana and Rola had all been killed and Rasha was injured...I still have lots of nightmare picturing the dead bodies of my family. I still live in that moment and I'll never forget.*

Given the scale of distressing experiences to which young Palestinians are regularly exposed, urgent efforts must be made to expand and make accessible appropriate mental health services

to affected youth.

The word 'appropriate' is key here. A recent adolescent mental health study strongly indicates that the relevance of current psychosocial programming

must be examined. In 'Normalising the Abnormal,' Giacaman et al argue that international donors have imposed on the oPt a model of what is acceptable psychosocial programming based on a model developed in Western countries. They suggest that since the post-*intifada* shift to emergency rather than development programmes, international donors have imported intervention methods designed to mitigate against post-traumatic stress disorder which provide local staff with short training programmes and limited follow-up. They caution that this approach neglects culturally appropriate community responses which may be more beneficial than individual counselling and runs the risk of distorting the 'social suffering of war into *individual* illness.'<sup>275</sup>

Giacaman et al also stress that the capacity to make 'life as normal as possible,' can bolster the resilience of young Palestinians to distressing events. As discussed in Section 2, expanding opportunities for young people to engage in normal activities

such as sports, cultural activities, and civic life has the potential to significantly enhance the health of young Palestinians.

## 5.6 Summary

Young Palestinians today face significant risks to their health and well-being. The State of Israel bears primary responsibility; through consistently violating international human rights and humanitarian law in its actions vis a vis Palestinian civilians, the physical and psychological well-being of young Palestinians continues to deteriorate as violence and insecurity clouds their daily reality. Palestinian policy-makers also have a role to play; first and foremost through ensuring the production and dissemination of youth disaggregated health data capable of informing evidence-based policy and service provision. In the interim, health promotion and curative services should be scaled up, based on existing national health data.

<sup>275</sup> Rita Giacaman, Ghada Naser and Will Boyce, *Normalising the Abnormal: Palestinian youth and the contradictions of resilience in protracted conflict*, Health and Social Care in the Community (2008) 16 (3), 291–298





On the occasion of  
**International Volunteer**  
5<sup>th</sup> December  
**Volunteers for the MDGs**  
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## 6. Justice and Security



## 6 Justice and Security

Issues relating to justice and security have a fundamental impact on the lives of youth. In Palestine, as will be discussed below, justice and security affect virtually every aspect of a youth's life, from civil and political freedoms to personal security, from the ability to find a job to the choice of who to associate with. Currently, there are three major bodies responsible for issues relating to justice and security: the State of Israel as the Occupying Power, the government in the West Bank (effectively controlled by Fatah), and the government in the Gaza Strip (effectively controlled by Hamas).

The State of Israel is omnipresent, controlling or affecting virtually every aspect of daily life in the oPt. Israel is responsible for serious and consistent violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, crimes which have a direct impact on the lives and well-being of Palestinian youth. Israel's control of movement (both internal and external), has a devastating impact, *inter alia*, on the

Palestinian economy, and Palestinian's legitimate rights to education, health, and association. Constant incursions and frequent offensives expose youth to death, injury and detention, while checkpoints and routine harassment cause frustration and the denial of basic human dignity.<sup>276</sup>

Although the illegal occupation affects all segments of Palestinian society, it is youth who bear the brunt of its burden. Youth, and male youth in particular, are specifically targeted and profiled by Israeli forces; *inter alia*, by the imposition of extensive travel restrictions. In the West Bank, since the outbreak of the second *intifada*, young men and women between the ages of 18 and 29, have comprised 1,144 (52.9 percent) of the 2,162 deaths arising as a result of Israeli actions; when this calculation is expanded to include under 18s, the percentage rises to 71.3 percent.<sup>277</sup>

Youth are also most likely to be involved in frontline resistance

<sup>276</sup> See further, ICHR, Status of Human Rights in the Palestinian-controlled Territories, 2008; PCHR, Annual Report, 2008; DCI-Palestine, Child Rights Situation Analysis: Right to Protection in the occupied Palestinian territory – 2008, (2008); Yesh Din, Backyard Proceedings, 2007.

<sup>277</sup> PCBS, Killed Palestinians (Martyrs) in Al-Aqsa Uprising (Intifafa), by District of Residence, Age Group and Sex, 2008.

activity. During the 27 December 2008 – 18 January 2009 Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip, youth accounted for 65.5 percent of the total combatant casualties. This figure increases to 89.7 percent if the calculation is expanded to include young persons between the ages of 15 and 29.<sup>278</sup>

In recent years, following the legislative elections of January 2006, and the internal fighting which culminated in the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, the PNA and Palestine itself has become fragmented. There are now two *de facto* governmental authorities in Palestine, the Hamas-dominated government in the Gaza Strip, and the Fatah-dominated government in the West Bank. Responsibility for the lives and well-being of Palestinian youth is thus fragmented, and two different regimes now regulate youth life. In addition, internal violence and political repression have become commonplace, with a devastating effect on the lives and well being of youth, and the unity of the Palestinian

liberation movement.<sup>279</sup>

Issues surrounding the impact of the Israeli occupation and the internal division have been analysed and discussed elsewhere in great detail; these findings will not be repeated herein. Rather, this section will focus on the key issues identified by youth themselves; this chapter is thus heavily based on survey and focus group findings, supplemented where necessary by secondary research.

This chapter is divided into four sections; rule of law and justice, the internal division, the impact of the occupation, and the limiting effects of insecurity.

## 6.1 The Rule of Law and Justice

*“... if there is no security it means that there is no protection. Every person is vulnerable.”<sup>280</sup>*

Palestinian law contains a number

<sup>278</sup> PCHR, List of Victims of Operation Cast Lead, 2009. Available at: <http://pchr.org/files/PressR/English/2008/19-03-2009.html>

<sup>279</sup> See further, PCHR, *Annual Report*, 2008; PCHR, *Black Pages in the Absence of Justice: Report on Bloody Fighting in the Gaza Strip from 7 to 14 June 2007*, 2007; Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies, *Public Freedoms in the Palestinian Authority Territories*, Semi-Annual Report, First Report 1/1/2008 – 30/6/2008, (2008); United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *The Humanitarian Monitor: occupied Palestinian territory*, Number 29, (September 2008).

<sup>280</sup> Sharek focus group, 18 – 26 year olds, Halhul, 20 July 2009

of provisions and safeguards with respect to the protection and respect for human rights and individual freedoms. For example, Article 10 of the Basic Law states that, “basic human rights and liberties shall be protected and respected” and that “[t]he Palestinian National Authority shall work without delay to become a party to regional and international declarations and covenants that protect human rights.” However, in the oPt today there is a significant divergence between the standards which the law enshrines, and the application of this law; “there will be no justice with the existence of some unenforced Palestinian laws.”<sup>281</sup> The autonomy of the security services and the lack of judicial independence have been highlighted by human rights organizations as key areas of concern.

In this regard, one focus group participant noted that, *“when it comes to justice, we have a court system, with defined penalties for illegal acts which gives a feeling of justice,”*<sup>282</sup> her sentence was finished by a colleague, who added that *“but the court and*

<sup>281</sup> Sharek focus group, 18 – 22 year olds, Abu Dis, 14 July 2009

<sup>282</sup> Sharek focus group, 18 – 26 year olds, Halhul, 20 July 2009

*law systems are corrupt, which leaves us facing a malfunctioning system that provides justice to certain people only.”*<sup>283</sup>

Ibrahim Barghouti, Director of the Palestinian Centre for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession has noted that “the independence of the judiciary is one of the key national challenges, and may be the key to national security”,<sup>284</sup> while Isam Arouri, Director of the Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Centre, emphasized that “the whole judiciary is ruled by the executive authority.”<sup>285</sup> The Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) has confirmed the general perception, stating that “all parties have dealt with the judiciary in a politicised manner.”<sup>286</sup> Equally, the autonomy and impunity with

<sup>283</sup> Sharek focus group, 18 – 26 year olds, Halhul, 20 July 2009

<sup>284</sup> PCHR interview with Ibrahim Barghouti, Director, Palestinian Centre for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession, Ramallah, 21 Dec. 2008. Quoted in, PCHR, *Respect for Human Rights in the occupied Palestinian territory: An Internal Palestinian Analysis*, UNDP Human Development Report Background Paper, 2009.

<sup>285</sup> PCHR interview with Isam Arouri, Director of the Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Centre, Ramallah, 17 Dec. 2008. Quoted in, PCHR, *Respect for Human Rights in the occupied Palestinian territory: An Internal Palestinian Analysis*, UNDP Human Development Report Background Paper, 2009.

<sup>286</sup> ICHR, *The Status of Human Rights in Palestine: The Thirteenth Annual Report*, Executive Summary, 9, (2008).

which the security services operate (both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) has resulted in numerous human rights violations; indeed, security services, most notably in the West Bank, now often operate independently of the judicial system. Sahar Francis, Director of Addameer, explained that “if you can get a release from the court, the security services/ different agencies, they don’t apply it; they don’t respect the decision of the Palestinian courts.”<sup>287</sup>

As a result of the internal division, security services are heavily engaged in a crackdown on political opponents, the government in the West Bank arrests, detains and intimidates Hamas supporters under their jurisdiction, while the government in the Gaza Strip does the same to Fatah supporters there. The vast majority of documented arbitrary arrest and torture cases concern political activists or supporters from the opposing party; “*There are lots of political arrests. It’s a result of the political situation. You can speak to the human rights organizations, or the Red*

287 PCHR interview with Sahar Francis, Director of Addameer, Ramallah, 17 Dec. 2008. Quoted in, PCHR, *Respect for Human Rights in the occupied Palestinian territory: An Internal Palestinian Analysis*, UNDP Human Development Report Background Paper, 2009.

*Cross, there are organizations you can go to, but no-one can really help, ... there is no way to help people.”*<sup>288</sup> Human Rights Watch note that they have “documented more than one dozen cases, and heard of many more, in which the authorities in Gaza or the West Bank released a detainee after forcing him to sign a document – often after torture – saying he would cut ties with the rival organization”.<sup>289</sup> As noted previously, it is young people who make up the majority of factions’ front line activists, consequently they are typically the group within society most directly affected; “*I’m very sorry. I need to say this. They tortured me in a very bad way more than one time. ... What did I do? Why was I jailed? Why was I tortured?*”<sup>290</sup>

Young people acknowledged the problems faced by the governments, noting the difficulties associated with enforcing the rule of law and justice under occupation, nonetheless this was not felt to be an excuse for inaction: “*Under occupation it is difficult to have an effective and fair justice system, but it*

288 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

289 Human Rights Watch, *Internal Fight: Palestinian Abuses in Gaza and the West Bank*, 10, (July, 2008).

290 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009



*is not impossible.*"<sup>291</sup>

Youth also expressed frustration at the lack of youth specific legislation within Palestinian law, *"In the constitution, the rights of young people are not upheld. And we're the biggest group in society."*<sup>292</sup> When asked who should bear responsibility for the rights of youth, the majority of focus groups participants felt that ultimate responsibility lay with the government, as noted by one participant, *"The officials themselves [must take responsibility], the education ministry, civil society, the PLC. Where are the rights of Palestinian youth? Even through one third of Palestinian society is youth, no-one takes responsibility."*<sup>293</sup> The reality was bluntly underlined by another respondent from the Gaza Strip, *"Do our fundamental rights exist in Gaza? The law doesn't provide our rights."*<sup>294</sup>

### 6.1.1 The Lack of Faith in the Government's Ability to Protect

*"We have been maintaining justice in our community internally..."*<sup>295</sup>

The perceived inability of the government to enforce the rule of law, and the associated impunity of the security forces, are key factors undermining confidence in the ability of the government to protect, and in the rule of law in general; *"the government is trying to maintain security, but we don't rely on them."*<sup>296</sup> The consequences of this perception are discussed further in Section 2 above. Consequently, large segments of society are reported to be turning away from the government, and the traditional legal system, either towards the family/clan, or traditional justice systems. For example, tribal notables have reported that their power and influence has increased since the advent of the PNA and, significantly, that "security officials seek their assistance in cases of social dispute, especially those involving breaches of "family honor [*sic*]." <sup>297</sup>

291 Sharek focus group, 18 – 22 year olds, Abu Dis, 14 July 2009.

292 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

293 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

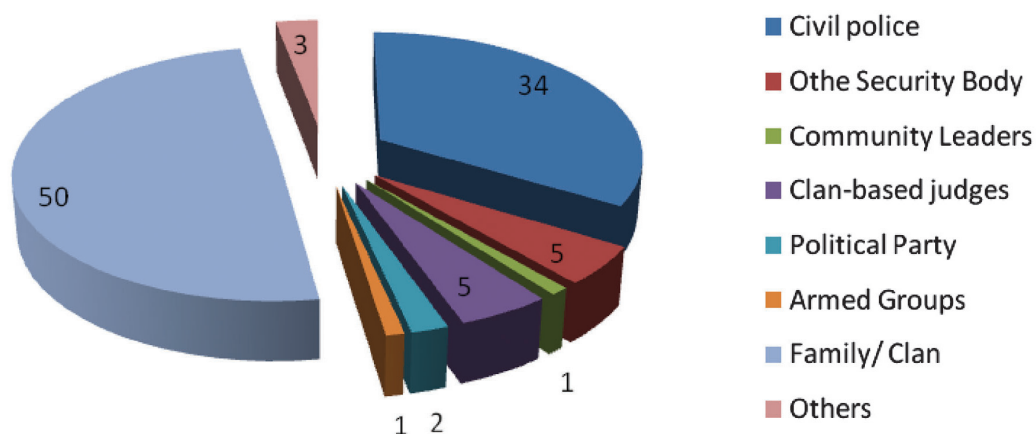
294 Sharek focus group, 20 – 24 year olds, Khan Younis, 18 July 2009

295 Sharek focus group, 17 – 21 year-olds, Salfeet, 9 July

296 Sharek focus group, 17 – 21 year-olds, Salfeet, 9 July

297 Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Mapping and Analyzing the Landscape of Femicide in Palestinian Society*, Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, 49, (2004).

**If you were to be a victim of a violent crime, who would you contact to seek protection? 18 -24 year olds**

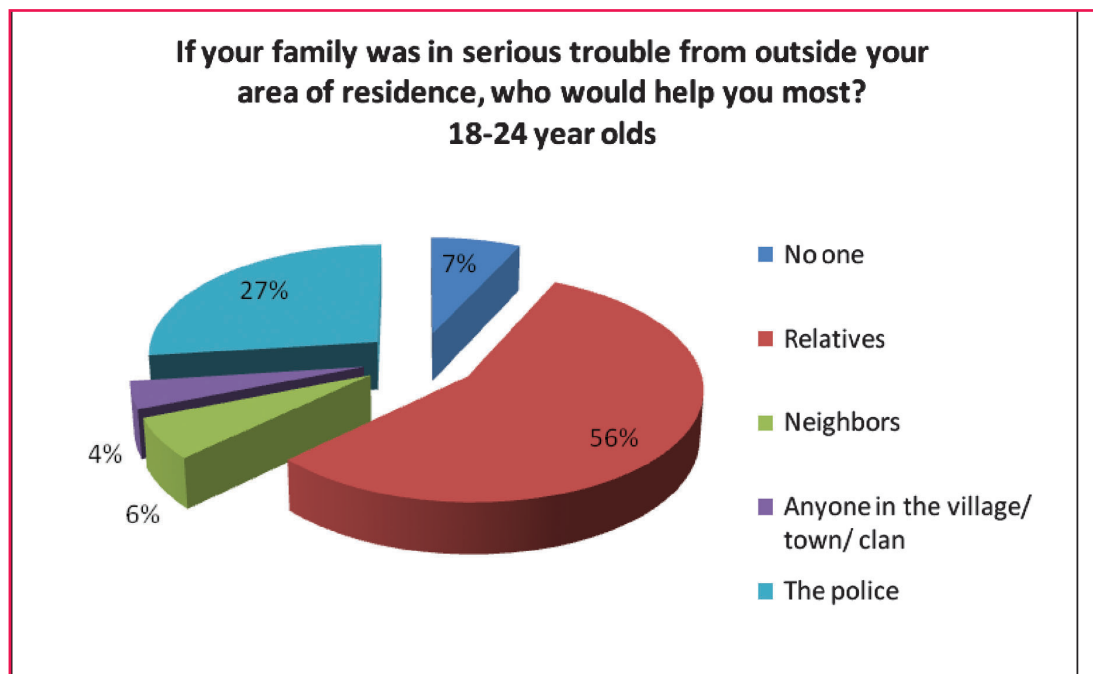


Source: UNDP Human Development Report Survey, 2009.

Survey results, and focus group findings, support this conclusion. A survey conducted for the UNDP Human Development Report 2009, indicated that in the event of a violent crime, most respondents would turn to their family, or clan based judges (47 percent), while only 40 percent would consult the civil police.

Equally, when asked, 'if your family was in serious trouble from outside your area of reside, who would help

you most', a significant majority of youth stated that they would rely on relatives (56 percent), while only 27 percent mentioned the police. Findings were similar if the conflict was to arise from within the local community; 51 percent would turn to relatives, 7 percent to neighbours, 4 percent to anyone in the village/ town/ camp, and 31 percent to the police; thus an overwhelming 73 percent would not choose the police as a first resort.



Source: UNDP Human Development Report Survey, 2009.

Within the focus groups, West Bank participants were cautiously optimistic towards the role of the police; “police are starting to play a role in providing protection to us, but they need to gain our trust first.”<sup>298</sup> In the Gaza Strip, however, participants’ attitudes towards the police were split – presumably along factional lines – with youth either receptive towards the police, “we were robbed before, and we went to the police station,

<sup>298</sup> Sharek focus group, 18-22 year olds, Ramallah, 12 July 2009

they helped us,”<sup>299</sup> or more roundly negative, “This society nowadays is a violent society. It is a rare thing when people go to the police station. A lot of people are beaten, and taken from their homes.”<sup>300</sup> The general attitude towards the police, among those not regarded as being affiliated to Hamas, was that “the police themselves are from Hamas, they are the ones affecting

<sup>299</sup> Sharek focus group, 15 – 20 year-olds, Rafah district, 18 July 2009

<sup>300</sup> Sharek focus group, 15 – 20 year-olds, Rafah district, 18 July 2009

*us, how can we go to the police.”*<sup>301</sup> It must be noted that, this apparent optimism towards the police in the West Bank is not necessarily a true reflection of the reality, as most of the focus group participants were not obviously affiliated to Hamas, if they were – particularly in light of recent government in the West Bank attacks on Hamas and Hamas affiliates<sup>302</sup> – it is presumed that results would more closely reflect those from the Gaza Strip.

The general trend away from the police, in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the accompanying feelings of frustration were expressed by two focus group participants, *“If there is a problem, we don’t go to the police, we’re a family we solve things together”*,<sup>303</sup> and *“We try to keep issues as limited and as low-key as possible. An issue should be solved on the family*

*level, if things get out of hand, then we go to known people in the community, and if nothing works out then we go to the law, court and police.”*<sup>304</sup>

### 6.1.2 Gender

Within Palestine today, women are the victims of significant levels of gender based discrimination. This discrimination is the result of three principal factors: a prevailing patriarchal culture, the existence of discriminatory laws which condone and perpetuate the second-class status of women in society, and the virtual absence of institutionalised policies capable of providing protection, justice and redress.<sup>305</sup> Frustration at the level of discrimination inherent in Palestinian law was expressed by focus group participants, *“there is great inequality based on gender. Even the written law is not just between men and women.”*<sup>306</sup> Existing legislation ignores a woman’s individual autonomy, placing it in the hands of her male relatives or guardians. Human rights organizations have noted that the

301 Sharek focus group, 20 – 24 year olds, Khan Younis, 18 July 2009

302 PCHR Press Release, *PCHR Calls for an End to Political Arrests and for Measures to Ensure the Success of Unity Dialogue*, 30 June 2009; Al Mezan Press Release, *Al Mezan Center Regrets the Death of a Man in Detention at the Hebron Intelligence Prison; Calls for Investigation into the Incident*, 16 June 2009; PCHR Press Release, *PCHR Condemns Arrests of Hamas’ Members and Supporters in the West Bank; Director of the Office of PLC Members from the Change and Reform Bloc Continues to be Detained*, **3 June 2009**.

303 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

304 Sharek focus group, 17 – 21 year-olds, Salfeet, 9 July

305 Human Rights Watch, *A Question of Security: Violence against Palestinian Women and Girls*, 7, (November 2006).

306 Sharek focus group, 18-22 year olds, Ramallah, 12 July 2009



contemporary legal framework is the single most significant obstacle to the furtherance of women's rights in the oPt; as long as the existing laws remain in place, it is believed that changing societal perceptions will remain a monumental if not impossible task<sup>307</sup>. As noted by one focus group participant with respect to 'honour' crimes, *"with such articles the law encourages this tragedy."*<sup>308</sup>

Although Palestinian law discriminates against women with respect to issues such as marriage and divorce, domestic violence and abuse, and child custody, it is perhaps 'honour' crimes and the associated legal provisions which most graphically illustrate the brutal consequences of the existing law. Although a difficult concept to define, a woman's 'honour' is perceived as being related to chastity, modesty and overall behaviour. While it is virtually impossible to list daily practices necessary for the preservation of 'honour', research indicated that it may be tarnished by "acts as simple and innocent as

being away from the family's home to a perceived sexual misconduct."<sup>309</sup> One young woman in the Gaza Strip was recently murdered on grounds of 'honour' for possessing a mobile phone.<sup>310</sup> Any attempts by a woman to assert her independence in matters of engagement, marriage or divorce, may also be construed as a violation of 'family honour'.

'Honour killing' – murder in response to a perceived 'honour' violation – is regarded as "the most tragic consequence and graphic illustration of deeply embedded, society-wide gender discrimination."<sup>311</sup> As noted by one male focus group participant, "culture and traditions are unfair, especially when it comes to honour crimes. The society always blames the female."<sup>312</sup> One of the most straightforward applications of this phenomenon relates to the crime of

309 Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Mapping and Analyzing the Landscape of Femicide in Palestinian Society, Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, 9, (2004).

310 Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, *Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights Condemns Killing of Woman in 'honor crime' and Calls for the Perpetrators of Such Crimes to be Brought to Justice*, 24 July 2009.

311 Human Rights Watch, *A Question of Security: Violence against Palestinian Women and Girls*, 52, (November 2006).

312 Sharek focus group, 18-22 year olds, Ramallah, 12 July 2009

307 See, PCHR, *Respect for Human Rights in the occupied Palestinian territory: An Internal Palestinian Analysis*, UNDP Human Development Report Background Paper, 2009.

308 Sharek focus group, 18-22 year olds, Ramallah, 12 July 2009

adultery. As noted by PCHR:<sup>313</sup>

*A man who finds “his wife, or one of his [female] mahrams<sup>314</sup> committing adultery with somebody, and kills, wounds, or injures one or both of them, shall be exempt from liability [shall benefit from ‘udhr muhill, the exculpating excuse].”<sup>315</sup> Should the female in question be one of the perpetrator’s “female ascendants or descendants or sisters”,<sup>316</sup> the perpetrator shall benefit from the mitigating excuse, and be liable to a lesser penalty. The law applicable in the Gaza Strip also provides for a reduced sentence for the crime of murder committed in circumstances of adultery.<sup>317</sup> Additionally, the law provides for a reduced sentence with respect to a perpetrator who, in a “state of great fury” resulting from an unlawful act on the part of the victim, commits a crime.<sup>318</sup> Speaking on this provision one judge noted, under conditions of anonymity, that, in some cases “if*

*the crime was committed in a fit of fury, he gets released right away.”<sup>319</sup>*

## 6.2 Internal Division

*“... there will never be protection and justice with the division”<sup>320</sup>*

The internal division is a major source of insecurity for Palestinian youth. Survey results indicate that it is perceived as being the second largest cause of insecurity, behind the occupation.<sup>321</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that while the internal division was not a major focus of discussion in the West Bank, during the focus groups participants from the Gaza Strip focused almost exclusively on the internal division. While the occupation was mentioned, its impact was seen as secondary; the internal division had the biggest direct impact on day-to-day life. As noted by one focus group participant in Gaza, “The internal fight increased 100 percent the problems in our lives.”<sup>322</sup> Again, it must be noted that, with respect to the West Bank, these

313 PCHR, *Respect for Human Rights in the occupied Palestinian territory: An Internal Palestinian Analysis*, UNDP Human Development Report Background Paper, 2009.

314 Women whom the male in question is forbidden to marry, i.e. daughter, sister, and so on.

315 Jordanian Penal Code No. 16 (1960), article 340(i).

316 Jordanian Penal Code No. 16 (1960), article 340(ii).

317 Egyptian Penal Law No. 58 (1936), article 237.

318 Jordanian Penal Code No. 16 (1960), article 98.

319 Quoted in, Human Rights Watch, *A Question of Security: Violence against Palestinian Women and Girls*, 52, (November 2006).

320 Sharek focus group, 18 – 22 year olds, Abu Dis, 14 July 2009

321 UNDP Human Development Report Survey, 2009.

322 Sharek focus group, 20 – 24 year olds, Khan Younis, 18 July 2009.

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findings are not necessarily reflective of overall perceptions of youth. Had more West Bank participants been affiliated with Hamas, overall results may have been different, potentially coming more in line with the findings from the Gaza Strip.

It is evident, however, that – as a result of Israeli actions – the internal division has had a direct impact on the lives of all Gaza Strip residents, in a way that is perhaps not comparable to the situation in the West Bank. While internal freedoms are a significant issue, and will be addressed below, the illegal closure regime imposed by Israel following the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, has had an almost unimaginable impact on all aspects of life in Gaza. It has been the principal contributing factor to, *inter alia*, escalating poverty (currently at 80 percent), and youth unemployment (60 percent); perhaps most fundamentally, in terms of youth's outlook and optimism, the closure has isolated the Gaza Strip from the outside world. This has been noted as a major cause of despair among youth, blocking opportunities to travel for education, and trapping them within a 46

kilometre-long stretch of land; *"We have great capacities but there is siege. I have many abilities but no resources. The day of youth was in the past; I can't even get married today; I think about leaving; all the opportunities inside the country are closed."*<sup>323</sup>

The three principal issues identified with respect to the impact of the internal division are feelings of danger and insecurity, the negative effect on Palestinian unity and national liberation, and the negative impact on family and social relations; other issues – primarily relating to personal freedoms – will be discussed below.

Feelings of pervasive insecurity were bluntly explained by one focus group participant, *"I am afraid of the government parties. I don't know, maybe even if there is a unity government I will still be afraid of them."*<sup>324</sup> Youth reported personal incidents in which they had been directly affected, *"I'm very sorry. I need to say this. they tortured me in a very bad way more than one time. .... What did I do? Why was*

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323 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

324 Sharek focus group, 15 – 19 year olds, Gaza City, 11 July 2009

*I jailed? Why was I tortured?”*<sup>325</sup> All youth had been affected by the violence in some way, *“I saw friends fighting for the factions, if you’re part of the factions you can be killed.”*<sup>326</sup> As underlined by another participant, *“[Everything] comes back to the factions. There is no security.”*<sup>327</sup>

As noted previously, youth are believed to comprise the bulk of factions’ front-line activists. However, as noted in Section 2, youth felt that they were being used, *“they use the youth as a means of implementing their purpose. ... Each party used their youth, but in a negative way.”*<sup>328</sup> As emphasized by a focus group participant in the West Bank, *“Political parties deal with youth as tools, but there is no role for youth in these parties, and they are treated as chess pawns without being offered a chance. On the contrary, any youth participant that tries to stand and represent is faced by suppression from the political institutions.”*<sup>329</sup> Further, youth expressed fear at the violent and exclusive nature of factional

politics, *“There is a problem with party issues, if you belong to a party you must believe in all its acts, whether right or wrong. If you don’t belong to a party you will be killed, this is not good; it is good to have lots of parties, with lots of people involved.”*<sup>330</sup> This feeling of divisiveness was underlined by another participant, *“they spread the concept that if you don’t belong to our party, you are not with us.”*<sup>331</sup>

The divisive and exclusive nature of factional politics, as illustrated above, has had a negative impact on social interactions; *“the internal fight [has] affected social relations within families.”*<sup>332</sup> This reality was further expanded upon, *“the internal situation is dangerous. It’s dismantling society. I live in Beit Hanoun, when there is a death, the families go and give condolences. After the coup, the families became divided, each family goes to the families of the same factions, personal relations between friends, university friends, friends at work etc, these have stopped, or they’ve been damaged.”*<sup>333</sup> Another participant

325 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

326 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

327 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

328 Sharek focus group, 20 – 24 year olds, Khan Younis, 18 July 2009

329 Sharek focus group, 18 – 22 year olds, Abu Dis, 14 July 2009

330 Sharek focus group, 15 – 20 year-olds, Rafah district, 18 July 2009

331 Sharek focus group, 15 – 20 year-olds, Rafah district, 18 July 2009

332 Sharek focus group, 20 – 24 year olds, Khan Younis, 18 July 2009

333 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009



explained that, *“after the internal fight, when a person wants to propose, the parents ask him where he works, for Fatah or Hamas?”*<sup>334</sup> Friendships have also been affected, *“if I belong to a party, and a friend belongs to another party, the relations are changed after the internal fight. Relations aren’t as strong as before, because of party issues.”*<sup>335</sup>

As evidenced by the repeated failures of the national reconciliation talks in Cairo, and the increasing fragmentation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, internal division has been regarded as having a devastating impact on national unity, particularly with respect to issues of national liberation: *“we need to strengthen certain cultures, like national cultures, when we see marches, I see no Palestinian flag, just Hamas flags. It’s the same for Fatah marches, many people follow specific factions, I’m PFLP, I can’t even go to a Hamas march, even if it’s a national march. This dismantling of society is very big. And the division, it impacts a lot on youth.”*<sup>336</sup>

#### Youth expressed frustration at the

334 Sharek focus group, 15 – 20 year-olds, Rafah district, 18 July 2009

335 Sharek focus group, 15 – 20 year-olds, Rafah district, 18 July 2009

336 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

current situation, and the seemingly remote possibility of resolution, *“if all the countries in the world can’t change Hamas, how can we?”*<sup>337</sup> As emphasised by another participant, *“if the Hamas party and the Fatah party cannot have a solution between them, we as a people, what can we do?”*<sup>338</sup>

### 6.3 The Impact of the Occupation

The Israeli occupation is the principal cause of insecurity among Palestinian youth,<sup>339</sup> *“Occupation is a reality that never leaves our minds. We live with occupation each moment in our life, and it has the biggest role in shattering our hopes and dreams.”*<sup>340</sup> Its effects are widespread, and intrusive. For most, they can be felt on a daily basis, *“there is no security in our daily life, and it is proven by the arrests, vandalism, checkpoints, delays for hours and hours every day”*.<sup>341</sup>

337 Sharek focus group, 15 – 19 year olds, Gaza City, 11 July 2009

338 Sharek focus group, 15 – 20 year-olds, Rafah district, 18 July 2009

339 UNDP Human Development Report 2009, Survey.

340 Sharek focus group, 18 – 26 year olds, Halhul, 20 July 2009

341 Sharek focus group, 18 – 26 year olds, Halhul, 20 July 2009

The effects of the occupation are widespread and have been heavily documented. The pervasive impact of the occupation was eloquently expressed by one focus group participant, *“Occupation and occupation and occupation. Even though it is an overused cause, no one can deny that it stands in our way to progress. It imposes restrictions in all fields, education, economic conditions, aside from the entire psychological trauma that youth is exposed to.”*<sup>342</sup> In focus groups youth highlighted three major concerns, movement (internal in the West Bank, external in the Gaza Strip), education, and vulnerability/insecurity.

The presence of approximately 630 roadblocks, and manned and unmanned checkpoints in the West Bank, in addition to the 40-60 ‘flying’ (temporary) checkpoints erected by Israeli forces each week, has a significantly detrimental impact on youth’s freedom of movement, cutting them off from friends, relatives, education, recreation and so on; *“Occupation limits our transportation; I’m not talking about travelling outside the country, but*

<sup>342</sup> Sharek focus group, 17 – 21 year-olds, Salfeet, 9 July

*even between the villages and cities as well.”*<sup>343</sup> In addition, routine humiliation at checkpoints undermines youth’s legitimate right to live in basic human dignity. In the Gaza Strip, the closure and restrictions no external movement have a profound psychological effect: *“I live in constant misery. I could stay in Gaza forever.”*<sup>344</sup>

Youth’s right to education is also affected by the occupation; in 2008 ICHR estimated that 150 school days were lost as a result of Israeli actions, while checkpoints, the Wall, and other forms of harassment make travel to and from school or university difficult. The disruption to the education system may have a long-term impact on the lives of youth, *“Our education career is interrupted daily by the surrounding instabilities, so how do we expect our job careers to be?”*<sup>345</sup>

Feelings of vulnerability and insecurity were also pervasive, *“Israeli soldiers can come into any town, house and room they want at any time. They can arrest whoever they want, and*

<sup>343</sup> Sharek focus group, 18 – 22 year olds, Ramallah, 12 July 2009

<sup>344</sup> Sharek focus group, 15 – 19 year olds, Gaza City, 11 July 2009

<sup>345</sup> Sharek focus group, 18 – 22 year olds, Ramallah, 12 July 2009

*destroy anything they like.”*<sup>346</sup> In the Gaza Strip, feelings of insecurity were heightened as a result of the recent Israeli offensive, *“There is no guarantee that at any point an F16 won’t drop a bomb on you. The military posts on the borders, could destroy a house, even after the war, the killing has continued.”*<sup>347</sup>

There was a pervasive feeling of vulnerability with respect to the actions of Israeli forces, nowhere was deemed safe, and youth felt that there was no one capable of offering protection, *“No one can protect you against the occupation. Even the government needs protection in this case.”*<sup>348</sup> Additionally, the long standing nature of the occupation – which has now existed for over 61 years – has a devastating psychological impact, as discussed in Section 5; *“In the war [27 December 2008 – 18 January 2009], you felt the suffering that we’ve been feeling for years.”*<sup>349</sup>

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346 Sharek focus group, 18 – 26 year olds, Halhul, 20 July 2009

347 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

348 Sharek focus group, 17 – 21 year-olds, Salfeet, 9 July

349 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

## 6.4 The Limiting Effects of Insecurity

*“We are all trying to do things and we’re stopped; by family, politics, the conditions here, the lack of democracy. I can’t talk about what I want; we’re restricted by the reality.”*<sup>350</sup>

Insecurities arising from both the occupation and the internal division were identified in the focus groups as having a significantly limiting effect on youth; constraining their ability to act freely and independently, and to exercise personal autonomy. However, while in the West Bank restrictions on individual freedoms were primarily attributed to society and culture – *“one of the most important obstacles that youth face are the social and traditional practices”*<sup>351</sup> – in the Gaza Strip, the government was noted as having a direct and controlling impact on the lives of youth. As explained by one participant, *“Yesterday I went back to my house, at two o’clock, the police stopped me three times, what is your name, where were you, why are you late, why aren’t you in a car. There is nothing in our society, what could I be doing? Why would they act like this?”*<sup>352</sup>

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350 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

351 Sharek focus group, 18 – 22 year olds, Abu Dis, 14 July 2009

352 Sharek focus group, 15 – 19 year olds, Gaza City, 11 July 2009

The impact of governmental interference was found to have a widespread impact, affecting how youth conduct themselves (self-censorship), and the opportunities available to them in relation to work, social opportunities, and youth initiatives. As one youth noted, *"It is difficult to give your opinion, you may be heard by other persons, and that can be very dangerous."*<sup>353</sup> Youth felt that they were required to interact with members of Hamas, on fear of losing their jobs; *"I'm the one who is scared to go and say hi to a friend who is Hamas. But if I don't go and say hi, I'm afraid I'll lose my salary."*<sup>354</sup>

Governmental interference, and factional affiliation, was also noted as having a negative impact on social interaction – *"if we have a mixed group nowadays, Hamas may come and stop it"*<sup>355</sup> – and on the scope of initiatives available to youth; *"Hamas don't like the activities of lots of organisations, they think that they should be closed"*.<sup>356</sup> As explained by one focus group participant:

*"Once, we wanted to make a*

353 Sharek focus group, 15 – 19 year olds, Gaza City, 11 July 2009

354 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

355 Sharek focus group, 20 – 24 year olds, Khan Younis, 18 July 2009

356 Sharek focus group, 20 – 24 year olds, Khan Younis, 18 July 2009

*youth group, we coordinated and sent emails, and got support and agreement from a foreign country and an Arab country, we'd sent a letter to the Saudi king, it was an initiative for youth, the Saudi king said he wanted to help us, but we needed a licence from the Interior Ministry. We went to the Interior Ministry, they asked if we were Fatah or Hamas, we said we were neither, we were just Palestinian youth, they said, we don't care, we won't give you a licence unless you are Hamas. We got agreement from a foreign country, an Arab country, but what stopped us was the government here."*<sup>357</sup>

The current situation in the Gaza Strip also restricts youth's scope for political participation, *"All the parents refuse their children to be involved in such [political] activities, because they are afraid for them; they may get hurt."*<sup>358</sup>

The impact of politics, and the internal division is thus pervasive; *"everything you do is judged from a political way."*<sup>359</sup> The situation was bleakly stated *"You have only one choice, the Hamas*

357 Sharek focus group, 20 – 25 year-olds, North Gaza, 11 July 2009

358 Sharek focus group, 15 – 19 year olds, Gaza City, 11 July 2009

359 Sharek focus group, 18 – 22 year olds, Ramallah, 12 July 2009



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*government or the Fatah government.”<sup>360</sup>*

*“We don’t know where to receive the blows, from the occupation on one side, or from the internal political instability on another side, or from the society as well.”<sup>361</sup>*

## 6.5 Summary

It is presented that justice, security and the rule of law are fundamental to the attainment of human rights. The interconnected nature of the violations highlighted in this section, and problems discussed throughout this report, are illustrative in this regard. Until the illegal policies of the occupation regime, and the closure in particular, are ceased the economy cannot recover; employment and poverty cannot be effectively combated. Until the rule of law is enforced, youth will continue to fall victim to internal fighting and the abuses of the security forces; their rights to, *inter alia*, freedom of expression, and association will remain unfulfilled. Until illegal restrictions on freedom of movement are lifted, access to health and education cannot be guaranteed.

<sup>360</sup> Sharek focus group, 20 – 24 year olds, Khan Younis, 18 July 2009

<sup>361</sup> Sharek focus group, 18 – 22 year olds, Ramallah, 12 July 2009

As illustrated throughout this report, youth in Palestine face an unrelenting daily reality of occupation, deprivation and limitations on personal freedoms. They are denied for the freedom and space necessary to achieve empowerment; occupation, internal violence, and culture, all weigh heavily on their shoulders. The consequences of this reality could be disastrous.

Yet, that is not to say that there is no hope, or that nothing can be done. Youth in Palestine have shown their full potential for progressive, creative participation in society, given the opportunity they have the power to change society.

However, in the current reality they need assistance. Youth programmes and activities must be a priority, crucially, they must also be tailored to the specific needs of youth in Palestine today. The *status quo* cannot be allowed to persist. It limits the opportunities open to youth, constraining their creative potential and denying them their fundamental right to live as youth: to grow, to learn, and to develop.









A photograph of a city street scene. In the foreground, a concrete curb with red and white diagonal stripes is severely damaged and broken. Two men are walking on the sidewalk in the background. The scene is set in an urban environment with buildings and trees visible in the distance.

## **7. The Future Knocking at the Door?**



## 7 The Future Knocking at the Door?

In May 2009, Mohammed 'Abdul Fattahal-Samman,<sup>362</sup> and Mohammed Rasheed Yassin, 24, both from the *'Izziddin al-Qassam Brigades*, died in a shootout with Fatah security forces in the West Bank town of Qalqilia after attempts by relatives to persuade them to surrender failed.<sup>362</sup>

As if another warning sign were needed, in August 2009, Rafeeq Hassan Abu Shbekah, 20, Abdul-Rahman Khader Mousa, 20, Mohammed Salah Abu Nada, 20, Abdullah Mustafa Awadallah, 22, Refa'at Issam Fayed Abu Selmiyah, 24, Mohamed Hashem An-Natour, 18, Ra'ed Al-Bal'awi, 24; Abdullah Khalid Hassan Banat, 20, Hussein Hafez Abu Ta'ah, 23, Jihad Basem Douhan, 17, Ahmed Yousif Weshah, 16, Zakariya Nizar Al-Loqa, 20 and Ameen Mohamed Abu Khusah, 26, were killed in a shootout with Hamas security forces in Rafah district in the south of the Gaza Strip.<sup>363</sup>

<sup>362</sup> <http://www.pchrgaza.org/files/PressRelease/English/2009/69-2009.html>

<sup>363</sup> Al Mezan Press Release, 26 Die in Rafah Clashes, 16 August 2008  
<http://www.mezan.org/en/a.php?id=8985>

These boys and young men were members of *Jund Ansar Allah*, an Islamic group which declared the establishment of an Islamic Emirate in the Iben Taymeyah Mosque in Rafah on 14 August 2009. Holed up in the mosque after negotiations failed, these youth fought, against their own people, to the death. Three security force members were also killed in this incident; all were under the age of 24.<sup>364</sup>

That these children and young men acted on their own volition is highly improbable; that they were disaffected, depressed and disillusioned is likely, and that they felt they had nothing to lose is possible. The warning signals on the consequences of occupation, oppression, poverty and lack of opportunity have been ringing for years. As early as 1993, Sara Roy wrote:

*"How will such children – an entire generation – be resocialised,*

<sup>364</sup> Al Mezan Press Release, 26 Die in Rafah Clashes, 16 August 2008  
<http://www.mezan.org/en/a.php?id=8985>

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particularly when their identity is based on what they have been denied? [...] How can they rebuild their society when they have no real understanding of what it is that needs repair? This is *the* most critical problem facing Palestinian society...the future is already knocking at the front door.”<sup>365</sup>

The future is here and the needs of Palestinian youth cannot wait for Palestinian factions to resolve their differences. Neither can they wait for the international community to wake up to its moral and legal obligation to protect their rights. If further conflict is to be forestalled, and the destruction of more young lives averted, urgent and effective action must be taken. It should start with a commitment by all States to compel Israel to abide by international law; commencing with an end to the siege on Gaza, an absolute cessation of violent attacks against the Palestinian

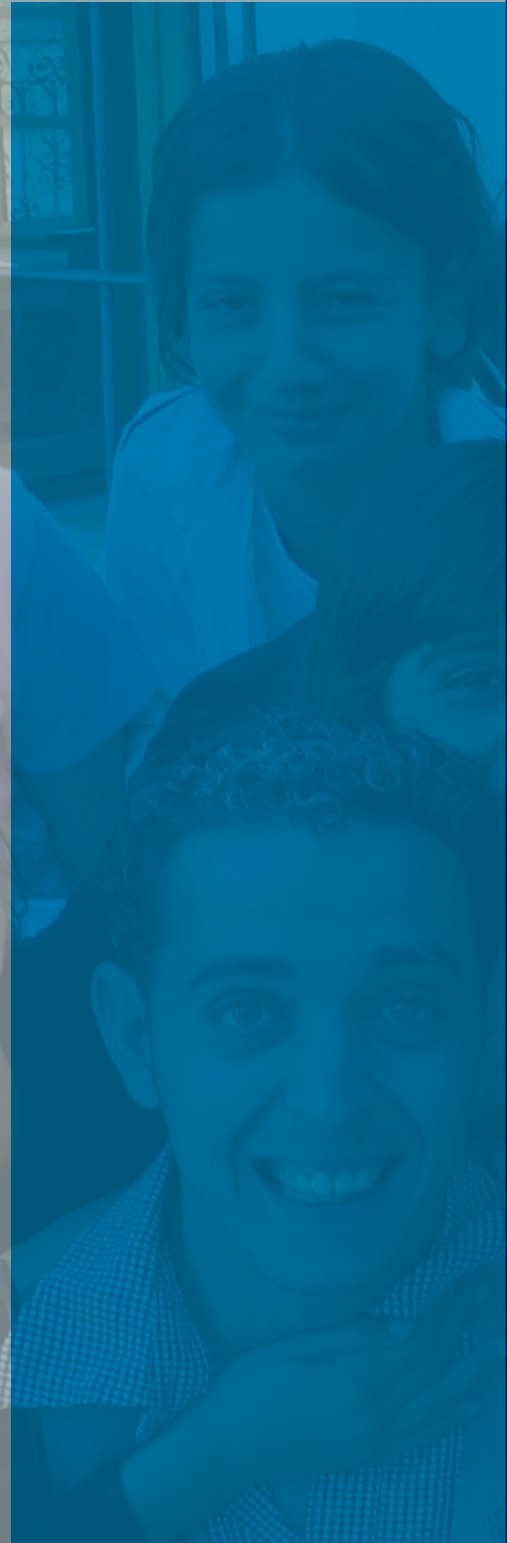
people and culminating in an end to six decades of occupation and colonial domination.

In the interim, the provision of youth services and programmes able to mitigate at least some of the damaging consequences of occupation and internal conflict must be urgently scaled up. Palestinian youth must have space in which to think, act and seek to realise their goals. Access to recreation, sports, social and health facilities must be extended to the out of reach while further research must be undertaken to form the basis of national youth policy across all spheres addressed in this report.

The creative potential of empowered youth is evident, as is the destructive and violent potential of disempowerment. In many ways the youth of Palestine today are at a crossroads.

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365 Sara Roy, “Gaza: New Dynamics of Civic Disintegration,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Volume 22, Number 4 (Summer 1993), pp. 28 – 29.



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