Palestinians Register: Laying Foundations and Setting Directions

Report of the Civitas Project
PREFACE

This volume contains the results of a participatory civic needs assessment undertaken in 2004 and 2005. Carried out by Palestinian refugees and exiles, and implemented by activists and local leaders, the work provides a unique record of contemporary Palestinian civic and political voices. Meetings were held in order to listen to and provide a platform for those Palestinians voices that are rarely heard, the men and women who live in al Shatat (the Palestinian dispersal in 1948 and after). They discuss herein issues of political representation, the concerns and mechanisms for engagement and renewal, and the connections that do and do not exist with their national representative the PLO, the host countries where they currently live; and crucially, with other refugee camps and communities, including their own.

The work is presented in the following manner: a table of contents lists the sections of the two parts of the report. The first part of the report, written by the project director, is taken up with a brief explanation of the project – its inception, aims, the process and the method of implementation. Part two of this report contains the findings themselves – the real substance of the project, which was undertaken in order to bring to light the opinions and recommendations of Palestinian refugees and exiles on the issues that concern them. This is followed by two annexes. The first is a partial list of the meetings held over a period of seven months. The second annexe contains the project literature written collaboratively and produced during its implementation. The findings themselves, in part two, have a detailed table of contents which present the contributions made in the meetings clustered under sets of themes.

There is no conclusion at the end of this volume, since the very density and sophistication of the contributions means we possess more than recommendations for action. In their suggestions are also the means and mechanisms to achieve them. Of course one can immediately note certain key commonalities in our current Palestinian discourse: the desire for direct elections to the Palestine National Council (PNC), for the reactivation and democratic reform of the PLO institutions, for the implementation of the Right of Return. Still, the conclusions and their force, energy, and richness create the foundations for research, practical institutional design, and political and civic activism for years to come.

This project was launched at the beginning of the second Intifada, and emerged from the predicament that had given rise to it. It took a number of years to take shape, construct, and come to fruition. The labour that went into creating this work was collective. In the acknowledgements at the end of the report one can find a list of some of the institutions, individuals, and groups that helped it get underway. As someone uniquely placed in this endeavour from its inception, it is tempting to take the opportunity and the space provided to explain and discuss the special nature of this work, its profound importance (especially at this critical moment in Palestinian political history); above all to make the connections, analyses, and recommendations that my vantage point as director, and intimate involvement in its processes, have offered.

Yet to do so would contravene the principles of this collective work. This platform should not be wrested away from those one has sought to provide this service to, and would diminish the remarkable contribution made by the participants, who are the real authors of this report. It is sufficient to have generated the vision and crafted the practical steps to implement it. Accordingly, the recommendations, interpretations, and directions will be developed by those making use of this reference tool in the future, for it contains the civic spirit of a people who, even in the worst conditions, have articulated both the agenda and the steps ahead in crystal clear terms. All the answers are here. Politicians, international agencies and institutions, local and national groups and bodies, political parties, associations, Palestinians both inside and outside of Palestine, and above all the younger generation of Palestinians, to whom this work is offered, can find in these pages much more than the aspirations of a people. In its findings lies the practical blueprint for the path ahead.

Karma Nabulsi
Oxford
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Part I

Objectives and Method

We want to convey our voice to the whole world so that all people can know our cause, and so that we can claim our rights.

(Participant, Women’s meeting, Nahr et-Boared camp, Lebanon)
Objectives

The Civitas research project, based at Nuffield College at the University of Oxford, assessed how Palestinian refugee communities living in exile in the Middle East, Europe, and further afield could strengthen their civic structures and mechanisms to enable better communication with their national representative the Palestine Liberation organisation (PLO) and its institutions, the humanitarian agencies that serve them, the host countries where they currently reside, structures within their own community, and with other refugee and exile communities, both inside and outside of Palestine.

Largely a volunteer project, it has been run by the communities themselves, and facilitated by a small team who co-ordinated activities in order to carry forward the voices of the refugees to these relevant bodies. In so doing, this project seeks to restore the vital links between all tiers of Palestinian civil society, and help in the reconnections of civic society to the PLO and national institutions that have suffered excessive fragmentation in the past decade. Through its findings, this report also aims to bring the urgent needs of the Palestinian refugees to the attention of the international community.

The project endeavoured to provide an impartial platform to those active societies, organisations, Palestinian men and women (and particularly young Palestinians) from all walks of life. This project was a step in assisting refugees and exiles to recover lost links and create new ones, especially the younger generation. Civitas was not able to reach all places where Palestinian exiles now live, dependent as it was on locally based civic associations coming forward to set up and run the meetings. But the project’s aim, through this report, is to provide a resource for all Palestinians, so they might be able to hear clearly the voices and common spirit of their people wherever they are, learn about them and their experiences in various contexts, and finds ways to connect to them so as to continue to build upon already existing collective engagement.
Framework of the Project: Purposes and Aims

The Civitas project began on the premise that the PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The project's purpose was to strengthen the PLO, and not suggest alternatives to it. Yet the active participation of Palestinians in the body politic and national debate, no matter where they are, is a crucial part of this strengthening process, as the PLO represents the Palestinian people, and reflects their voice. Both those inside and outside of the traditional party system residing outside the West Bank and Gaza have equal rights of democratic participation in the law-making of their national institutions, and can assert those rights, no matter if they are not members of a political party or faction, but as members of the Palestinian general will.

All the international legal rights of the Palestinian people are also continually affirmed through this project’s research, procedures, and recommendations. It incorporates the rights of the Palestinian people and affirms these rights through the voices of Palestinians themselves, speaking in public and open debate wherever possible, and in syndicate meetings where open public meetings of this kind were illegal. Foremost amongst these rights is Palestinian refugees’ right of return, as articulated in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 of 1948, which resolved that

‘The refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible’.

This project is more extensive and comprehensive, as it also affirms the universal rights of the Palestinian people whatever their current place of residence: their right to self determination, their social, economic, and political rights, as expressed through the UN Declaration of Human Rights, countless UN Security Council and General Assembly Resolutions, as well as by the national will of the Palestinian people as expressed through their sole legitimate representative the PLO. This project, by giving voice to those who are excluded from any political process (which has been restricted in the past decade to the occupied West Bank and Gaza), will naturally enhance the advancement of these rights.
Background

The History and Background of the Project – its Development, the Right of Return report

This collective research project stemmed directly from the findings and recommendations of a report issued by the British Joint Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry on Refugees in the summer of 2000 (JMEC). This report, which had specifically addressed the Palestinian refugee issue, was entitled Right of Return (3rd edition, 2004). This Commission had used participatory methodology and had drawn upon oral evidence with additional written testimony. It brought together the three Middle East Councils of the House of Commons: Labour, Conservative, and Liberal Democrat. The Commission of Enquiry was established with the aim of ensuring respect for the international law that dealt with the Palestinian refugee issue, with particular reference to the implementation of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194.

The JMEC Parliamentary Report was aimed at encouraging the British Government and the European Union to take a stronger position in its representation of Palestinian refugee rights and concerns. It was written after British MPs from the Middle East Councils visited the region in 1999 and listened to the concerns of Palestinian refugees themselves in the camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Among its main recommendations, the Report urged the EU to strengthen UNRWA, to ensure that the refugees were included in any political process which sought to contribute to a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, and to help reconnect them to their legitimate representation in ways which were consistent with the principle of self-determination.

Underlining the dangers of excluding the majority of the Palestinians from such a political process, the Report remarked:

‘All refugees, without exception, wanted to communicate directly with us the fact that they felt completely excluded from the peace process. They also wanted us to understand that a peaceful solution could only emerge with the inclusion of the refugee issue, as well as the refugees’ participation in some manner. Finally, they told us that unless the refugees’ concerns were incorporated into the process of decision-making on a final settlement, they were convinced that this agreement would not have the capacity to bring peace. These three distinct concerns were clearly articulated.’

This subject was raised again in the Commission’s Findings under the section on “Representativeness”:

‘There were several distinct aspects concerning the complex subject of representation. This issue is the most complicated of all, but it is also perhaps the most understudied and misunderstood part of Palestinian refugee life. We learnt that over different sets of rights and concerns there were different responses to the question of representativeness. The Commission learnt that representation involves different understandings depending on the issue at hand: individual property rights, civil rights and collective rights as a people to self-determination. For the collective will, and as to the rights of the Palestinian people as a people, the Commission was told without exception that their representative was the Palestine Liberation organisation (PLO). Refugees repeatedly told us, however, that representation was needed at several levels, not just one: political, legal, individual and civil. However, all were explicit about the limits of national representation over individual rights. In Gaza, we were told that it was the refugees’ right to make decisions about their individual claims to their property […]

The Commission notes that there was wide disparity between those who were fortunate in having active representation at a grassroots level in the camps, and places where there was no such adequate representation. Finally, the Commission noted that the groups able to make direct representations to their elected leadership were only those refugees in close physical proximity to them; those living in the Occupied Territories. Indeed the only group that the Commission met who mentioned petitioning the leadership were in Gaza. There was a deep concern amongst refugees in the Arab countries that they were not in a physical position or situation which would allow their voices to be heard by their chosen representatives, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and they were seeking means to correct this. This problem had developed, in their eyes, as a result of a protracted period of dispossession and dislocation, which indeed they are still suffering at this time.’

The Commission also included a specific Remark on the subject, which underscored the complexity of the current civic and political arrangements for Palestinian refugees:

‘The third remark concerns the legal, constitutive and representational decisions between the two Palestinian political bodies, and their specific roles and function vis-à-vis the refugees. The
first is the PLO, which is seen as representing all Palestinians everywhere, whether outside the West Bank and Gaza, or within it, with overwhelming support. The second is the Palestine National Authority, an appointed body, and its relationship with the Palestinian Legislative Council, elected by Palestinians inside the Palestinian territories in 1995.

The Commission found that the refugees outside felt that the concerns of the Palestinians inside the territories were taking precedence over the concerns of the Palestinian people not resident in the West Bank and Gaza. None of the Palestinians believed this was a position taken by the Palestinian people themselves, or a declared or desired policy of the PLO. It was only that the peculiar constraints of the recent peace process had thereby constructed a role for the PNA in looking solely after the affairs of the Palestinians inside, and in so doing, had functionally prejudiced the people outside in the refugee camps’.

Based on the testimony and evidence of the refugees, the Commission recommended to the European Union and its Commission of External Relations that an attempt be made:

‘To address a few of the difficult problems the refugees now suffer as a result of the lack of basic mechanisms through which to make their voices heard. These recommendation come as a result of hearing the anxieties expressed amongst the refugees as to their being excluded from the official peace process. This has emerged as a result of their being, in fact, both structurally and functionally separated from the PLO leadership by the creation of the PNA, and the removal of the leadership of the PLO to the West Bank and Gaza. This problem has been further compounded given that the role and mandate of the PNA was restructured to the management of the West Bank and Gaza and the inhabitants of it, as well as to security responsibilities, all of which has proved an extremely complicated task.

The gaps left by these new structures, all of which have emerged since Oslo, and the shift of focus exclusively to the West Bank and Gaza, point to several aspects which the Commission believes need attention. The last seven years (and in particular during the run up to the first Legislative Council elections of 1995) saw a tremendous surge of interest, expertise and donor money flooding into the Occupied Territories from the various EU member states, and above all by the European Union, in order to give badly needed assistance with the important task of constructing the institutional and social components of a democratic society… However, it is clear that non-governmental organisations, parliamentary organisations, and European governments could all help with the establishment of political infrastructures for the refugees now outside the West Bank and Gaza, so that they may continue to have the much needed links maintained with their chosen representatives.

Finally, still in this area, the Commission of Enquiry has some suggestions for the European Union and the European Commission on refugee representation. We suggest they might begin the task of investigating the creation of two distinct mechanisms required by both Palestinian exiles and refugees. These structures need to address the two sets of concerns that currently pertain to the refugees, the one collective and the other individual. For the former, a mechanism is needed to enable the democratic decision-making procedures of the Palestinian people to be enhanced, through incorporating the views of the refugees in the camps… Thus the formation and management of a mechanism of the general (or collective) will of the Palestinian Al-Shatat by the European Commission should be encouraged, and its role and functions need to be defined and considered in some depth… For the model on collective will, very little work has been done, and the Commission of Enquiry would like to recommend to the European Union that its Commission look at the theoretical and practical components of such a mechanism, since it is particularly well placed to do so’.

The Civitas research project was developed and formally proposed in 2002 by the Specialist Advisor to the Commission of Enquiry on Palestinian Refugees, Dr Karma Nabulsi, as a formal project proposal in 2002, as a direct result of the findings, remarks, and specific recommendations in the Commission’s Report, Right of Return. After extensive consultation with the European Commission of External Relations the project was formally approved by the EU in 2004.
Background

2) Political Context of the EU and the Peace Process, the Middle East, Palestinian Refugees

This research on the issue of civic structures was initially suggested to the European Union during the first year of the Second Intifada, after the Report had been written but before it had been published, in March 2001. It was being proposed just as the Oslo Peace Process, as the Israeli-Palestinian peace process was commonly known, had publicly collapsed, and the international community was reviewing the reasons for this collapse, as well as exploring the lacunae inherent in the process itself. One of the central shortcomings that had come into view was the lack of any progress on the key issue of Palestinian refugees.

Political background to the Refugee Issue

At the start of the interim arrangements in the wake of the Oslo agreements of 1993, the Palestinian refugees had been made the subject of “final status” negotiations, and the issue set aside for multilateral discussions. By 2001, the peace process had broken down completely, no progress had been made on the refugee issue, and the lack of attention and focus upon this issue had contributed to a huge impasse. What had been seen in 1993 as the core of the conflict had become, after seven years of neglect, the most explosive issue in the international arena, and the one where there was the greatest polarity of views between the two parties. This polarity was imported inside the Palestinian political arena itself, with undue pressure placed upon the Palestinian side to make concessions on the basic rights of refugees in order to advance negotiations with the Israelis, who were continuing to refuse to
discuss the issue of refugee rights. This had the effect of increasing fragmentation and confusion in the closed-door discussions and declared policy positions advanced in the international arena by various Palestinian actors, both official and semi-official, during the period leading up to 2000, and just after it.

The refugee issue is important in its own right, yet it cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader question of political representation, which is where this collective research project comes in. The tension between adequate forms of representation was a central challenge confronting all Palestinians throughout the 1990s, whether under occupation, in refugee camps in the Arab world, or in exile farther afield. In the Palestinian arena a combination of national, democratic, and popular institutions and processes both inside and outside the occupied Palestinian territories underwent major devastation in previous decades. Additionally, after the launch of the second Intifada in 2001, Israel proceeded through intense military assault to dismantle and destroy the various civic institutions of the PNA in the West Bank and Gaza.

This more recent violence against Palestinian political representation and civic life was hardly new. The destruction and marginalization process of Palestinian civic activity, especially in exile, began with the structural damage inflicted by Israel to the national liberation movement in over thirty years of combat to its institutions and its personnel, especially in the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, whose purpose was to crush the PLO and its institutional infrastructure. The crisis of Palestinian state building and means of authentic reform (and the pivotal position of the refugees within this), can only be understood in this specific context and in reference to this civic and institutional history.

The PLO, the PNA, and the Palestinian Refugees and Exiles

The Palestine Liberation Organisation, the umbrella institution within which the formerly broad-based popular movement operated, was drawn largely from Palestinian refugees in the Arab world who had been expelled from their homes in Palestine to make way for the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, during what is known as the Nakbah – the Catastrophe. After earlier collective uprisings for independence in Palestine during the 1920s and 1930s, and steady resistance to expulsion on a less organized basis throughout the 1950s, organised resistance was relaunched in the mid 1960s after those in the refugee camps of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and exiles living in the Gulf had waited for more than seventeen years for Israel to implement the United Nations Resolution 194 which would allow them to return to the homes, cities, farms and villages from where they came.

After enjoying a wave of political, diplomatic, and military successes in the late 1960s and 1970s – it was recognized as the sole legitimate voice of the Palestinian people by the United Nations and the Arab League in 1974 – the PLO suffered a series of extreme institutional, military, and political shocks: first in Jordan after 1970, then in Lebanon in the early 1980s, and finally in the Gulf in the 1990s. While separating the PLO from its constituencies living outside the West Bank and Gaza, these ruptures also undercut what democratic mechanisms it had developed, and weakened its channels of communication. The first of these fractures occurred when it moved the shattered remnants of its institutional base from Lebanon to Tunis at the end of the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, after tens of thousands of civilians (Lebanese and Palestinians), cadres and fighters of the movement were killed. Much of its institutional infrastructure and popular base (which was deeply associational, grass-roots, and democratic in nature), drawn from the 300,000 Palestinian refugees living in the camps there was destroyed, in a much more comprehensive manner than the recent infrastructural devastation of the West Bank and Gaza by Israel’s invasion and reoccupation after 2001.

The second fracture came when the core elite of the PLO’s political institutions resettled in Gaza under the terms of the Oslo accords after 1993. Although the PLO continued to exist nominally as an overarching institution representing the voice of all Palestinians, its leadership was eventually transposed into the temporary institutions of the PNA, an organ created through negotiations with Israel, and which became its administrative arm. The PNA was, however, responsible only for Palestinians inside the West Bank and Gaza, (although UNRWA continued to provide social and economic welfare to the refugees inside the West Bank and Gaza). This transposition had serious repercussions for the Palestinian people as a whole, as the PLO had previously operated in a far closer relationship with the associations and civil society in the refugee camps outside of the West Bank and Gaza. This was to severely damage and weaken the associational structures of the unions and other exile groups that were
The PLO and the Palestinian People

2) Political Context of the EU and the Peace Process, the Middle East, Palestinian Refugees

Palestinians had always resisted attempts to separate the ‘outside’ from the ‘inside’ since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, when Israel tried to establish an alternative leadership to the exile PLO through the ‘Village Leagues’. Instead, almost all politically active Palestinians living under military occupation within the 1967 borders (22% of historic Palestine) were, after 1965, members of the underground movements that made up the PLO, such as Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Democratic Front. However the migration of much of the official apparatus of PLO into the occupied Palestinian territories in 1994 had a number of powerful (and negative) consequences: it fractured the links between Palestinians inside and outside the occupied territories, seriously weakened the political representation of Palestinians living outside, and created new cleavages with those within the local party system in the territories where the PLO were now functioning.

The Impact of the Oslo Process on Palestinian Refugees and Exiles

The most important factor in the marginalization of Palestinian representation were the terms and procedures of the Oslo agreement itself. The accords comprised a two stage process, where the smaller, less controversial issues were initially agreed upon. The real issues at the core of the conflict (such as refugees and Jerusalem) were deferred until ‘final status’ talks, when it was claimed the necessary confidence would be built due to good faith practices in negotiations; these final negotiations were to take place a few years into the peace process.

The fragmentation of Palestinian representation can best be illustrated by the effect of elections themselves, commonly seen as the bedrock of any socially just political process. The most long-lasting damage to the integrity of the Palestinian body politic came as a direct result of the elections by which the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) was established in the West Bank and Gaza in 1995. Instead of enhancing democracy and representation, these elections further fragmented the Palestinian people as a whole, excluding as they did all Palestinians outside of the territories from their democratic process, without a simultaneous process within the Palestine National Council, the parliament in exile, through which the Palestinians from 1948 are connected to the PLO since its creation. Although under the terms of the PLO/FNA arrangements, the PLC holds a percentage of the seats within the Palestine National Council (PNC), there were no simultaneous elections to this body, which represents the majority of refugees, effectively silencing and disenfranchising the majority of the Palestinian people.

The Development of Civil Society inside the West Bank and Gaza Strip to the Exclusion of the Palestinians outside

The enhancing of civil society structures and funding of NGOs inside the West Bank and Gaza further intensified a perceived division between Palestinians inside and outside: those inside received considerable international funding, whilst the political and civic aspirations and needs of those living outside the Palestinian territories were ignored, neglected, and even rejected; at best they were classified as objects of humanitarian relief. This exclusion has denied Palestinians residing outside the West Bank and Gaza the most elementary democratic right to help shape the key constitutional and the political institutions of the future state that belongs to them as much as to those resident inside occupied Palestine. This in turn has exacerbated the original distress of the refugees’ predicament, rather than contributing to a solution. The political and civic exclusion of the refugees has also effectively de-historicised the conflict, which no longer has an origin, and thus no longer possesses a rationale for its resolution.

Nowhere is this relationship between representation, democracy, and the refugees more apparent than on the issue of the right of return of refugees to their homes. Although it was accepted at the start of the Oslo process that this issue was the core of the conflict (and certainly for Palestinians it remains the most central), it had nevertheless become accepted convention to insist that the Palestinian leadership would need to make a ‘painful compromise’ without the issue being substantively raised with Israel. By the start of the second intifada it had become the undisputed assumption in the international community that the refugees would be resettled in a Palestinian state or remain in the Arab host countries. That this transfer and resettlement would occur against their will and contrary to the recognized principles of international law is not an issue to which the international community devoted much attention. Nor that it would also be against the principles of property law and refugee return which every other refugee group
today benefits from, from the century old rights of the Circassians in Russia to the more recent conflicts of Kosovo and Bosnia Herzegovina (where the USA has been foremost amongst those states insisting upon the right of return of refugees to their homes as the cornerstone to a durable solution).

The huge discrepancy between the international community’s position on all other refugee cases and its negative policy towards the rights of Palestinian refugees is not lost on those Palestinian refugees; indeed it is one of the largest factors for the lack of trust and their sense of constant betrayal by the international community, which is based on consistent experience lasting more than half a century.

**The EU and the Peace process**

There have been three key articulations of the European Union’s position on the question of Palestine and the specific issue of refugees:

**The Venice declaration of 13 June 1980** which established the right to existence and to security of all States in the region, including Israel, and justice for all the peoples, which implied recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

**The Berlin declaration of 24 March 1999** which introduced the notion of a viable Palestinian state by stating that the European Union was convinced that the creation of a democratic, viable and peaceful sovereign Palestinian State on the basis of existing agreements and through negotiations would provide the best guarantee of Israel’s security and Israel’s acceptance as an equal partner in the region.

**The Seville declaration of 22 June 2002** was more explicit on the expected solution to the conflict. A settlement could be achieved only through negotiation. The objective was an end to the occupation and the early establishment of a democratic, viable, peaceful and sovereign State of Palestine, on the basis of the 1967 borders, if necessary with minor adjustments agreed by the parties. The end result should be two States living side by side within secure and recognised borders enjoying normal relations with their neighbours. In this context, it stated, a fair solution should be found to the complex issue of Jerusalem, and a just, viable and agreed solution to the problem of the Palestinian refugees.
The importance of participatory research methods is now well-recognised. Initiated as a response to local needs, participatory research was launched through a series of independent experiments in widely different settings during the 1970s. Today participatory research methods form a well-developed field of study with wide-ranging applications, but primarily it has been used in understanding development and poverty.

At the heart of this approach lies the reasoning that poor and exploited people can and should be enabled to analyse their own reality, and this should not be left for elites to decide on their behalf. From a methodological point of view, the Civitas project is firmly anchored in this approach, its central premise being to empower refugees and exiles by facilitating a process where they identify their own political and civic needs.

The philosophical argument for participatory research rests in the need to take into account power asymmetries in any research. Many human relationships can be understood in terms of hierarchies of power and weakness, of dominance and subordination. Participatory methods minimise (or at least control for) these hierarchical relationships between the researcher and the researched by giving primary importance to the views of those who are the subject of the enquiry. Rather than the expert – be it an academic, a development professional, or a government official – participatory research puts the power in the hands of those who are being studied; it further acknowledges that they know their realities best, and are best placed to identify possible solutions to their problems. By highlighting the limitations of quantitative surveys and pre-coded questionnaires, it also argues for the use of open-ended themes and participatory methods.

This approach is one of the methodological premises of the Civitas project, its central aim being to empower refugees and exiles by facilitating a process where they identify their own political and civic needs. However, the Civitas project goes further than this strategic goal, as it sees the refugees not simply as subjects of research, but as agents of change. It does not cast the refugees as the subject of study, but rather assumes the questions to be explored and assessed are their situation and predicament, as well as the answers to them. This can be seen in the very scope of the subject matter being assessed: political and civic realities. By focussing on these themes, it recognises that refugees and exiles are both citizens and part of the core Palestinian body politic, with the fundamental right to discuss these issues, and to take part in deciding upon them.

Nor is the use of participatory research by the Civitas project occurring in isolation. Most international development institutions have acknowledged the importance of listening to and involving the people who are the subject of the development intervention. The World Bank has adopted participatory research as an integral part of its routine poverty assessments. The key argument provided by the Bank for inclusion of more participatory methods is that large-scale surveys can only provide an incomplete picture of poverty since they use – in almost all instances – close-ended questions. The Bank argues that poverty (its meaning and depth, its manifestations and causes) also depends on factors that cannot be easily captured by such questions. Within refugee studies there has been a growing recognition of the importance of participatory research methods. The guidelines and manuals on organising evaluations of humanitarian assistance produced by a range of international organisations, donors, and NGOs give a similar clear message.

This increasing recognition of the value of participatory approaches has only marginally filtered into the specific field of Palestinian refugee studies. The refugee issue has attracted an enormous amount of research, notably with the start of the Middle East peace processing the early 1990s. Work on Palestinian refugees is being carried out by a vast range of research institutes, individual academics, and advocacy think tanks, not to mention international research organisations such as the World Bank, and its various specialized agencies, as well as international institutions such as the United Nations and its various specialized agencies, as well as international institutes, individual academics, and advocacy think tanks, and international organisations such as the United Nations and its various specialized agencies, as well as international institutions such as the World Bank.

There are research centres engaged in studying Palestinian refugees in no less than twenty institutions, including the Rand Corporation, Harvard University, McGill University in Montreal, Yarmuk University in Jordan; BADIL Resource Centre, Bir Zeit University and the Shaml Centre in the occupied West Bank, Tel Aviv University, the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, the International Development Research Centre and the International Development Agency in Canada, FAFO (Norwegian Institute for Labour and Social Research), and the International Crisis Group in the USA.
This research on Palestinian refugees has tended to focused on the following key areas: the reasons for their flight in 1947-1948; the size of the Palestinian refugee population, its distributions across various Arab countries, and the description of the refugees’ socio-economic status in the host countries; the psychological and emotional consequences of becoming a refugee; the legal status and treatment of Palestinian refugees in the host countries; Israel’s perception of the refugee issue and Israeli and Palestinian attitudes towards the right of return, compensation, and resettlement issues.

While drawing upon existing data, the Civitas project adopts an entirely different approach to the refugee question, exploring the links which connect Palestinian refugees across different geographical regions, and the political and civic aspects of their experiences. By emphasizing their civic and political status as active agents in the Palestinian body politic, it recognises this status and emphasizes these basic rights. Above all, the Civitas project research is grounded in a method which gives the refugees control over the objectives of the research and gives their voices primary importance, rather than fitting them within the framework of the researchers’ own interests.

The Role of Facilitation in the Project

The Civitas project provided a service to the Palestinian refugee and exile communities all over the world: in the Arab world, in Europe and in America, by facilitating a process so that they might raise the issues that concern them, as well as their rights and their needs as refugees, to the international community and to their national representative the PLO, the host countries, and other relevant bodies. The project’s purpose is to serve the Palestinian refugees and exiles, through a recorded transcription of their voices, as expressed in public meetings. It also provides a means to strengthen connections between refugee communities, inside and outside of Palestine. The aim of this project is to also bring these rights and needs to the attention of the international community, so that the international community can take up its responsibilities to the Palestinian people and the Palestinian refugees under international law.

This project is not an institution, party, faction, or NGO. Civitas is purely a facilitation service with a limited mandate and limited time period. It relies entirely on the recommendations made by existing associations, activists, and ordinary people on the ground, raised through open discussion. This project also strives to strengthen and enhance all existing institutions and associations which serve Palestinian refugee and exile communities outside of Palestine, whatever the legal or civil status of the Palestinians in those countries, providing them with additional platforms and ways to connect to each other. It does not aim to replace existing grass-roots associations, political parties or other channels and structures that serve Palestinian civic and political society. The project itself was run by community activists, both in the right of return movement and in other associational bodies and institutions.

This project asked Palestinians to suggest for themselves whether they need further channels of communication to the ones they currently possess. This question emerged as a result of the refugees’ own demands and aspirations, and in light of the serious fragmentation experienced by exiled Palestinian communities for decades, and based on the conclusions of the JMEC Parliamentary Right of Return report. The project extended to Palestinian refugee and exile communities outside of Palestine in as many countries as could be reached within the limited time frame and budgetary constraints. It sought to empower the ongoing work to strengthen the connection between refugee and exile communities outside Palestine, and those within Palestine. Based on their own recommendations published here, it will be for these communities and associations, both inside and outside of Palestine, to decide on the means to continue strengthening the connections themselves. This report is a tool for those exile and refugee communities, and this resource was created through their own activities.
Pilots

An essential step to prepare for the debates themselves was the 6-day pilot study carried out in Jordan and Lebanon between the 25th of July and the 1st of August 2004. The study consisted of a series of preparatory workshops. The aim of the pilot study was threefold:

1) To give the project team a detailed appreciation of how Palestinian refugees describe and discuss their civic needs, and what the frameworks for these discussions are in differing host countries, taking into account local, political, civil, and geographic constraints and challenges.

2) To inform the project team how to explain the various aspects of the project to different sectors of the refugee community: political activists, refugees of different ages and professions, political parties and unions, as well as groups of different sizes. It was also important to learn about the exact mechanisms of facilitation that could be used for moderating a discussion on these complex political and civic subjects. Particular attention was needed to ensure that the issues could be raised honestly, but at the same time address the safety and comfort of the participants. This would be of great assistance when developing the tools for the facilitators who would run the debates in their own community later on in the project.

3) To give the project team a clearer understanding of the range of difficulties and conditions of the people in the refugee camps, and especially how they discuss channels of communication with the various bodies that serve them in relation to their conditions. This was to assist in developing the sets of issues and themes that were to be debated in the communities, to ensure that the guidelines, procedures, and methods that were used were inclusive and transparent. It was critically important to establish themes and procedures that were fair; that the themes themselves emerged from what people were already discussing in their communities, and helped move the discussion forward.

Many significant views were expressed by different sectors of the Palestinian refugee community and many practical suggestions were made concerning civic structures as well as the needs and priorities of the refugee community. Indeed, the pilot study and those that participated in it assisted enormously in developing the steps of the project. This feedback was a key step in the methodology, which argues that every and any engagement in the civic sphere must rely entirely on the dynamics and realities of the people themselves, and the details of their attachments, ideology, conditions, and especially their existing political and associational frameworks. All of the meetings were taped, videoed, transcribed, and translated.

JORDAN

Three meetings were organised for the pilot study in Jordan. The first gathering was held at the Al Quds Centre for Political Studies in Amman with participation of people from service committees, political parties, unions, clubs, politicians, members of parliament, refugee activists, and representatives of institutions that serve the people in different camps. The event was attended by about 45 people, largely from Jaresh refugee camp, but also from other areas in Jordan. The second, also convened at the Centre and attended by about 44 people, was made up of a mix of people similar to the first meeting as well as a broad cross-section of refugees: workers and unemployed, those with political affiliations and those without, youth, women, and the elderly. Another meeting was held in at the Al Quds Centre of Political Studies in the days that followed. This last workshop was attended by around 40 Palestinian refugees from various refugee camps in Jordan, including unofficial camps and areas. Audio tapes, video tapes and transcribed records of all these meetings were produced.

During the pilot study in Jordan, several issues were raised concerning the nature, objectives, and the linkage of the project to other international political projects and initiatives that are seen in a negative and dangerous light. Although the objectives of the project were presented in a straightforward manner, many expressed their concerns about whether the project could be seen or understood as an initiative for resettlement of the refugees, of giving up the right of return and compensation affirmed by UN resolution 194 and other commitments to the rights of refugees under international law. General apprehension and concern about international projects was profound, and based on the past experience of those refugees present at the meetings. It took some time to make the principles of the project clear; especially against the backdrop of the political machinations in the international arena on the issue of the Palestinian refugees concerning their rights and their present and future status. Furthermore, there was some uncertainty and confusion over the precise meaning and role of
civic structures and mechanisms, what better communication with the national representative would actually involve, and what the refugees would be deciding in the forthcoming discussions and debates. The pilot study meetings in Jordan also revealed that the public space in which the refugees could express their views was often severely limited.

The meetings also revealed important views and understandings upon which the refugees were extremely articulate and clear. The most commonly expressed view in the three meetings was that the civic needs and structures of the refugees in Jordan cannot be separated from their political, economic, social, and legal needs, which are considered intimately connected to each other, especially in the ways these influence their daily lives and shape future possibilities. Indeed the starting point in discussions was always an illustration by refugees of their socioeconomic, political, and legal problems and needs, and in many cases to suggest ways to solve these problems and meet these needs. These can be classified into the following:

- **Health and education:** Most of the participants gave special attention to the severe health and education challenges they currently face. They repeatedly stressed that there had been a reduction of the UNRWA services in the last few years. The second point was the absence of health insurance, and associated problems. The third was the lack of or limited access to higher education. In many cases, they lacked information and knowledge of what they lacked information and knowledge of what these structures and mechanisms could mean in practice or what form they might take.

- **Electoral system:** Some of the participants, particularly politicians, members of parliament, and intellectuals, expressed their unhappiness and dissatisfaction with the electoral system in Jordan. This system was described as unfair and designed to restrict the refugees’ representative voice in the country and international community. The ratio of MPs to constituents varies wildly between Palestinian and Jordanian areas. A concrete solution for this issue was not offered by those attending. They focused only on the need for thinking this system in order to secure full inclusiveness of the refugee voice in the national life of Jordan.

The discussions then shifted towards some suggestions for civic structures and to the idea of better communication with the PLO and the host country. This shift took place in some cases naturally, and in others as result of direct interaction and questions posed by the moderator.

The types of views varied, based on the particular character, roles, responsibilities, and political affiliation of those participating. Most of civic structures and mechanisms for communication suggested by the participants were combined with the consideration that, given the political and legal restrictions they currently face, some of these ideas could not be implemented. For these same considerations, many participants avoided providing any detailed suggestions for civic structures or mechanisms for communication with the PLO. As mentioned earlier, other participants did not do anything because they lacked information and knowledge of what these structures and mechanisms could mean in practice, or what form they might take.

It was made overwhelmingly clear that most of the participants seek regular communication, coordination, and interaction with the PLO as well as the host country and other institutions that serve the refugee community, such as UNRWA. Although they want communication with both their host country and the PLO, it was affirmed that the only legitimate representative of Palestinian refugees’ rights is the PLO. It was noticed that the 1967 refugees were demanding a stronger representative role for the PLO in solving their problems, meeting their needs, and including...
Many participants were unhappy with the nature, structure, and the role of these committees in the camps. It was expressed that membership in these committees should be based on elections rather than on appointment by the government, as is currently the case. In addition, it was suggested that their role should be restructured according to clear guidelines to serve the needs and interests of the refugees themselves. It was argued in the meetings that it would be better to establish popular committees rather than service committees in the camps (to both monitor and manage the camps).

- **Camps committees**: Many participants were unhappy with the nature, structure, and the role of these committees in the camps. The establishment of such structures requires political decisions and government approval. In addition, it requires a close discussion and coordination between the PLO and host country. Without such arrangements, the prospects for building such structures and mechanisms were seen as quite impossible.

**LEBANON**

Three meetings were organised for the purposes of the pilot study in Lebanon. Two public meetings made up of a broad cross-section of Palestinian refugee society took place in Lebanon, one gathering over 200 people in Al-Rashidiyeh refugee camp in south Lebanon, and the other gathering over 60 people in Shatila refugee camp in Beirut. In addition, a workshop was organised on the first evening in Beirut for over 75 people representing the political establishment of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon: popular committees, representatives from all political parties and factions, unions, clubs, media, NGOs, refugee activists, and representatives of institutions that serve the people in the refugee camps. There are video recordings and transcriptions of the Beirut and Shatila meetings, and a transcript of the Al-Rashidiyeh meeting in South Lebanon.

Unlike the meetings in Jordan where participants started the discussion with illustrations of the social, economic, and legal problems they currently face, most of the participants in Lebanon’s meetings began by discussing their political reality. They reaffirmed that the PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people as a prelude to any other discussion, and as a central organising principle to any discussion of Palestinian political issues. In addition, the majority reaffirmed their confidence in President Arafat. The context for this are the long wars in the 1980s and the various military attempts to assert political and military control of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and the continuance of Syrian-funded and backed Palestinian parties and proxies who are still functioning there with differing levels of success. What was equally important was that these opinions were advanced by several different political factions, and not only Fateh, the mainstream partly of which President Arafat was leader, which is also the main ruling party inside occupied Palestine. Next, similar worries were raised by the refugees in Lebanon that were raised in Jordan, concerning the nature, objectives, and linkage of the project to other projects and initiatives that claim to be dealing with the refugee issue internationally, but are seen by the refugees as hostile to their rights and realities.

Following the reaffirmation of the legitimacy and representation of the PLO, and presenting these concerns about exact the role of the project, participants then began to speak about their social, economic, civic, and political problems and needs. These can be summarised as follows:

- **Civil and economic rights, in particular the right to work**: In all three meetings people expressed grave concerns about the restriction of work for the Palestinian in Lebanon. At the time of the pilot project in late July 2004, Palestinians were banned from more than 73 professions in Lebanon. It was understood and explained by the refugees that this practice by the Lebanese government violates all basic humanitarian and international ILO norms, as well as international conventions that protect refugees.

It was noted that while **SAMED** (one of the main PLO economic institutions that employed great numbers of refugees until 1982 in factories and other institutions) was functioning in Lebanon, the economic situation was far better for...
Palestinians, since it provided jobs for significant numbers. People saw their needs as twofold: first, they demanded that the Lebanese government implement the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. This Convention gives the right for refugees to work in their host country. Second, they demanded that the PLO be able to reopen their institutions in Lebanon, which could help Palestinians and provide crucial jobs. People who suggested this second point also said that this requires, among other things, dialogue and political agreement between the PLO and the Lebanese government, which they noted was highly unlikely to be achieved at this stage.

- **Legal and property rights:** As with issues pertaining to the right for work, participants expressed great concern about the lack of entitlements for ownership and inheritance. Any property they might own cannot be left to their children. In addition, many of the participants said that they lack the legal documents to prove marriage, to travel, and even to register their children in the parents’ documents, or for schooling and health. It was said that the only body which can solve these problems is the Lebanese government, by recognising the legal conditions of the status of the refugees and granting them their basic human rights.

- **Health, education, electricity, and housing conditions:** All participants gave special attention to these issues. It was unanimously asserted that these problems were due to the reduction of UNRWA services to refugees during recent years. They said UNRWA had a responsibility to help Palestinians and provide crucial jobs. People saw their needs as twofold: first, they did not want to be dependent upon handouts, but wanted to work, and this was a recurring theme.

As in Jordan, participants thought that solving these issues about their general conditions should not lead in any way to resettlement, nor giving up their right of return to their homes. On the contrary, all participants expressed the view that addressing these issues would empower them, strengthen their own political and civic position, and give support to their national representative. Some of the participants (especially the elites and representatives of political factions) expressed opinions for improving the current civic structure of the PLO, and a few others suggested the development of new structures in addition to the current ones. These views can be summarised as the followings:

- **PLO Institutions:** While most of the participants affirmed that the PLO institutions represented by political parties, unions, social institutions etc. are providing important services and help to the camps, they also agreed on the need to strengthen these institutions so that they could be more representative and respond more effectively to their needs. One way suggested by the participants for this purpose was to have an election to the PNC. Another was to restructure current institutions in response to the political, economic and social development that the Palestinians are currently living in, to better reflect current concerns of the people themselves.

It was suggested to establish new institutions and committees for the PLO, which would aim at developing better communication and coordination between the Palestinian Authority, the PLO and the refugee community in Lebanon. However, the participants did not provide detailed suggestions about the type of institutions and committees that could be formed.

- **Media:** Some of the participants proposed that special attention should be given to the role of the media in supporting the Palestine question. Again, it was not clear what kind of attention should be given, but this point was expressed several times.

- **Political legitimacy:** Participants demanded the restoration of formal Palestinian political representation in the Lebanon, such as the reopening of the PLO embassy or delegation.

- **Popular Leadership Committees:** A few participants suggested the establishment of popular leadership committees to work closely with the PLO in order to meet the needs of the refugees. These committees should be elected by the refugees themselves in the camps. It was suggested to reactivate such institutions that existed under the PLO, and for their role to be based on popular and democratic principles.

The experience from the pilot study and the examination of its outcomes were carried on into a study to prepare for the Experts’ meeting at the end of August 2004; the Cyprus consultation meeting of facilitators in November 2004, as well as a continuous process of consultation with active community members on the ground. This was in order to develop the final set of questions and issues to be discussed by the Palestinian refugee and exile communities themselves and to proceed with the preparations for the forthcoming debates in a way that ensured they were conducted in as careful and inclusive a manner as possible.
EXPERTS’ MEETING

The Experts’ meeting was held between the 27th and the 29th of August 2004 at Nuffield College, Oxford. Its aim was to provide a forum for suggestions and to receive feedback on the main issues that had arisen following the pilot study. Participants were invited on the basis of their expertise and experience, and were drawn from the United Nations, Nuffield College, the University of Oxford, the University of Geneva and further afield; the range of professional expertise represented included sociologists, political scientists, elections and democratization experts, specialists in refugee law, and census and statistics experts.

Ten sessions were held over two days of intensive work. The discussions were crucial in helping define the work ahead, to ensure that the project team was aware of the challenges that had to be confronted, and to discuss how to meet them. Above all, the meeting helped to establish the types of preparatory steps required for a civic needs assessment that would be carried out by the refugees themselves, an exercise that had never been attempted before in this way, or on this scale. The pilot study carried out in Jordan and Lebanon was the initial focus of the discussions as it provided an excellent resource for exploring the dilemmas and difficulties faced by Palestinian refugees in the civic arena, and the political contexts in which they lived. These meetings also showed where further development of the project’s planning was necessary in order to define the next stages of implementation.

The most basic challenge to emerge during the pilot study concerned communicating the project’s purposes and aims to the refugees themselves. The issues here were numerous. First, the project was inherently complex and not easy to explain in a schematic manner – especially the notion of a civic needs assessment that would be carried out by the refugees themselves, and not by outside ‘technical’ experts or academics. Second, there were deep and well founded suspicions and a background of hostilities in different Palestinian contexts to any new initiatives. This project was being put forward at a time and in an arena where there had been many international and national attempts to control and close down the refugee issue without addressing it in any substantial terms, nor by involving the people most concerned, the refugees themselves. This had been a consistent historical practice and policy for over 50 years. It was both natural and inevitable that these concerns would be articulated again in response to a project funded by international donors, whose individual governments’ record in resolving the refugee issue had been (to say the least) poor.

There were political challenges to be addressed. There was a strong associational and party system that operated in the Palestinian political arena, although many of these structures had become undemocratic and fossilized during the Oslo years. At the time of its inception, assurances were given that this project did not seek to undermine existing Palestinian parties and associations, but would effectively strengthen them through the enhanced participation of ordinary people. The main Palestinian parties and factions had understood the project on this basis, but it was also clear that more assurances were needed, and that guidelines which guaranteed and clarified the aims and procedures of the project needed to be set out in the presentation of the future work. Fourth, and following from the previous point, there were a small number of groups which were hostile to the project’s aims, because they would inevitably become disempowered through the introduction of more democratic procedures and practices, given the fragmentation of the previous years, and their enhanced status on speaking on behalf of the refugees without any transparency, elections, or methods for truly representing them.

On the other hand, organising and holding public meetings convened by Palestinian activists and associations on civic issues had up until then never been permitted in many of the Arab host countries. “Right of return” activities were permitted in some countries, as long as they had restricted their discourse and discussions to this issue; in other Arab countries the right or common practice to hold large open meetings is consistently denied, with an intensive network of police and security enforcing this system. The diplomatic work that needed to be undertaken by the project team was immense and complex in this regard: each official level in each of these countries would have to be approached in a comprehensive and sensitive strategy that explained the project’s importance as well as its benefits for both the host country and the refugees themselves, and in outcomes and civic developments that could be seen as useful and constructive. In short, the project could be threatened as much by those who misunderstood it as by those who understood it only too well.

Through the discussions with the Experts it became clear that there was a need for better explanations and briefings about the different components and phases of the project, including literature and support for the associations and groups that were volunteering to facilitate its implementation on the ground, as well as close work with local media. It was also agreed that more small local teams on the ground would be needed to learn how
to explain the project as a whole to the different groups and types of refugees, and to be able to discuss all its aspects extensively. Indeed, the teams that arranged and prepared the meetings in Lebanon had asked specifically for more help in training grass-roots and community workers in the camps about both the project’s principles and its implementation, and how to answer a range of questions that arose.

Other issues that were discussed at the Experts’ meeting related to various technical and logistical requirements for the implementation of the project on the ground, such as: the construction and appropriate formulation of the subjects to be discussed by the communities during the debates (and the need for these to come from the direct concerns of those communities); the support that might be required by the communities in terms of disseminating the relevant information and identifying the techniques and roles of the facilitators and note takers; the process of implementation as it related to logistical and technical considerations for increasing inclusion of the different sectors of the Palestinian refugee and exile communities.

Three main findings emerged in the meetings from the pilot questions. First, some people had expressed concerns about some of the questions, and others had misunderstood the logic underpinning them. This raised concerns about the questionnaires’ construction – how were they to be structured and what accompanying information and examples should be provided of civic structures in order for the refugee communities to make meaningful choices about the mechanisms needed in different areas according to the political, legal and economic conditions in these communities?

Finally, there was some discussion of whether a ranking of choices be allowed in function of the different services provided by these structures. For example, it was suggested that regular delegations might allow for a movement of delegates from refugee communities to the PLO institutions, and from the PLO to the refugee communities. However, such delegations might not be the best structure to allow a community to air and develop their views amongst themselves, or express the plurality of views that existed amongst them — monthly newsletters in the camps and exile communities might be more appropriate for this aspect of civic life, and as necessary as the delegations.

Discussions on the debates focussed on the kind of assistance to be given to the moderators and the types of guidelines to be developed. Among the issues considered by the Experts were how many meetings needed to be conducted in every community so as to assess civic needs properly; how the proceedings were to be recorded, and how to ensure this was carried out by the moderators; whether any other mechanisms for debate should be used; how much advance literature should be distributed; and how to organise the role of media and outreach mechanisms to communities in view of the fact that website registration and other means of dissemination of the project were to be used.

There was also a fundamental issue concerning the timing and sequencing of the debates. The pilot study had demonstrated that participation often took a particular form: speakers often began by making a political speech or reading a statement, then referring to their actual problems, and finally linking the discussion to the central political issues (such as the right of return and resettlement issues). Only then were they able actually to consider the creation of a civic structure or talk about them constructively. It therefore became clear that the popular deliberations needed to choose civic structures and categorise issues to be raised with representatives had to be staggered over time, and could not be completed in one session. Accordingly discussions with the experts centred on whether a template could be developed so there could be a first meeting where the ideas and tasks were presented, one or more workshops held in-between for discussions, and a final meeting where the structures were chosen and the final list of issues agreed and classified.

Another important question which was discussed with the experts was the issue of inclusivity. The pilot study had revealed that not all sections of the communities had been included in the discussions. For example, it had been easier for women to come to daytime meetings rather than the evening ones, and although this had been addressed in a very skilful and conscientious manner in both Lebanon and Jordan by the moderators (who had ensured that some daytime meetings were held), it was clearly more difficult for women to get a chance to actually speak, once present. When the women did speak, it was noticeable how practical and articulate they had been about discussing their social, economic, civic, and political concerns in a concrete manner. Therefore, it was agreed that encouraging women’s participation was crucial. There had also not been enough young people. The students who did participate had been productive and creative, and had shown themselves very keen
Experts’ Meeting

to be involved in the process. Accordingly, there was considerable discussion as to the procedures and guidelines to be provided in order to ensure optimal inclusion of all segments of society into the debates. This was a challenge not only in each refugee community and in each particular country, but also across countries — in particular in Arab host countries where political participation at this level was not generally encouraged anyway. There were political constraints to the inclusion of certain communities (Egypt, the Gulf, and Jordan were the strongest examples); it was noted that these would have to be handled with proper attention to local sensitivities. The location where the debates were convened was equally important, and negotiations with particular countries, and facilitation and support by international bodies working in the host countries, would be crucial.

A series of discussions were also held with the experts on the range of questions concerning the two databases. The first would consist of a map charting the communities’ locations, size, political and civic associations, and relations with the host countries; and the second would be designed after receiving the information from the civic debates all over the world; once the main debates had taken place in December 2004- March 2005. The process of collecting the information on the communities had started in late June 2004 and it was expected to be completed by the end of September or early October 2004 at the latest. Although noticeable progress had been made in this regard, especially in the Middle East and Europe, completing the process by the specified deadline appeared problematic. In many communities, gathering good information was complex, and the information received was not always accurate. Many communities did not have any fully functional associations or institutions. At this stage, information on about 20 communities in different countries had been gathered. However, the level of this information was highly variable, ranging from the basic to the comprehensive. The critical question here was how to maintain a modicum of consistency and build the most comprehensive database possible given the time (and resource) constraints.

There was also some consideration of how the second database would be built to help establish the scope of the debates of the questionnaires, and then how to incorporate the outcomes of these questionnaires after the debates period. The questionnaires for the debates would be built around three main issues. First, what civic structure would the refugees wish in order better to communicate with their national representative? Second, what are the issues that they would wish to discuss with these representatives? Third, as a community, what were their own practical priorities? Given the nature of the issues to be debated, it was hoped that the structure and design of the database would help the functions of the debate process itself. It needed to incorporate the outcome of the debates in ways that served the objectives of the project and provided a resource to individuals, academics and scholars, Palestinian exile and refugee associations and communities, and national and international institutions. It was recognized that some of the possibilities for structure and design were straightforward, whereas others required further discussion and assessment.

Finally, the Experts gave their feedback and suggestions on the project’s final report’s design in relation to the main issues it would need to highlight, the sections that should be included, the demonstration of the different stages that were taken in the needs-assessment exercise, the illustration of the level of procedural inclusion and transparency, and the background material necessary as a useful resource for all those that may use it.

CYPRUS CONSULTATION MEETING

The Cyprus consultation meeting, held between the 5th and 7th of November 2004, provided an opportunity to discuss issues relating to the development of the project thus far with the active participation of community leaders from different Palestinian refugee and exile communities all over the world. Three sessions took place every day over a period of three days, and all participants were equal contributors to the discussions and to the final results of the meeting.

The meeting brought together over 30 active members of Palestinian refugee and exile communities from the following countries: Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, United Kingdom, France, Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Italy, Austria, the United States and Canada. Individuals from Latin America, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Kuwait, and Gaza were not able to attend due to travel restrictions or other last minute logistical setbacks.

On the first day of the meeting, discussion was initiated by the presentation by the Oxford team of the background and objectives of the project, its intended phases and operational procedures, and up-to-date information about the preparations and levels of implementation. Suggestions were made
by the participants about presenting the detailed background of the project to a wider audience, and on disseminating more widely the principles of the project and its overall purposes, in order to ensure that they were properly understood within the refugee communities.

Accordingly the initial discussions focused on the distinctiveness of the project as a technical and research project run by grassroots organisations and relying upon popular participation for its findings, and the challenges which would arise relating to its being understood as serving the needs of the refugees by the refugees themselves. Participatory methodology necessitated an approach different to that of current NGOs, rights campaigns, political platforms, or Palestinian civic associations and political parties. The methodology required that the public meetings themselves demonstrate what was important to refugees, by letting the refugees articulate these important issues, and accurately recording the views of the people in open meetings. It was not for the project literature to advocate or for the participants about presenting the detailed background of the project to a wider audience, and on disseminating more widely the principles of the project and its overall purposes, in order to ensure that they were properly understood within the refugee communities.

Yet the project’s origins lay in the British Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry’s Report on Refugees of March 2001, entitled Right of Return, whose recommendations had included a reaffirmation of UN Resolution 194 and a specific proposal to work for a greater inclusion of Palestinian refugees through their incorporation into the Palestinian body politic and the integration of their views, interests, and concerns into any future peace negotiations. In this way, the project’s purpose and methodology were both distinctive. The aim of civic empowerment and political incorporation was at odds with much of current international thinking on Palestinian refugees, who tended to be regarded the refugees as obstacles to peace rather than the essential contributors to it.

The project’s methodology, which flowed directly from its distinctive purpose, was unique in that it aimed to arrive at its conclusions through participatory debates by the refugees themselves, rather than by adopting other methods such as opinion surveys or polls, which had been found generally to distort and misrepresent the state of mind of Palestinians, and create artificial divisions among them. The most fundamental point was that the project’s goal was to enable Palestinian refugee communities themselves to identify their civic and political needs, and to find channels of communication (either existing or new) to enable these needs to be raised with their legitimate national bodies and other relevant bodies.

This point was all the more important to emphasize as discussions concerning Palestinian refugees tended to focus on desirable future outcomes, and to stipulate these outcomes a priori, as a prelude to any discussion or wider public participation. It was a cardinal principle underlying the project that desirable outcomes could only be identified by basing them upon the refugees’ own legitimate claims, arrived at through extensive discussion and public participation; this premise was strongly endorsed by the Cyprus consultative meeting. The participants suggested including the background of the project (the Right of Return report) in the project description as a way to explain the purposes of the project and its ambitions and motives, in order to reassure refugees who might worry it was an initiative aimed at weakening Palestinians claims, rather than strengthening them.

There was also much discussion, on this first day, of timing of the meetings, and it was agreed that the months of January and February 2005 would be ideal for holding the debates in Europe and the Middle East. It was also confirmed that, for logistical reasons, the gatherings in the United States and Latin America would be held later. It was also agreed that the involvement of UNRWA would be highly beneficial for the facilitation of the debates, as the possibility of convening some of the meetings in the premises or buildings of a United Nations body would help to ensure that the discussions were as inclusive as possible (this had been one of the themes discussed at the Experts’ Meeting). Inclusivity needed to be achieved in four dimensions: firstly, political inclusivity: all strands of Palestinian refugee opinion needed to be brought into the debates; secondly, social and functional inclusivity: as wide as possible a range of Palestinian groups and associations, NGOs, and sectors of the community needed to be incorporated (those in work, the unemployed, youth, women); and thirdly, geographic inclusivity: the debates needed to draw people in from as many areas and regions as possible within each country. Finally, it was essential to be mindful of the technical conditions for inclusivity: the debates had to be structured and organised in such a way as to make it possible for all those who wished to participate to do so without hindrance. This meant both thinking about the support which communities might need in order to attend a debate (for example, adequate
Cyprus Consultation Meeting

means of transport might be a serious issue) as well as ensuring that the debates were widely publicised, within existing political parameters, and their purposes communicated in an open and transparent manner.

The issues of how many meetings were to be held in each country, and how these meetings were to be organised were also explored at length. In the case of Lebanon, for example, it was agreed that sets of meetings should be held in four regions: in the South, North, Beqa’ and Beirut areas. It was agreed by the participants that the debates should be recorded, by video where possible, or by audio tape where not, with at least two note-takers present as well. The mechanisms and logistics of ensuring rapid translation from Arabic into English were also discussed. The questions which should be asked of the communities were also considered at length, particularly in view of the different types of issues which the refugees had to confront (legal, political, civic, material and humanitarian) and the widely different situations which refugee communities found themselves in the different host countries and regions across the world. It was eventually agreed that the questions to be put to the refugees at the debates should focus on four areas:

(i) the channels of communication which they would desire to open in order better to communicate with their national representative, the host country where they resided, humanitarian agencies and other international institutions which provide services, other Palestinian refugee communities, and structures inside their own community

(ii) the civic structures and mechanisms currently used to communicate with these various bodies. This was in order to explore what current practice was, to assist in thinking about how to strengthen existing structures they relied upon, or whether additional structures needed to be created, given new circumstances.

(iii) the civic, legal, social, economic, and political issues they would wish to raise with these bodies

(iv) the most urgent needs and priorities as refugees

Refugee needs formed a very broad spectrum, ranging from political issues of right of return to civic needs such as the securing of identity papers and effective practical communication with humanitarian agencies. When assembled in the final report, all this information would prove invaluable in many dimensions: to the refugees themselves, as a record of their needs and views; to the international donors and humanitarian agencies, as an instrument for facilitating their relations with the refugees; and to the various governments and foreign offices, who would better be able to hear the distinct voice of the Palestinian refugees.

In this context, the Cyprus meeting agreed that the second phase of the project — the advocacy and implementation of these mechanisms — could emerge only once the civic needs of the refugees had been articulated and expressed through the debates, and that this second phase would be built around the relationships which the communities themselves would seek to establish and strengthen with other Palestinian bodies.

Models for the debates

The second day of the meeting focused on the concept of differing models for the debates, and how a ‘minimum’ and a ‘maximum’ model could be envisaged so as to allow the discussions to be held with due regard for the considerable variations in local political and material conditions. The ‘maximum’ model was the ideal, framed without consideration to any financial, geographic, or political constraints. The maximum model would envisage a meeting cycle which lasted two to three weeks. It would consist of an opening meeting, where the basic objectives and purposes of the project would be outlined; a series of at least three syndicate meetings, where the key questions would be discussed by different groups (representatives of women’s associations, youth groups, elites and intellectuals); and a closing meeting, at which suggestions would be advanced. In such a configuration, it was thought that it would be optimal to have unlimited numbers attending the opening and closing meetings, and to try and limit each of the syndicate meetings to around 25 people.

However it was likely that circumstances would vary considerably from country to country, and indeed that in some places, especially where participation in the public sphere by Palestinians in host countries (or even by nationals themselves) was limited, only a ‘minimum’ model would be feasible: in this configuration, the meetings would be fewer in number; and all different sections of the community would be invited to attend together; rather than in different sectoral groups; it was agreed that under these circumstances every effort should be undertaken to make attendance as inclusive as possible through existing channels of communication within the refugee and exile community. There was further discussion of the issue of inclusivity, and particularly of the means of ensuring that attendance be encouraged from ‘traditional’ constituencies (those in work, professionals, members of political associations) but also such groups as the unemployed, those with no political affiliations, the uneducated and the elderly, those without official documents, as
well as from women and youth. It was noted that what counted as part of the ‘elite’ would vary as well, depending on the country which was being considered.

The Role of Moderators and Facilitators

As the concept of a ‘minimum’ and ‘maximum’ model suggested, a critical factor in the success of the debates would lie in the role played by moderators and facilitators of the project. It would be their judgment which would determine which type of meeting would prove more appropriate to the local conditions in which the debates were to be held. Moderators and facilitators would be responsible for explaining the project; for outlining the programme of the meeting; for proposing the key questions for discussion; and for responding to any questions and concerns which might be voiced from the floor. In this context it was noted that valuable lessons could be learned from the pilot project, notably in relation to the experiences of holding community meetings, using available opportunities for holding discussions of this kind, and anticipating the sort of questions which might be raised at the meetings.

Local Contexts

In order to establish the variations in and range of conditions faced by Palestinian refugees, participants at the Cyprus meeting also gave an extensive briefing of their own refugee communities and the socio-economic and political challenges they currently faced. Each participant also gave an assessment of the different opportunities and challenges that might face their own community in implementing the project on the ground with, in part, the experience of the pilot study meetings in Jordan and Lebanon serving as an example. What emerged from these presentations was a complex tableau of the differences among Palestinian refugees – differences which were not only geographical and political, but also based on levels of education and employment. The degree of concentration or dispersal of Palestinian refugees was also a major logistical factor to be considered in the organisation of debates, and much thought was given to the methods to be used to overcome these problems so as to encourage extensive participation. Also to be taken into account were the possible political constraints upon public participation. These constraints could come from a variety of sources: the host country’s government officials, and Palestinian organisations and factions which had either misunderstood the project’s aims and objectives and saw it as an alternative to the PLO, or who did not seek to encourage popular participation from Palestinian citizens in political and civic decision-making.

On the final day of the meeting, participants discussed the issues to be arranged following the Cyprus consultation meeting, including logistical and technical requirements for the period of the debates and the types of literature required. It was reiterated that, in view of the fact that the Palestinian refugee communities across the Arab world, Europe and further afield experienced widely different conditions, and would therefore come to the debates with a range of expectations and priorities, it was agreed that the different models for running the debates (the ‘minimum’ and ‘maximum’ models) were appropriate, while at the same time maintaining overall consistency in approach and methodology. In this context it was stressed that procedures needed to be put in place so as to ensure that all moderators and facilitators adhered to the same rules and standards. It was therefore agreed that small printed Handbooks would need to produced for this purpose, and that they would be based on the conclusions collectively reached by the Cyprus Meeting participants. The three Handbooks would cover the following areas:

(i) Guidelines for running the debates.
(ii) The project description (the maximum and minimum models).
(iii) A summary of the Right of Return report with its recommendation to the EU to facilitate this research project.
(iv) A description of the types and models of civic structures that currently exist in refugee and exile Palestinian political society.

It was agreed at the Cyprus meeting that the Civitas team at Oxford would write first drafts of the first three handbooks according to the spirit and principles that had been expressed and reaffirmed during the three day meeting, relying upon the extensive notes taken over the three days, and the agreements achieved. These drafts would be circulated to all participants by e-mail for their further feedback and input to ensure there would be a clear consensus about what was collectively agreed upon by the participants and what would be printed (see ANNEXE B, Project literature). The fourth handbook, on current models of civic structures, was to be written only after the moderators had sent in examples of existing Palestinian civic institutions from various regions. This handbook would be prepared to inform moderators and participants about the range and variety of civic structures and mechanisms already serving Palestinian refugee society and the types of roles and functions they played.
Mobilisation and Preparations for the Debates

I) Beginning Mobilisation: Mapping the Communities by the Communities

The central mechanism relied upon for implementing this civic needs assessment was the mobilisation of activists within Palestinian refugee and exile communities. This was the most complex, challenging, and evolving dynamic in the entire project. Indeed, the process of mobilisation, which involved a profound and heated public discussion about issues the project was engaged upon, was one of the most constructive features of the project. This process of mobilisation, and the challenges faced by those attempting to implement the project in their camps and communities, proved to be as important a finding, and as rich an experience as the issues raised in the meetings themselves (which can be found in Part 2 of the report).

The passionate socio-political and civic issues that emerged concerning the civic reconnection and voice of Palestinian people to the various national and international institutions that represented and served them (from the PLO to the host countries to humanitarian agencies to the local associations themselves), and the discussion about the fundamental and urgent issues people wished to raise with these bodies, provided for an extraordinary engagement in a number of ways, and over an intense period of eighteen months.

Beginning Mobilisation: Mapping the Communities by the Communities

The first step in the mobilisation process was the mapping of the communities. This was done in two ways. First, a call to Palestinian refugee and exile communities was made by email, telephone, and in preparation meetings, both in order to raise public awareness of the purposes and principles of the project and to initiate a process whereby representatives of different sectors of various Palestinian communities would seek to become involved in the process of holding public meetings for Palestinian refugees and exiles.

Given the project’s reliance upon the communities themselves coming forward to volunteer their time, the map that was created of the communities was unique in its geographic scope, and followed a trajectory that emerged through the participation of particularly active members in refugee exile society. The mapping exercise did not set out to be a comprehensive survey of the number of Palestinian refugees outside occupied Palestine, nor a gathering of statistics or information about various Palestinian refugee communities (of which there is an enormous amount of data of varying quality). Instead, it was a map created for the dynamic of mobilisation and outreach, and was shaped almost entirely by the participation and involvement of active members of various communities in particular countries.

The mapping exercise provided a means to begin to learn about the wide variety and shapes of civic associations, level of structures, and activism present in refugee exile communities since the enormous changes that had occurred in the past decade: new migration of refugees to Europe, the Gulf, and North America as a result of the extreme hardship of the living conditions in the refugee camps in Lebanon and other host countries; the expulsions and exodus from Kuwait during the first Gulf war of 1990-1991; the ascendance of the PNA and the simultaneous deterioration of the PLO as an active institution in exile in the mid-1990s; the sense of siege and vulnerability in the Palestinian refugee and exile communities in North America with fears of speaking up publicly after the introduction of new legislation and the curtailing of civil rights; new refugees from occupied Palestine arriving to Jordan and further afield after the start of the Second Intifada in 2001.

Given the objectives of the project, it became equally important to initiate contact with associations and activists in certain key countries, in order to ensure participation of refugees and exiles where popular participation was highly problematic and constrained, in particular Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, and particular areas in the Gulf. Activists, intellectuals, and association and community leaders were contacted in these countries, initiated by the project team. Equally, initial mapping within certain European countries which hold newly expanded Palestinian refugee communities, such as Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Germany, were initiated by the project team, based on community and political rights associations (such as right of return coalitions and refugee and exile community centres) to become involved in facilitating the meetings. As a step in the mobilisation process, the findings that emerged as a result of this mapping exercise was crucial in planning the process of holding public meetings, which was a constantly expanding and dynamic database of Palestinian civic society in exile.

The Shape of Political and Civic Society Outside the West Bank and Gaza

The Political and Civic Landscape in 2003

Organising public discussion upon the entire range of issues of the current Palestinian predicament was a complex task, especially during the exact period...
the project was initiated. First, public discussion focussing on the needs and social welfare of Palestinian refugees was seen by many Palestinians as a clear code for resettlement, and the betrayal of core Palestinian refugee rights. This was particularly the case with academic projects funded from international bodies in the west. Since the policy of the international community was to restrict itself to funding humanitarian projects for Palestinian refugees, and to restrict funding civic participation, democracy building, and human rights projects to inside the WBGS, this only enforced the suspicion that these humanitarian concerns were the very means to abandon key legal and political rights about the right of return held by all Palestinians as the core issue that needed to be resolved. Accordingly, some Palestinians felt that focussing on other issues in any form undermined the emphasis on the right of return, which should be the central issue mobilising refugees. Yet equally, much of the debates and discussion and concerns Palestinians were having during this period concerned their political and civic needs as well as their rights, and these were closely tied to their socio-economic needs and rights.

Second, splits and fragmentation of the PLO, the mainstream party Fatah, and other smaller factions had been developing for some years, especially outside the WBGS. At the time of project implementation, different spheres of power were located outside Palestine, with several competing for sole legitimacy and leadership. After the death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004 (who was simultaneously the elected head of the PNA, the head of the PLO, and the elected head of Fatah), any semblance of unity inside the various PLO institutions and the party collapsed entirely, and this played itself out with some force during the mobilisation process over 2004-5. There were several types of organisation and associational structures in exile, and many new formations had developed in the past decade. The relocation of the PLO leadership to the WBGS was accompanied by a withdrawal of their attention, representation, funding, and other vital civic and political support to the vast network of unions, associations, communities, and party activists outside occupied Palestine. Although no progress was being made throughout the 1990s in negotiations with Israel or host countries on the main issues of the refugees: their rights, their urgent concerns, their legal status, yet the entire focus remained on the Palestinians that lived inside Occupied Palestine. The tiers and webs of connection between civic and political structures on the national level began to fragment and dissolve, as these associations, activists, and factions became sidelined and ignored.

The right of return movement developed in strength from the mid 1990s from a number of causes. Primary among these was the exclusion of those outside from the political framework of decision-making since the creation of the PNA, and therefore the issues that concerned the refugees. There was an accompanying sense that along with their exclusion, this issue of crucial important to refugees, the right of return, was being quietly dropped under international pressure (although it remained an official PLO position). Many of those in the Right of Return movement had left factional politics, but maintained factional practices, which were introduced into the Right of Return movement in the way they approached issues of Palestinian participation in the political arena. Others from smaller factions had stayed within their faction, but were concentrating on mobilising on the right of return issue, and these associational factors introduced a factional style of politics into their specific dealings with the issues raised in this research project. Equally, many community associations were associated with a single faction. The common civic landscape of Palestinian refugee and exile communities in each host country consisted of a range of small institutions, clubs, charities, associations, newsletters, and other bodies, each representing a different faction or political party, many emerging for a season or a year to hold one or two events or publications before ceasing to be active in anything but name. In many of the communities, Palestinians had not come together in an inclusive political or civic process for many years, if ever, excepting in some places on religious holiday and social events.

With the increasing disintegration of the PLO institutions in exile in the mid 1990s, many Palestinians had abandoned the framework of the PLO to work in single issue political factions, or Islamic ones, and sought to strengthen their own political positions and views. As the loss of representation increased, many saw the national institutions of the PLO as increasingly corrupt and ineffective, and at the time of the project implementation many new and emerging civic groups and individuals believed it was not worth strengthening or restoring, nor putting time into any mobilising or collective effort towards this endeavour, especially as the PLO itself was seen to have abandoned its constituents. The Islamic and other smaller parties operated outside of the PNA in the occupied Palestinian territories and outside of the PLO in exile. Accordingly, at the time this process was launched, some of these sectors saw no incentive to engage in a mobilisation process to strengthen the PLO’s grassroots base through a reconnection between the mass of the people and its representatives (although in many countries the Islamic associations and smaller factions participated wholeheartedly in the project and were crucial for mobilising attendance).
Others in exile had abandoned the framework of the PLO yet remained informed by the need for a unifying framework, and a huge range of these types of institutions were competing for supremacy. In North America, most of the young generation knew nothing of the PLO nor had even heard the existence of the Palestine National Council, the parliament-in exile. Instead they associated the PA with recent corruption stories as well as the abandonment of representative positions that reflected the Palestinian people’s views. Others from Lebanon and Palestine, resident in the USA, were often involved in the remnants of the smaller factions, independently organised into small, sometimes very active institutions. However the majority were organised through religious associations or family and town clubs and associations, and Arab-American associations.

What also became apparent through the mapping exercise was that in many aspects, the civic life of Palestinian refugees was highly constrained by the older national associational structures that had largely collapsed in practice, but had not yet been replaced. This meant a highly conservative method of politics dominated both the political and civic spheres in exile. This was drawn from two traditions, family and tribal party politics, and the vestiges of the national liberation movement. The role of leader and initiator was still seen by the older generation of the national liberation movement. The role of leader and initiator was still seen by the older generation as a father figure who would tell his people what to think, and do their thinking for them, rather than one who democratically listened to what people themselves wished to do, or expect their equal and active participation in the political decision making processes. Equally, the inherited practices from the national liberation movement meant some very small groups of leaders saw themselves as the vanguard and privileged to take decisions on behalf of the people they claimed to speak for. The political environment of host countries where these political elites lived played a pivotal role in their position and their dominance in Palestinian political life.

Preparations For The Debates And Meetings

Addressing Constraints
Between the end of the Cyprus conference in November 2004 and the organisation of the debates in early 2005, preparation for the debates involved several steps, operating at simultaneous levels. Each host country, and each Palestinian refugee and exile community had different concerns and issues that needed to be tackled in a step-by-step process by both the local team of activists and the Civitas team, in coordination. Permissions were needed (and always requested by local activists who were aware that without such permission their security and would be endangered by local authorities) to hold public meetings in a range of countries, and for some of these countries this necessitated a complex and extensive series of official and formal meetings and correspondence with the various relevant government ministries, embassies, and officials over a period of several months. For some of these host countries, official encouragement from the leadership of the PLO was crucial for facilitation of the project. In others, official endorsement was actually counterproductive to organising in the Palestinian community. In certain key countries the PLO itself was quite independent of the PLO/PNA structure in Ramallah, and autonomous in decision-making from it, relying heavily on the position and authority of the host country instead.

Active endorsement of the project from the Chair of the PLO facilitated work on the ground in Lebanon during the pilot project in the summer of 2004. In order for the meetings to take place in several countries in the Arab world, the facilitation of the PLO embassies in the region was crucial, and written support by the Chairman of the PLO proved extremely helpful in the success of these meetings. In other countries, such as Europe and North America, no formal approval to hold public meetings in the community was required - or even common practice - among Palestinian refugee and exile communities. Relations between the embassies and the Palestinian community varied widely, and in some countries there had been a complete breakdown of communication between them.

Creating Public Space
Those activists who volunteered to participate in the project followed two complementary paths once becoming involved in the project, and in the course of planning the different steps of mobilisation. The first was a measured assessment of the constraints and challenges posed by the narrowing of the Palestinian public arena as outlined above. This was followed by the elaboration of practical steps to overcome them. It was in these endeavours that was demonstrated the tremendous ingenuity, creativity, political sophistication, and tenacity of the hundreds of activists who helped make this project come to life. Given the harsh nature of the exile Palestinian political and civic conditions, Palestinian activists have acquired a formidable capacity in the art of overcoming logistical, geographic, and political obstacles, and which served to make the project accomplish its aims.

Besides planning to overcome technical obstacles, the second path which moderators and activists created offered an even greater contribution to the overall outcomes of the project. Beyond an assessment of the constraints
to the implementation of the project, those who became involved in organising the meetings did so primarily because they provided an ideal forum for upholding their own principles, continuing their existing lines of work, and increasing the possibilities of political and civic progress for the Palestinians as a whole and their refugee community in particular. It provided them with the means to enhance their ability to defend and serve Palestinian refugees. The process of mobilisation was in itself a dynamic mechanism through which activists and leaders could engage in the public sphere through offering a crucial service to their community: giving them voice, and raising refugees to the status of sovereign by recognizing them as citizens. It made possible, in however limited and transitory a process, a reaffirmation that the source of sovereignty always resides in the people's consent and wishes, the founding principle of popular self-rule. These democratic practices engaged upon by the mobilisers and moderators of the debates created a groundbreaking dynamic in many areas. It enhanced the possibilities that creating new forms of public space could provide a renewal and strengthening of collective democratic practices. A cooperative endeavour, international in scope, took place where each individual, usually working in small groups, planned towards public participation, building towards inclusiveness rather than separation, all with the aim of locating the source of Palestinian decision-making and power in the will of ordinary Palestinians. The second feature had to do with convergence. In different host countries, in different types of exile and refugee communities, Palestinians who introduced the ideas of the project into the broader exile community followed similar paths, although they were not in direct contact and communication with each other, and engaged in this work as volunteers, deploying their own ingenuity, creativity, and civic virtues. Guided by this goal, and using the methodology of the project’s principles according to guidelines collectively constructed at the first Cyprus meeting, the results of these methods were impressive. These individual and collective steps provided a different model of leadership and role for community and grassroots leaders, and created places for the civic and political issues of the day to be raised in the open, rather than behind closed doors.

The Action Plans: Operating Two Paths
The first step in this process was to create an action plan in coordination with the local team of activists and leaders (See Annex: B). These action plans were constructed according to a detailed set of criteria, and used different methods. They were developed through an extensive process of conversations, drafting plans, and preparatory visits by the Civitas team to the refugee camps and communities in order to introduce the project's principles to groups, officials, prominent individuals, community leaders, institutions, and political parties in coordination with local groups. Local activist members, disseminating and explaining the project, travelled extensively within their host country, in particular in Europe, North America, as well as certain Arab countries such as Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Action plans involved the preparation of official letters and explanatory documentation for host country officials, humanitarian agency directors, and a wide distribution of the project literature amongst various sectors of the Palestinian population. There was also a series of local and regional workshops for those seeking to moderate the debates. Possible models for holding successful meetings were discussed, such as deciding the chronology of the sets of meetings: starting or closing with smaller syndicate meetings or public meetings, holding a series of several meetings, and a combination of these types of meetings. The particular model eventually settled on was constructed by the local moderators after an analysis of geographic, civic and political constraints, existing capacity of the moderators and associations, and the state of fragmentation of the refugee and exile community itself. The short time-scale of meetings implementation (as a result of the project’s limited financial and temporal scope, and small staff) restricted the outreach and take-up of some countries, and the possibilities of developing the full potential in others, which would have needed a great deal more time to come together. Palestinian activists in other regions who sought to become involved in organising participatory debates were unable to achieve this by the deadline imposed by the project’s mandate. Many more meetings, debates, and discussions could have been convened on a continuing basis throughout 2005-6, and much interest was expressed in doing so, especially on a popular level within occupied and historic Palestine.

It was intended that this project be only the first such initiative of many that will provide this service to Palestinian refugees and exiles in the future, in order to begin the vital process of strengthening their associative links with the many bodies and institutions that serve them, from the national representative the PLO, to their local associations on the ground.
Part II

Introduction to the Findings

“Part of the universal commonality of civic and political rhetoric is the method and style of the arguments that are made in collective meetings”
Introduction to the Findings

In the following pages are the findings of meetings held over a period of seven months in 2005. In the Annexe A of this report can be found the list of these meetings, the dates they were held, and the types of meetings convened. The findings in this section are the exact transcripts of what was spoken by the participants at these meetings. It is not the purpose here to assess or shape the character of these voices, nor to evaluate them by exploring their relevance, or highlighting their importance. The substance of the findings, where thousands of Palestinians describe, analyse, and discuss the issues that concern them and make a series of specific and general recommendations is precisely where the contribution and expertise reside.

What has been done here is to provide a systematic thematic organisation and classification of the conversations and discussions that took place. These have been broadly classified under the questions produced and set out in the Guidelines to the Debates (also see Annexe), which formed the framework for these discussions. Accordingly, the work preparing the presentation of these findings has consisted in the careful arrangement of the themes, and the creation of headings, sub-headings, and titles under a detailed table of contents. This layout will hopefully provide suitable landmarks and sufficient direction for the reader to be able to follow the flow of the issues raised in the meetings, as well as grasp the complex and dynamic contribution made by Palestinians, who created the entirety of the contents themselves. In order to engage the readers in the issues that arose, as well as orient them through the dense and rich expression of popular civic articulation, it is useful to highlight a few of the unique features of this methodology, and the kinds of contribution it provides.

So as to provide a useful context for appreciating the resource contained in the findings, readers might want to take the following seven factors into consideration. These have arisen as a result of the encounter between two critical features in this collective work: the methodology of participating in and recording the participatory meetings, and the current political and civic conditions of the Palestinian refugee and exile communities.

Unlike opinion polls or surveys, interventions made by participants in the meetings rarely focus on a specific question, theme, or sphere of importance in a narrow declarative way. Instead they provide a rich context, understanding, and appreciation of the issues being raised. Although the themes in Part II have largely been arranged under one of the headings of the civic, political, or institutional structure the participants refer to (the PLO, the host country, humanitarian agencies, their own refugee community, etc.), particular discussions are always broader and richer in character. Further, because of the unique predicament facing Palestinians in civil, social, economic, and political spheres, many of the concerns are directed at more than one level, and relate to more than one issue. Participants in the debates also commonly understand how each sphere and concern is linked to the other through these issues, or what institutional design needs to take place in order to make this link. Therefore these detailed contributions provide recommendations that are more sophisticated and developed than the class of answers which might be provided in a poll, survey, or questionnaire. However, in order to maintain the flow of the material for the readers’ sake, and to connect a part of one meeting to other parts held elsewhere in a collective manner, long discussions have had to be arranged in distinct and discrete paragraphs.

Part of the universal commonality of civic and political rhetoric is the method and style of the arguments that are made in collective meetings. When expressing what needs to be done, or recommending a course of action or a particular civic structure, interventions are invariably prefaced by a discussion of why this particular suggestion is needed, as well as a reasoning of what went wrong to create this particular circumstance or need. A suggestion on future action can only be persuasive and agreed upon if an understanding of the nature of the problem is shared. There must be common agreement on what is the nature of the problem, and especially upon why it arose. Therefore many recommendations made in the findings are located in a line of reasoning that first articulates the problems being faced, and the precise reasons for these problems. It has been impossible to separate descriptions of the existing state of affairs, and recommendations of what to do about them into separate headings. And indeed to separate them in this manner would be entirely artificial, and detract from their contribution.

Another feature of collective meetings is the very dynamic of the gathering itself, and how common agreement, decisions, and understandings were sometimes achieved in them. There are two ways this occurred on a deliberative level, and as they cannot be replicated in the layout of the findings section of the report, it is important that they be highlighted here.
First, in most of the meetings, the tenor and level of the contributions developed substantively as the meetings progressed, and many began to take real life towards the second half of the meeting. After the sometimes lengthy opening introductions, setting out of the meeting guidelines by the moderators, the early contributions often took the form of ceremonial speeches, more similar to traditional public meetings where local leaders speak for an extended period. As the meetings would progress, with more people contributing in an immediate, frank, and direct way, the tenor of the meetings could change quite rapidly and dramatically; the progression from audience to participant substantively altered the nature and substance of the discussion.

Not everything of importance that happens in a meeting can be recaptured in written form. Thus, for example, the relevance of a particular comment which took place at the very end of a meeting, which seemed to sum up a general mood, and captured an essential contribution to the general interest, or a crucial interjection that was not entirely progressive in its deliberation; some of the discursive process engaged upon the meeting guidelines by the moderators, the early contributions often took the form of ceremonial speeches, more similar to traditional public meetings where local leaders speak for an extended period. As the meetings would progress, with more people contributing in an immediate, frank, and direct way, the tenor of the meetings could change quite rapidly and dramatically; the progression from audience to participant substantively altered the nature and substance of the discussion.

There was another way in which this deliberative process was significant. In many meetings (in particular syndicate and smaller meetings), a deliberative exchange was enacted for substantial amounts of time. This meant that participants engaged in a collective (rather than individual) process of discussion, where common objectives were arrived at through discursive evolution. Participants carried forward a development of the discussion at hand, each contributing to a furthering of issues being aired, and kept to the subject matter in order to achieve common understanding. Of course those who did not speak during these moments were also contributors, as they did not interrupt, disagree, or otherwise break the commitment to the common discussion. (see pages 149 to 152 - Women’s Meeting, Athens)

III

Many of the meetings marked the first time the Palestinian exile or refugee community had met for several years as a whole, or had taken the time to discuss civic and political issues of this nature in such an open forum. In some host countries it was the first time they had met in this way, as opposed to in small groups, single issue events, or at large weddings or national celebrations. Accordingly, some of the discursive process engaged upon was not entirely progressive in its deliberation; indeed on many occasions people would get involved in other participants’ comments, would disagree, interrupt, be interrupted in turn, and an argument, debate, and counter-argument would be advanced simultaneously. At other times this would be interrupted by random interjections on different subjects. Although it was clearly very constructive and helpful for the community to engage upon these early collective discussions, it was much more problematic to attempt to make an audible and comprehensible transcription of the event. With several people speaking at once, often little could be deciphered on the tape by the transcribers, and sometimes what was transcribed became fragmentary. This certainly did not reflect the fact that these moments were frequently powerful and useful for the meetings, and the participants themselves.

IV

The contributions are further characterized by the variety of preparation undertaken in different areas, due to a range of geographical, political, social, and organization constraints on the ground. The difference between a minimum model being applied (as above) and a maximum model (see Part I for the different models) created diverse levels of awareness about the nature of the project, and the level of informed understanding of the issues that were being discussed. Particularly in the case of Lebanon, where an immense and detailed preparatory set of pilot workshops, preparatory meetings – both formal and informal – and widespread information through dissemination and mobilisation was undertaken before the actual meetings, and where such detailed background work was possible this made for an extremely informed, reflective, and serious contribution by the participants. Further, the model used for the meetings themselves, in the setting up of both public and syndicate meetings across
Introduction to the Findings

A unique aspect of the meetings was the types of issues that were explored as a result of the huge expanse of host countries where meetings were held. Two factors need highlighting here. One issue particular to location is the status of Palestinians, and the relationship they have forged with the host country. This has raised many unique factors, entirely connected to the particular set of civic and political circumstances in which Palestinian refugees live. The second, equally important point that emerges from the range of places in which were held is the extraordinary commonality of certain key issues. The most striking feature of this work is the close identification that Palestinians share on the nature of the challenges that face them, and even on the solutions to address these challenges. Certain persistent issues were raised in meetings and can be seen as universal, such as the need to reanimate unions, direct elections to the Palestine National Council (PNC) for those in exile, safeguarding the Right of Return, and the need for a census and the issuing of identity papers. Sometimes these demands were addressed to a particular body, but most of them were addressed to all national bodies, and were thus not grouped under one heading, but can be found throughout the text.

In two host countries meetings took a more constrained course. Preparatory meetings were held in Syria at an early stage of the project, but in the end permission to hold these meetings was not granted by the relevant authorities. Accordingly, the materials included here are only from those early general meetings during which time formal discussions were held with officials about the possibility of convening substantive meetings. As such, these partial records do not possess the status of findings in the way other do. These early meetings were exploratory and informal, with no formal moderating from the project team, and they all lacked the same conditions – the sets of questions that were finalized by the moderators, the technical conditions such as taped meetings, or the same level of public preparation – under which other meetings were convened.

In Jordan a set of meetings were recorded but also do not comprise an equivalent part of these findings. Some two and a half years on, we are still waiting for permission from the relevant Jordanian ministry officials to hold these civic meetings in the Palestinian refugee camps. However, the very early pilot meetings held in Jordan (where the broad issues of the project were discussed in a general way) have been incorporated in the findings. They provide a useful summary of the views of some of the refugees there. Although in Jordan and Syria only informal preparatory or pilot meetings were held, and therefore we do not claim they hold the status of the other meetings included here, the project team thought their inclusion might prove both useful and illuminating.

A final feature of the meetings was that the conditions they were held under directly influenced the kinds of contribution made by the participants. In Egypt, for example, the meetings were held in secret, as meetings of this nature are not allowed in the country. In Iraq, the challenges in holding meetings in the face of the ongoing security situation were matched only by the courage and determination of both moderator and participants to ensure they were convened (see Moderator from Iraq’s discussion, page 256). The value of these contributions, and the style and method in which participants discussed the issues, take an added weight from the complex and extraordinary challenges the refugees face in the ability to discuss these simple everyday civic matters at all. Therefore, to be consistent, inclusive, and above all protective in the presentation of the voices of the participants we have published here, we have removed all relevant names. This has meant the loss of information that might have otherwise been useful for the reader; in particular in recognizing the large proportion of women participating and contributing to the discussions. The transcripts and tapes are now reserved in their entirety in the archived database at Nuffield College, and this archive can be accessed through application to the College and the Project Director. The confidentiality of some of the participants in certain host countries needs to be preserved until such a time that international and national protections of individuals have created the necessary conditions for free access.
Further findings: The Meetings in Palestine and the Moderators’ Meeting

Two further sets of meetings are included in the Further Findings Section (see page 231), those held in Palestine, and a three day meeting in Cyprus where some of the moderators were able to come together to discuss how they had implemented the debates in their host country. For the Palestine discussions, these meetings were held under different conditions from the earlier debates, and thus are not included in the main findings. First they were arranged by local moderators in four regions (Nablus, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Gaza) according to neither the minimum or maximum model, but instead constructed to address and include NGOs, representatives of the popular committees and national forces, as well as Right of Return and other activists from the refugee camps. Although the moderators involved had expressed an interest to hold a similar set of public meetings to those convened elsewhere, time and budget constraints unfortunately prevented a similarly comprehensive process to be carried out inside occupied Palestine. Certainly NGOs and other local associations were, at the time the project came to a close, seeking to convene meetings to include internally displaced Palestinians inside Israel and the 1948 territories. It is hoped that these committees and associations can make use of the findings to advance the ideas of holding meetings so that the next stage of this work carries even greater inclusivity of the Palestinian people. As for the last set of findings, these comprise extracts from the taped discussions held over a period of three days at Cyprus in the early autumn of 2005, where some of the moderators met, many for the first time. Unfortunately visa, travel document, and travel restriction issues prevented the moderators from a number of host countries from attending these discussions, such as Spain, Australia, Italy, the UAE, and Chile, so these findings are only a part of the views of the many moderators and activists who ran the meetings in the Palestinian Shatat. Two of the moderators, from Egypt and Saudi Arabia, had yet to convene the meetings in their countries, and so were discussing matters in advance, rather than retrospectively.

Language, Translation, and Transcription

Most of the meetings were conducted in Arabic. This is the case for all the meetings held in the Arab world. In some European countries, the meetings were held in a mixture of Arabic, English, and the host country language, but with Arabic still predominating. This mixture of languages was particularly the case in the Sweden where different generations spoke to each other and with their peers across different languages. Palestinians of the younger generation, and Palestinians who have lived for longer periods of time in host countries, tended to rely upon the local language, for example in Chicago, Australia, Sweden, Detroit, and Toronto. However, the meetings were sometimes a mix of Arabic and English as older members of the community preferred to speak in Arabic, and often the younger generation was able to understand Arabic yet were uncomfortable speaking in it. The Chile meetings were conducted in Spanish.

All quotes were derived from an arduous and delicate process transferring different types of tapes into CDs, the transcription of these recordings into documents, the translation of these documents into English, and finally, the editing the Arabic for standardization and correlating between the English and Arabic quotes. The only exception to this is the meetings that were held in Australia where the quotes are drawn from detailed written minutes of the note-takers.

Apart from Australia, all quotes in Part Two are from recorded meetings. However, there were also meetings convened for the project that we were not able to include here. Numerous preparatory, public, and syndicate meetings were either not recorded, or their sound was irretrievably distorted and inaudible, which makes their inclusion in the report impossible. These include certain preparatory and syndicate meetings in the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, the US, France, and Yemen, and public meetings in Austria, Riyadh, and a day-long public meeting (accompanied by a series of smaller meetings which included a meeting for Palestinian children), conducted in Ottawa. A full list of meetings held is available in Annexe A.
Translators’ Note

Part Two consists of transcriptions of meetings where people spoke in a mixture of local Arabic dialects, Modern Standard Arabic, and sometimes also combined local languages with Arabic. It is difficult to translate these without losing the style and idiosyncrasies of how people speak in a political setting. Very often certain forms of understanding, expressions and definitions – though self-explanatory to those present – are difficult to translate to an English-speaking reader. Those speaking would often make use a variety of terms to express what would be regarded, in English, as the same word. This speaks to the richness of Arabic categories and definitions of existing forms of political participation and civic involvement. Moreover, people would sometimes utilize references to Arab-Islamic political history in order to define the nature of their relationships to their representatives. For example, there is a consistent reference to the PLO as the fundamental marji’ya to which all Palestinians refer. Depending on the context of the meeting and the speaker’s argument, we have translated this as reference point, sole authority, authority, or legitimate authority.

We have tried to maintain a hint of the colour of the original Arabic by maintaining some of the phrasing structure, local sayings, and injunctions (such as insha’Allah), although much of this has been sacrificed to both clarity and readability. This is a great pity as much of the vigour, elegance, subtlety, and expressiveness of the speakers has been lost in the English translation. However we decided that it would be far better to make sure their voices are as clear in the translation as they are in the original form.

Terms are transliterated as closely as possible according to the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) system, although some differences are still present, particularly for local dialects. In addition, proper names and definitions that already have a more recognizable English transliteration have been used instead.

Finally, we have kept to using the Arabic term of al Shatat for the Palestinian dispersion, as the English term Diaspora does not adequately capture the complex nature and status of this condition.
Part II

1) National Representative

What will happen now that we have a consulate? What will happen to those of us who live abroad? Are things going to be easier if we want to visit our relatives inside? This is just one question... yet there are a lot of questions Palestinians wish to ask and to convey to our official Palestinian bodies through the national organization.

(Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)
I) The PLO and the Palestinian People

a. The PLO as Sole Legitimate Representative

So it seems everyone has reached a result – albeit an emotional one. This result, that the PLO is the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, is nearly taken for granted. I personally have doubts about this issue at the present time. Is the PLO really still the only legitimate representative for the Palestinian people? I think that this question is important, and a very important one in this meeting when it is asked within this framework; when we wonder when the PLO the only legitimate representative for the Palestinian people? And why it might not still be so? I say that the PLO was the only legitimate representative for the Palestinian people when the voice of the Palestinian student, worker, peasant, and woman was heard; wherever they were, whether the student was in Dakkar, Moscow, or London; his voice was automatically heard to the Executive Committee of the PLO through very organized union structures and frameworks; when the opinion and attitude of the Palestinian peasant in any village was conveyed to the Palestinian National Council, and then to the Palestinian Central Council, then to the Palestinian Executive Committee, in a totally democratic and coherent way. So there were seven representatives in the Palestinian National Council for the students union, and ten for the labour union, and fifteen for the women union, and so on. Consequently, the decision that was issued by the Legislative Council, which is adopted by the PLO’s Executive Committee, that it was a democratic representative for all the Palestinian sections. Back then, we were able to say that the Palestinian decision that was issued by the PLO is the only legitimate representative for the Palestinian people. What happened now? The PLO is what is left in a framework that has been completely emptied from content; a non-legitimate National Council; a non-legitimate unelected Executive Committee; and a union structure that had been dissolved by a decision from inside the PLO which resulted in the absence of the students, labor, and women unions. Thus free democratic self-expression is totally absent in the opinion of the Palestinian sectors. We should have a defined and common goal to support our cause in Al-Shatat countries and to support the PLO as the only legitimate representative for all the Palestinians.

The PLO isn’t good for anything, this is what I think, whether you agree with me or not. It doesn’t exist for me, but we, as Palestinians, do exist and we must find our way. We will find our way, so forget the PLO. We should have a defined and common goal to support our cause in Al-Shatat countries and to support the PLO as the only legitimate representative for all the Palestinians.

Are we willing to back the PLO even though they are seen as a corrupt organization? I stress the importance of the relative independence of the PLO in its espousal of our national rights as a people, most especially the right of return. The PLO is also important as our sole and legitimate representative.

I think that we must basically agree that the PLO is emptied of its contents. It had, twenty years ago, many political frameworks to which people belonged, and people used to convey their demands one way or another to the central committee of the National Council. And I agree with you about what was just said that the PLO doesn’t represent all the Palestinian people. Now there is a separation, the National Authority represents some of us now. I don’t want to say this, it’s obvious.

The first recommendation is that of the Palestinian people, or their cause, and of the PLO, the only representative for the Palestinians which can speak in their names, to not leave any room for uncertainty.

Our representative is clear: It is the PLO, and it is the only legitimate representative for the Palestinians wherever they are, on the basis of not renouncing the right of return. If any strand in the PLO renounced the right of return, he is only representing himself, not us. But we are still under the flag of the PLO. There is Palestinian, Arab, and international consensus that the PLO is our only legitimate representative, and this is indisputable.

I say that the PLO is the only legitimate representative for the Palestinian people. What happened now? The PLO is what is left in a framework that has been completely emptied from content; a non-legitimate National Council; a non-legitimate unelected Executive Committee; and a union structure that had been dissolved by a decision from inside the PLO which resulted in the absence of the students, labor, and women unions. Thus free democratic self-expression is totally absent in the opinion of the Palestinian sectors. We should have a defined and common goal to support our cause in Al-Shatat countries and to support the PLO as the only legitimate representative for all the Palestinians.

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My representative on the national level is the PLO, considering that it is the only legitimate representative recognized on the Arab and international level. There is no alternative. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

The PLO is the only legitimate representative for the Palestinian people wherever they are. This is internationally recognized. And it is obvious that there isn’t any chance of debating about it. (Participant, Public meeting, Arhus, Denmark)

There is another thing. I know that the PLO has many negative aspects, and I know that there are people in the PLO who could be called traitors. And I know that its leadership is not that good. But if I have problems with the PLO, this doesn’t mean that I don’t recognize it as the only legitimate national representative for us Palestinians. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

The issue we are stressing here is that the PLO is the only legitimate representative for all the Palestinian people wherever they are. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

The PLO, with its principles, is the organization which represents the Palestinian people. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany)

My only legitimate representative is the PLO, not any other organization. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

The PLO is the Palestinian legitimate representative. (Participant, Public meeting, Damman, Saudi Arabia)

The Palestinian peoples’ only legitimate representation is through the PLO, and this representative got bigger, and we never went through other international institutions or agencies. This means that this is our voice. (Participant, Youth meeting, Damman, Saudi Arabia)

As for my national representative, it is any free Palestinian who would make my right to my country and village a recognizable right. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

As a Palestinian, I can confirm that the PLO is the legitimate representative regardless of its current weakness. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

First of all, the PLO is the only legitimate representative for me, and even for the Palestinian people who live in Al-Shatat. (Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany)

Of course my representative is the PLO. How nice it would be for us, the Palestinians, if all the Palestinian committees were united to form a national unity. Finally, any Palestinian who doesn’t renounce the right of return represents me and all the Palestinian people. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

I believe the community in Al-Shatat must go beyond the point of exploring the group structure and ways to communicate in order to seek to formalize this communication with the PLO, which we all agree – despite the ups and downs since the mid-1970s – is the legitimate representative. That’s it, it goes without doubt that no one at present denies that it is the only one that represents our people. (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

b. Existing Structures and Channels of Communication

As for channels of communication, there are, of course, representatives from certain bodies and federations and unions here who represent people and connect them to our national representatives. And there are channels of communication through these organisations. The PLO represents all of them and we don’t want the PLO reduced to a clique, as we must preserve the fact that it represents all Palestinians. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, El-Buss camp, Lebanon)

The structures and organizations that we contact are the PLO and the popular committees, and I also mentioned Hamas and some other organizations. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Buq’ el-Shemali camp, Lebanon)

There is a relationship between us and the PLO, and our relationship with the PLO’s offices is an established relationship. Sometimes disputes arise concerning certain issues, but the relationship still exists, and the PLO’s offices had never refused holding any Palestinian meeting or declined to answer any question. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

As for communication with the international institutions, it is achieved through our institutions, and they offer acceptable services. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hweh camp, Lebanon)

As a Palestinian citizen, as someone living in Canada, and as someone who is in Canada responsible for its well being as a citizen, we speak about these things, and I am not sure if everyone had the chance to do that. The PLO ambassador’s mind is open – if you call him at the Embassy he would give you his home number. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)
I am one of those fortunate ones who were able to sit on the board of the American Federation of Ramallah, Palestine. Through that organization I have had access to communication to the national representative. But that access is limited, and we should not be talking about this limited access of a non profit organization that does charitable work, that has political clout within a city somewhat. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

As for channels of communication, there is the PLO leadership in Lebanon, and this leadership communicates with the central leadership, and we don’t want any other method of communication to replace the PLO, which is the only legitimate representative for the Palestinian people. The channels of communication are achieved through the PLO’s representatives in Lebanon, and through its sub-federations and sub-unions. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, El-Buss camp, Lebanon)

It seems to me that the Palestinian Embassy was previously the channel of communication between us and our national representative. The Embassy was very negligent in this respect. But lately the Embassy went through a period of great and extensive revitalization, performing activities in the Palestinian refugees regions. It is trying to develop a real means of communication between us here in Norway and between our national representative, the PLO. I think that no one represents me in this country or is authorized to contact my national representative for me except the Palestinian Embassy. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

In Canada we have the Palestinian refugee committee which is based in Ottawa and they deal with Palestinian refugees, and in the PLO we have this. We have the Palestinian refugee committee which is part of the PLO and responsible for Palestinian refugee issues, and we have representatives from each camp. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

The relationship with the PLO is established through the federations and popular committees. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, El-Buss camp, Lebanon)

I have direct contacts with the PLO office and with members of the administrative committee in the PLO office depending on the program we set – to revive the Palestinian anniversary of Land Day, or of Nakba Day. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

The PLO is considered the responsible political organization of the refugees, and the relationship with it is established through the unions and popular committees, while the relationship with UNRWA is established through popular committees. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, El-Buss camp, Lebanon)

In several camps, there are public unions, associations, clubs, youth organizations, and a womens’ union. (Participant, Public meeting, Malma, Sweden)

c. Lack of Connection to the PLO

As Palestinians living in Canada, we actually need such meetings, because many of us face legal problems with the Canadian government, and some of us face economic ones. The Palestinian community in Canada is somewhat distanced from the PLO, especially these last years. Communication is almost cut off, and the Embassy is not concerned about the community’s problems. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

Why won’t the Palestinians see us? Why won’t they come to our houses and see the way we live? They are useless ambassadors and officials who ride fancy cars with guards behind and in front of them. Their children are in Europe and Russia, and also in England and France in order to study, why can’t our children study? (Participant, Meeting, Hilwan, Egypt)

I think they [the PLO] deliberately ignore us. I don’t want to be ignored, I want to impose my presence. There isn’t a single organisation which can convey the demands of the refugees: why? What do you suggest as civil channels of communication through which we can convey this voice? We’re simply talking about it, but we are not able to know the way to communicate and contact the PLO. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

As for the relationship with the PLO and sketching out a mechanism to deal and talk with it, I am pretty pessimistic. I have no relations with the PLO, I haven’t even entered the Embassy in its old or its new building at Al-Saadun Street, except for once. To speak frankly, when you enter the Embassy, you feel you are a stranger, as if you weren’t a member of the Palestinian community in this country. And they start asking questions like: where are you going? What do you want? Who do you want to see? For example, the official in the Palestinian Embassy responsible for refugees entered only two houses in Al-Salam neighbourhood a year or so before the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime. He took photos, and talked with people, and from 40 houses which are there, he only entered two, in order to look into what’s wrong. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq).
This is not right, the President should know every detail of what’s happening. But they don’t tell him the truth. Our President is supposed to feel our suffering — and he would if he came to Egypt and saw the way we live. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

We suffer at work. We also suffer socially, politically, and representatively. Our representative, who should feel my suffering, doesn’t, alas, feel anything. He does not know anything about our pain. Or he knows, and distort the facts. I think he can ease some of this suffering, and consider it as a remedy to cure the pain. He could offer a lot of things, but he doesn’t offer anything, and he takes the assistance for himself. This is alas what happened in the past, and what is happening now. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

How are we supposed to handle these issues? I recommend we submit our suggestions on how to communicate with our international leadership. We have mobiles and occasional bulletins. I wonder where the PLO, which is our national representative, is. And does it think in the same way as you do? And does it have a means of communication such as the internet like the American, Canadian or Italian communities which are communicating with their countries through e-mails? (Participant, Public meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

I wish I could go to Gaza to see this Abbas whom they appointed as our President. I want to ask him to come and see how people here are hungry. [A Palestinian official] gets millions in financial assistance. Once, an Egyptian told me while I was leaving the Embassy that when they see their cars, it is not possible to say that these are Palestinians, because they are the richest people. Just look at his office! But he is not giving us his money. (Participant, Meeting, Hilwan, Egypt)

d. Absence of and Neglect by the PLO

7. There aren’t any institutions for the Palestinian Liberation Organization in Iraq. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

The PLO is paralyzed and worn out, yet we have supported it ever since it was established, for it is the only legitimate representative for the Palestinian people. But it has played no role since 1983. The National Council has been holding meetings for political reasons, although all of the PLO’s departments themselves are absent. At the Cairo Meeting, resolutions were issued with the aim of having the people themselves choose their representatives for the Council. The Palestinian Authority is assuming its role, albeit incompletely, in the West Bank and Gaza, but it is entirely absent concerning the Palestinian people abroad. We all insist upon the right of return based on UN Resolution 194. The United States of America is to be blamed for not implementing this resolution. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Sbeineh camp, Syria)

We had rare occasional relationships with the Palestinian Liberation Organization. When anything happened, the PLO used to get involved. And after the PLO took over, I can safely say that there isn’t actually an organization; it is absent and we don’t feel its presence, and perhaps it doesn’t know our actual location right now. We haven’t heard that the PLO has held any talks with anyone about our current problems. I am one of those who had complained several times to the Palestinian Embassy concerning our suffering under this new regime. Up until this moment, no one answered me. I still haven’t been given an answer. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Toba’a), Baghdad, Iraq)

The Palestinian street suffers from chaos. No one answers us: everything is just ink on paper: Even Mahmud Abbas doesn’t answer us. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

In areas other from Iraq, the connection between the Palestinian communities and the leadership is there, and they do communicate. However, fear is the most common denominator between members of each community. Even those who have passports are uncomfortable. Daily concerns differ from one arena to another. (Participant, Public Meeting, Sana’a, Yemen)

Where is the popular army? The Palestinian Liberation Army. Where is it? (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

Up until now and after the death of Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian government hasn’t decided exactly what it will do concerning Palestinian refugees and the Right of Return. As for me as an individual, any Palestinian government represents me as a Palestinian and a refugee if they were born and
I) The PLO and the Palestinian People
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What is our fate as Palestinians in Iraq? What did the Authority do for us? Why doesn’t it ask about us and look into our problems? In this country, everything is possible. The Authority is busy now in Gaza, what will it do for us? When Mahmud Abbas came to power, things got clearer. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’faraniya – Al-Shatat, Baghdad, Iraq)

They tell you we are building PLO institutions and popular committees. Apparently there is a popular committee, but is it really studying and following the camp’s conditions? (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Nafr El-Bared camp, Lebanon)

As for the issue of representation, we hope to have a channel of communication with our national representative, the PLO. The PLO is still, after thirty years, our only legitimate representative, and it is comprised of the Palestinian factions that are represented inside it. After Oslo, and the end of the armed struggle, the Palestinians in Al-Shatat - who number about five or six million people according to statistics - should have a voice, a strong voice. We are now gathered in Al-Shatat saying that the return issue is a sacred one. How will we convey our voice to our national representative, and where is this national representative that will hear us and convey our needs, demands, and voice to the concerned international institutions which work for the refugees? (Participant, Public meeting, Montreuil, Canada)

First of all, the Iraqi people must solve their problems alone. We can hardly solve ours. Our problem is much bigger and more extensive: we’re just starting our way after 100 years had passed by. Regrettably, this community is completely absent in the minds of the officials of the PLO, even in their statements. For example, when they claim the return of the Palestinian refugees to their properties, they only mention the refugees in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. No one mentions the Palestinian refugees in Iraq, nor in Egypt. No one mentions the Palestinian community in Egypt: why? We have discussed this issue with many Palestinian officials, and we asked them to mention the Palestinian community when they talk about the Palestinian refugees. The refugees in Iraq need to feel that there is someone out there who thinks of them. And this is a real gap: how would he feel when you forget to mention him while mentioning the Palestinians in Jordan, Lebanon, Gaza, West Bank, and Syria? He would say that if he didn’t even mention me in his statement, would he defend me if something bad happened to me? They would say that we mentioned the Palestinians in Al-Shatat. But I want some sort of special mention – this assures me that I am not forgotten. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq)

Concerning the PLO’s policy – and as any Palestinian who lives outside Palestine and who doesn’t have a framework other than the PLO – I must seek someone to represent me. Will it be the Jordanian system, or the so-and-so party, or the such-and-such organization? The PLO represents all Palestinian people outside Palestine. But when the PLO arrived at Oslo they leapt very high – a very high jump that went beyond our thinking - and the Palestinian people who live outside Palestine could no longer adjust to the propositions it made. As unions, we used to be very active here. But they no longer need people to criticize them and tell them to stop, and that they are behaving in a way that doesn’t correspond with what the Palestinian people really want. Its main concern has been always to choose a Palestinian community that would replace institutions that discuss and object to things. And even the Palestinian communities have been no more than a social framework. They (I mean the Palestinian Authority) don’t want even the Palestinian community to exist. And it can object at any moment. (Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany)

The existing Palestinian institutions and agencies whether in the embassy or elsewhere are incredibly bureaucratic. You are treated differently when you enter these institutions. This is a very important for Palestinians. By this I mean dignity and a good attitude when you deal with Palestinians. Yet these institutions can’t motivate themselves because they are blocked for security reasons. The elite which has money is preferred by them – but there are Palestinians within this elite whom the system itself fears lest they become powerful and influential. Consequently they too are oppressed. You must be in the same circle as the government. This is one of the reasons. The other reason is that these agencies can’t work because the whole nation is suffering from a crisis.
For whom would they work when there are so many of us? That’s why they can’t do anything. The press and media are attacked; they rush to the lawyers union. Therefore we are speaking about a Palestinian authority whose its strength, no matter how far it gets, is far less than any other established and independent country. You are talking about a weak authority ruled by the security institutions in the first place. There is no lobby for this issue, and that’s another reason. Also there are broken relations among various Palestinian authorities. I think no one has dealt with this issue: to connect these Palestinian authorities so that they can feel that they have an independent identity. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

These representatives have never represented themselves to us, and actually even two of the people that sit on the PNC or the PNC refugee committee are right here. Although they know who we are they have never contacted us. Even when you contact them they never contact you, so if there is someone with a supposed portfolio. We know they are doing nothing, and in any democratic process people have the right to communicate with those who communicate with them, or who represent them. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada.)

The PLO office doesn’t want you! The PA doesn’t want you! Our rights have been lost since the date of the Catastrophe until this day. We have lived 40 years in Lebanon, and no one ever considered taking our voice into account! (Participant, Public Meeting, Koge, Denmark)

A brother from the PLO came and we talked to him, and told him to convey our greetings to our leader Abu Ammar whom we know and who knows us. And he is not a stranger; he’s like a son to us. But they don’t care enough for our people in Iraq. A teacher can’t be appointed unless he’s Ba’athist, and there are a lot of forbidden things we can’t do. For example, you can’t buy a bicycle for your son. Our only hope is in the Authority. Abu Mazen is a new official along with many brothers in the Authority; and we hope he would pay attention to our people in Iraq and we hope that he would come visit us if things get better. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’faraniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

There is another thing: we don’t have anyone to represent us here in Al-Shatat countries – in the camps or in any other country. Who is our representative? It’s true that our representative is the PLO, which is the only legitimate representative, but there is no communication; neither with the PLO nor with our people in the occupied lands. Where is the communication between us? It doesn’t exist. If my son had a job opportunity abroad, he will need a reference. We don’t have a legitimate authority to convey our voice to, or resort to, when any issue arises. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

This isn’t a life. Let them come and live with our suffering. The least one can do is offer me support. Tell me that this is a book which contains the names of the wounded and affected families. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

As for our conditions as a community, all unions and federations and committees that existed in the community were destroyed after the Oslo agreements. You can say that they have deserted us. The PLO deserted the Students’ Union, the Labour Union, the Women’s Union, and the Trade Union’s Federation. There were a lot of unions, and they were all working under the PLO on the media level and on the leadership level. The members of the PLO came from people who work abroad. After the Oslo agreements, all these unions were destroyed, and the PLO deserted all of the unions and federations. And people lost confidence in the PLO – not as a representative, but as a channel of communication and process of connection that no longer exists. (Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany)

We don’t have organizations or communities; this is the first time we hear of such things. And we don’t have any communication with the Palestinian Authority. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We all want “the right of return”, but if there isn’t a right of return, we want alternatives for the reality in which we live. Abu Mazen demanded only the territories of ’67. We don’t know anything about the Authority except what we hear on the television. Where are the 48 regions? Where are the rights of the 48 refugees? Our situation is similar to cancer – we have taken all the treatment, but it hasn’t worked. After the collapse of the regime we tried everything; nothing worked. We took pictures of all the shelters and sent them to the Authority. We addressed Mohammad Dahlan and Farouq Qaddumi and Yasser Arafat. No one answered us. We also addressed Bush who claims to be the guardian of the liberties in the world. There is no solution for our problems. Our problem is that we don’t have a powerful man to solve our problem. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’faraniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

It is suggested that a delegation from the Palestinian Authority should go to Iraq and meet the Iraqi government, and with Dr. Al-Ja’fari specifically, the head of the Iraqi government, and with the Iraqi officials, to put an end to the suffering of

Until today I didn’t know that we had a national representative. Who is he, and what does he actually do, and what does his position and role entail? Our national representative should attempt to do things with youth and young people, like establishing websites, and tapping into the electronic media to reach out to Palestinian youth. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)
I) The PLO and the Palestinian People

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To be honest, I feel that the PLO is distant from me, and although I feel Arab and I’m a Palestinian refugee from the camps, I don’t know anything about the political issues. But I want to return to my country. (Participant, Public Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

We don’t have a central authority inside the refugee population. Frankly, everything is neglected in what relates to the means or civil structures which one uses now as an organization. There are no mechanisms, we don’t do anything. Every organization is doing its best to serve the people in its own way, but there are no common mechanisms. The popular committee is neglected; consequently there is nothing but the existing organizations which assume that they serve their people. Everyone depends on his own work, and there is a lot of exception in this area for so many people. Everyone tries to benefit those who are related to him, and there are people in trouble who can’t find anyone to serve them. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

The General Union of Students is merely a name. There are no elections, and we don’t benefit from the money that is supposed to be given to the students. In the agency, you can get a scholarship if you know important people who will make sure that you get it. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Sheneh camp, Syria)

As for the relationship with the new regime – we all know what the occupation is. The minute it arrived, it demanded Syria close the offices of Palestinian resistance factions considering them terrorist organizations. And, of course, all the Palestinian resistance factions’ offices in Iraq were closed. Even the Palestinian Embassy was deprived of the privilege of being an Embassy; it does not have diplomatic immunity. I am not trying to defend the Embassy. I rarely sees its employees. They lifted diplomatic immunity from all embassies, especially after arresting the Palestinian Chargé d’affaires, and the Palestinian Commercial Attaché, to justify lifting immunity. An Embassy without immunity and a community which is now unprotected. Its authority is when it calls the factions, but the factions don’t have the answer; since they don’t have the capabilities. There is a possibility that the factions will meet the parties in Iraq, albeit in limited meetings. These Iraqi powers and parties welcome you and praise you, but when it comes to decision-making they don’t have any effect. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq)

I’m telling you that the PLO is broken and frozen. (Participant, Public Meeting, Koge, Denmark)

Why don’t we give every family a caravan to go out and live in the desert. That will be better than suffering in these shelters. Who represents us doesn’t do anything, and doesn’t work to solve our problems. Why? (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Humiya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

What has the Embassy done for us? Let’s go back in time a little. We have received numerous letters saying can’t do anything about this shelter! I am one of those people who would have been executed if I were to be exposed. I appeared on TV, and said that their reports contain a lot of mistakes about the refugees’ conditions. Perhaps [participant] knows about that. You are talking about suffering, well, suffering is huge, and where shall we begin? Ok, why are we living here, is this a room with a space for five persons? Water falls on you from this side, and doesn’t work to solve our problems. Why? (Participant, Women’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

We have no electricity and the Popular Committee is not aware of this. They only hang electricity lines, but water and electricity lines are cut. The same applies to the infrastructures projects which are being implemented but in a certain order. The streets have holes in them with water and mud, the electricity is cut, and the electricity lines dangle many times, what if some people or children died as a result? Who will be responsible for that? We don’t have a legitimate authority here. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

Why? (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq)

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tell you about it, all our conditions are very bad, what do you want to talk about? If I were to talk until morning, I wouldn’t say enough, and this wouldn’t cure the pain. All Palestinians suffer in this country. We built this fence outside from our own money to protect families, we raised 250, and 500 from every family and we built it. We explained our suffering many times to the Embassy in vain. Who represents us in this country? I only have one question, who represents us in Iraq? Is it the Embassy? Frankly the Embassy doesn’t represent us, it only represents itself. How many employees are there in the Embassy? Can’t they build this fence? What’s wrong with that? Is it wrong to cooperate under our current situation? What do you want us to do? Against whom must we fight? If you want to complain, he will fight against us. I wish some official will solve our problems. One man was appointed, what did he do? Nothing. And even if there is another official, he won’t do anything. This I tell you frankly: this official saw the way we live, and our miserable houses, and what did he do for us? Nothing. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Humiya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

There are several points of view on the Palestinian scene. For us, the right of return is a collective and individual right that can’t be manipulated. The Palestinian state is not an alternative to the right of return. We don’t accept anything other than the implementation of Resolution 194. Frankly, we are addicted to having someone to act as a representative for us; the leadership issues orders that we should implement. The political base does not take our opinion into consideration. But we don’t accept to be ignored. The PLO is our only legitimate representative, yet its role is marginalized. Federations were not formed. All the institutions in the camp are absent. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

As for the PLO, it is the only legitimate representative. Here, the list is available, two thirds of its members have either died or retired. Accordingly, the PLO is the sole legitimate representative and when it is formed it will bring together all the shades and factions of the Palestinian people. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

There are several Palestinian National Council (PNC) members who live in Canada. Among them is [members in the Palestinian National Council]. And the question to them is how they have exercised their position as PNC members. And then also there are these other organizations like the General Union of Palestinian Women and other parts of the PLO that may not formally exist in Canada. So for example the General Union of Palestinian Women is supposed to be operating for Palestinians in Mississauga but we haven’t seen any activities from it, so we don’t know what to hold them accountable to, because of their lack of activity. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

All talk of forming an independent committee in this country is void of meaning. We tried that when the PLO was still a strong organization, but now it is marginalized. The Palestinian Authority represents the Palestinians who are in the West Bank and Gaza, while the PLO represents all Palestinians, whether they live under occupation or as refugees in exile. The PLO had established institutions, popular institutions, women’s unions, students’ unions, and unions for all social sectors. These unions had their institutions which represented the Palestinians wherever they were. They used to contact them, and they had a joint program for every gathering, and a general program for all Palestinians. The PLO is the best organization to

We built the PLO with our blood. It is the only legitimate representative for us. But where is it now, considering all its institutions are paralysed? There are 34,000 refugees in Jaramana Camp without even one member in the National Council. Therefore, we demand the re-establishment of the PLO on democratic foundations and through elections. There are no channels of communication with either the PLO or international institutions. Consequently, the international community should support these refugee camps and assist us to build civic structures that represent the interests of Palestinian refugees. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

We are the people who should care for Palestine. We should not be asking for someone, or going to somebody as a community. We decide we want a PLO, so as a community we should start a PLO, if you want change you have to be an agent yourself; we have done it again and again. We have to use the power that we have, and we are not using that. We sat down and said let Congress do it, we should stop saying they should make the change. We should say we need to create change. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)
I) The PLO and the Palestinian People

Need to Reactivate and Revive the PLO

The issue of representing the Palestinian people in the Authority or the legitimate representative, or the existing PA, or in the decisions taken at present is the other side of the coin. There is a relationship as a Palestinian community here or in France and everywhere in the world, and who has the right to vote. No one disagrees with this. The question is how this process would be achieved. We should suggest here to activate the PLO's role, and then leave matters to see how they solve them in the future. (Participant, Activists' meeting, Athens, Greece)

The PLO used to represent all Palestinian political factions. Therefore what is needed now is to activate the PLO by reinvigorating the federations we used to have. In the UAE we had a women's union, a students' union, a workers' union, an engineers' union and a writers' union. These unions had headquarters and they were effective, but when the PLO was marginalized, these unions stopped working. It was not the state which decided to end these unions; it was our decision. The Palestinian Authority is now negotiating on the West Bank and Gaza, and on the rights of the Palestinians, and their goal is to negotiate as the Palestinian Authority, not as the PLO. Therefore, the best channel of representation may be a committee here. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

We have a deficit in Al-Beqaa area. We have federations, like the writers and the pharmacists’ federations, but they don’t have a field of work. We should activate these federations, and we demand the PLO in Lebanon to do so. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

The second issue is the PLO. I think that we should not depend on the fact that this needs the support of the PLO. Personally, I badly believe that there is nothing named the PLO. And there is no leadership for this organization. And even if there was a leadership, it no longer represents the Palestinian people. The last parliamentary meeting of the Palestinian National Council was formed twenty years ago; its members have either died or retired or resigned. Practically there is no PLO. Moreover, the PLO is no longer in tune with the developments of Palestinian political power including Hamas and Islamic Jihad. That’s why I say that popular effort is what is going to revive the PLO. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

The PLO marginalized millions of refugees around the world. I don’t recognize Abu Mazen and I refused his statement in which he asked any country that wants to give the nationality to Palestinians to do this as an alternative to the right of return. I urge the re-establishment of the PLO and its institutions because we need this national representative to defend our social and national causes. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Sbeineh camp, Syria)

It is very important that we communicate with our only national and legitimate representative, the PLO. But this communication must be achieved through institutions and not individuals. And if there isn’t any communication between the institutions, their leaderships, and their members. This is a huge problem that we must solve. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

It is well known that the Palestinian Authority represents only, and exclusively, the Palestinian people who live inside. The PLO represents the largest sector of the Palestinian people who live in different countries. Therefore I think in order to
exert pressure on the Palestinian negotiators, as well as the other party to the conflict, it is very important to further activate the PLO’s role. This is because it includes all sectors of the Palestinian people, not only the Palestinians inside. (Participant, Public meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

I want to point out that we want accountable structures and that we need to rebuild these structures. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

In the past decade, we have ourselves had to organize and create a new organization, which was great, but I think we have to put more pressure on the PLO. Either these organizations are part of PLO or they have some kind advisory role and they take us seriously. Because they organize outside of these organizations as if we are a marginal organization that is being sidelined. So maybe from now on in putting more pressure on PLO, to first always think within existing organizations, and the reform of these organizations. Just because we have been accustomed in the last decade or two to take things with our own hands. But sometimes we create new things rather on building up existing organizations. Someone once told me who has left the PLO in the sixties and the institutions, that this is the biggest mistake, most of the discussions that we are having were happening in PLO in the sixties in terms of decision-making and accountability. And of course those honest voices were encouraged even then, they had a problem of the Mithaq, and they had different ways to go around it but it still stands as a major achievement of the Palestinian people. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

I think that working on reprogramming the Palestinian institutions is an essential demand for the Palestinian community. (Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany).

Let’s emphasize that the PLO, however weak it is, is still powerful because the Palestinian people are strongest. (Participant, Public Meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

The most urgent needs are in the fields of health, education, and work. The work of the institutions and civil rights should be managed in detail. When someone, for example, works as an employee who supports six families but who has no work, how would he live? And with all my respect to you, but all of you come carrying your booklets and writing down notes as if you have sequences sentences, yet you were all raised in camps and you know these things since you suffered from them. Before ‘82, the PLO used to help us teach our youth through scholarships to Russia or Cuba. Those are some of the positives of the PLO, which raised the educational level from elementary to the sixth grade. We, in Lebanon, want to have our civil national rights, and to be able, at least, to work in a Lebanese company. We know that all the brothers in the PLO in Lebanon came from different places, then preach some national speeches all day long. But we all came from the camps and live in zinc houses. Let us define proper foundations to rebuild the PLO in order to make it our basic authoritative body before the Lebanese State. (Participant, Public meeting, Burj el-Barajneh, Lebanon)

I want the PLO back, it’s a must, because as a community we are lost, we are unable to organize ourselves, we are far from it because we don’t have anything to look up to, we don’t look up to the Authority, so that’s why we are not organized. When we have the PLO we will be organized, the PLO is the umbrella, and it should be the highest authority and not the Palestinian Authority, which right now is only its branch. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

I refuse to return to the ’67 territories, and I insist upon Resolution 194. The PLO doesn’t do anything, whether inside or abroad. It is merely a structure. Its institutions should be revived through democratic elections. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

We have a lot of young men who have not been guided through the organizational structure. We recognize that the PLO is the legitimate representative and Palestinians all over the world insist upon this issue. In the PLO, there are institutions other than the Executive Committee. If the Executive Committee is without institutions, and the leadership is without a base, then it is no more than a committee. The PLO’s institutions have been disabled in order to weaken us without resistance. The Popular committees are useless and they don’t represent anyone. And the federations and the unions for students and workers or doctors and engineers are too weak to be able to provide any services to our people.

We also have the higher political committee and the committee of the returnee affairs which have been disabled by an external order. And sadly, we, as Palestinian, helped in destroying them. They must be rebuilt on a civil national basis upon which the process of communication will be guaranteed. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

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I) The PLO and the Palestinian People

f. The Palestinian Authority and the PLO

There are two parties here. Those of us who are outside feel that the Authority does not care about them, and only cares about the Palestinians inside Palestine. The other party is the Palestinians in Al-Shatat, who feel somewhat lost. Who are we? The Authority is busy with itself and its institutions, and the big question is: who represents the Palestinians in Al-Shatat? (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

The PLO is the biggest representative for the Palestinians. And the Authority is the smallest representative because it only represents the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the president of the Authority should not be the president of the PLO. There were some attempts with Abu Ammar to end the role of the PLO. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

We must not wait until forming a committee to represent us. “The Right of Return” is unambiguous, so we must focus on it as long as there are talks under way. I have to make my voice heard to the Palestinian Embassy first, which must, in turn, pass it on to the Palestinian Authority to emphasize that we insist upon the Right of Return. We want the right of return and compensation. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)

Frankly, I went to the Embassy for some business; and I feel that the Palestinian Embassy does not work for the refugees in this country. I feel it is somebody else’s Embassy, maybe for West Bank people, or for the 1967 areas only. I don’t feel that the Embassy represents me. Even the Authority, I don’t feel it works for the benefit of the refugees. I feel that the Authority is for the people of Gaza and the West Bank, who live inside Palestine. The refugee is forgotten, and his rights are lost. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory meeting, Amman, Jordan)

What is the current Palestinian government going to do for us? (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

I hope that we might define matters. We should have a clear political program. Any wife should be included in the Palestinian factions and any husband should accept the political program which is divided into sections, political and military. The political one is the Palestinian masses inside and outside. Secondly, what can I say? In brief, I can say that I want to return. And a comment – I have a complicated comment. This mistake began long ago when the PLO was marginalized within Palestinian communities and the Palestinian nation. The communities didn’t have a role in the first place. There were never elections, and it was necessary to destroy the institutions of the PLO long ago. They first marginalized the students union and started to destroy it. Now, the federations are almost absent. The last step was closing the nationalist hotel. There is now a conspiracy which first began with the people, but they are now conspiring against the PLO to replace it with the Authority. And what they want now is to destroy the systems and the PLO. I think the solution is to activate and strengthen the communities’ role in the PLO. The PLO and the people should draw strength from each other. Thank you. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

There is an attempt in the PLO itself to weaken it and cancel its right of representation. (Participant, Public meeting, Damman, Saudi Arabia)

The biggest thing that I need to emphasize here as a Palestinian is the marginalization of the PLO such that we, as Palestinians, actually had a structure that represented us. And now what we have is the Authority, and as I said before it does not represent the Palestinians. I am speaking structurally – at least the PLO previously included certain movements and labour unions, so that we were able to connect. Where are things going for Palestinians in the world? Right now it feels as if we are foreigners, in each country – we began disintegrating after the Authority came in... just watching, without any connection and without any respect. To me, structurally, that is the biggest flaw that we are facing. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)
Reconnecting with the PLO and separating the Authority from the PLO must be done. Here, there is some sort of confusion between the Palestinian Authority and the PLO. We think that the PA represents our Palestinian brothers who elected it, this is our opinion. We don’t want to elect the Authority, but only the PLO. The PLO is our only legitimate representative, and if there is an election to be conducted for someone to represent us, we want people to represent us in the Palestinian National Council not in the legislative council which represents people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

There is a very important issue. The PLO is the only legitimate representative, and this is not a marginal issue. It was first recognized at the Rabat Summit. There is an Arab consensus that the PLO is the only legitimate representative; this means that it is the political representative for the Palestinian people inside Palestine and also abroad. The PA represents only the Palestinian people inside Palestine. So this means that we shouldn’t neglect the PLO simply because they did so. There is a program in the PLO which demands the right of return. If we neglect the PLO and do not demand to reform it, it’s like neglecting our rights, especially our right to return, and we will no longer have a political representative who would defend this right. The suggestion is very specific, which is to revive the PLO’s institutions on the basis of political foundations. This is a Palestinian popular demand for those who live in Al-Shatat and those who live inside Palestine, the two groups can’t be separated. These are the common demands of the Palestinian people. (Participant, Activist meeting, Athens, Greece)

If anything we should answer the question by saying that we need to reinstate the PLO and re-energize it, so that we will not be disenfranchised. We should advocate this through the community. I am saying that we have the right; I want to re-energize the PLO. We need a real authority – not the Palestinian Authority, because the Palestinian Authority does not represent Palestinians, it represents a certain corrupt segment of Palestinians and all those that are chasing after the mirage of negotiations. Before we had a program of resistance, and now it’s a program of negotiations, that’s enough. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

We should pay attention to the fact that the PLO is not the Palestinian Authority, because the Authority represents the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip only, while the PLO represents the Palestinians wherever they are, whether outside or inside Palestine, and whether in Al-Shatat or in the camps or communities. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

The Authority does not have information about the Palestinians abroad. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)

The Palestinian National Council is a result of the PLO but it is not a part of the Palestinian Authority. (Participant, Public meeting, Berlin, Germany)

I want the Right of Return, but I don’t want the Palestinian Authority to be the representative of the Palestinian people, or my representative. I don’t want either Mahmud Abbas or Abu Mazen, or anyone from this gang. And I accept the PLO as a representative, but not the Palestinian Authority. (Participant, Public meeting, Oslo, Norway)

About the first axis, the Palestinians all agree that the PLO is the only legitimate representative, and I like to thank you for affirming that the Authority is the representative for the Palestinian people inside, and the PLO is part of all this. This is a very important point, and it was emphasized. As for the elections of the Legislative Council, the issue of whether to nominate refugees for the Legislative Council was discussed by the refugees inside Palestine. It was decided not to nominate any refugee, because he would give the semblance of being a representative, which in itself would be manipulating the refugees’ cause. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

Ever since the Palestinian leadership was established in Palestine, the PLO turned its back to the Palestinians abroad as if we were not Palestinians. They didn’t even take our opinions in the Palestinian elections. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

This brother here talked about the Palestinian elections. Although we live here, we don’t have the right to vote and choose the National Authority, because the National Authority is the representative of the Palestinian people within the Authority’s territories, which is the West Bank and Gaza Strip. (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

Well I have to raise the issue of the authorities. I think they should know what they are doing and adopt one policy, which first of all should be registration. They are dreaming of getting something from Sharon and they are going now and negotiating for a state; they are dreaming. I think they should get their act together; nobody is going to throw out the resistance card, never; never forget the main issues, the right of return,
National Representative

1) The PLO and the Palestinian People

\textbf{g. Being Lost Between Authorities}

The Israelis revealed their intention to cancel the PLO, and we also participated with the Authority, so the PLO ran away and became weak. We must assume the responsibility for this, and whoever says that the PLO is strong and supports the Authority really means that the Authority supports the PLO.

(Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

In fact we are trying to separate the various Palestinian institutions. We are saying that there is the PLO, and the Authority, in addition to the popular committees, federations, unions and political activities as if these institutions are separate from each other. What I know, and what everyone knows, is that the PLO is the political, national and socially legitimate representative of the Palestinians, regardless of what you can say now about the PLO’s fragmented and withered state.

(Participant, Public meeting, Berlin, Germany)

The basis I referred to is the Palestinian leadership inside Palestine. I am only a factor that can help, I am not the foundation. The base is the Palestinian leadership inside Palestine, and I take more power from the Palestinian leadership than it takes from me as an immigrant in Sweden. It is possible that it takes much more power from the Palestinian people inside Palestine than from us who are living here in Sweden.

(Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

The PLO should remain the sponsor of the Palestinian people abroad, because it is intended from now on to destroy the refugees. We now just have an Authority inside.

(Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

But what is the role of the PLO towards the refugees? Where is our role? (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

What we notice is that there isn’t communication between the leadership and the refugees in order to define the refugee’s role in the political process.

(Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

How can we reform the PLO to include all the factions? We can’t talk in this meeting about this because this requires experts who are experienced in popular management. It should represent all the factions of the Palestinian people and it should include everyone. This PLO can decide about the return issue. I want a political program that includes all what you are saying. I want a clear procedural system internally, like that in all other organizations in the world. From whom do you want that? From the PLO, the PLO should do that.

(Participants, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

I would like to know who my representative is. As far as the Palestinian community in Canada, I don’t know how to reach my representative, I have never seen my representative, I have never heard my representative guarantee my rights as a Palestinian refugee.

(Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

After establishing the Palestinian Authority, things got more complicated. Jordan began treating us according to the quota system, assigning only 5% to the Palestinians inside and outside and Gaza and those who live in Al-Shatat, and this is a big problem. We became unable to teach our children, and we are not allowed to work except in private institutions and companies — if they accept to hire us! And if we can’t work, we can’t afford to teach our children, consequently our children were lost as we were before. As for medical treatment, we previously presented an application to the Royal Diwan to get exemptions but we are no longer allowed to do that. They say to us that we have a National Authority and...
National Representative

2) Demands of our Representatives

a. International Negotiations

Although it has remained the symbol that the Palestinian people hold to, the PLO’s role has been marginalized since it entered the Oslo process. Nevertheless, it must be rebuilt on democratic bases through elections. The civic committees were formed lest the PLO or the Authority embark upon a political compromise renouncing the right of return. As such, these committees assumed their role on the basis of insisting upon the right of return, and we accordingly maintain these committees, considering that they are independent ones. Hence, we in Syria and in exile are heading towards forming an independent and democratic refugee movement. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Homs (A’ideen) camp, Syria)

I see the core issue as being the responsibility which is upon ourselves, as a unified people who are not willing to sit by and watch a closed-door policy. We have to take action against that – we shouldn’t sit by and watch the Palestinian representatives give away our rights without having our voice heard. Our voice must be heard. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

If one wants the connection to be with the PLO, we then demand the PLO to adhere to its National Charter, in order to exist as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. And since there are initiatives designed to convey our voice to the Authority, we demand the Authority define its standing in respect to the basics. The Palestinian people in the host countries and Al-Shatat and the camps want to return to an entirely freed Palestine. (Participant, Public meeting, Waardergen, Netherlands)

I need to get recognized officially, and I need to know what they are going to negotiate away from me, I need to have this knowledge and information. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

We are trying to convey our voice to the Authority and the negotiators, and we call them to take more steps and to be more patient. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

What really concerns me is that they are negotiating without taking our opinions; they are negotiating in our absence, and as Palestinians, whether refugees or not, those who consider themselves refugees or not are negotiating in our name, as if we don’t have an opinion and as if we are not concerned. Are they talking about the right of return or compensation, or compensation and the right of return? We don’t know what they are negotiating about. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)
I add my voice to all the comments which have been made, and I also say that the PLO is our national representative. But as Palestinians in Canada we should play a big role to support our cause. Unfortunately our cause is being manipulated, especially against us, the Palestinians in Al-Shatat. I heard from leading figures that the Palestinian Authority is circulating rumours that say that we don’t want to return to our land. Some people also say that Israel and the Palestinians agreed with each other on the fate of the Palestinians in Al-Shatat: to settle them where they live. But this is not true. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

As for the right of return, for us as Palestinians the right of return is not a subject of discussion; it is a legitimate and normal right. Humans have the right to live in their home countries. But this right does not exist for the Third World. Israel says that it will allow the return of ten thousand out of the five million Palestinian refugees, but the rest would remain wiped out abroad. This right should be among the foundations of the negotiations, along with another thing, which is restoring Jerusalem. We shouldn’t renounce these two rights. The Palestinian negotiator has no right to renounce them, alleging that he didn’t, and he has no right to say that Jerusalem will be restored while he means Abu Dis. As communities and as Palestinian refugees, we are supposed to prevent negotiators from renouncing Jerusalem or the right to live in their home. Humans have the right to live in their home countries and they even dislike the camps’ residents lest they disagree with them on what they suggest. I want to comment on the title of the Arab-Israeli struggle, which I strongly and absolutely reject; it is the Palestinian-Israeli struggle, because we are to assume the responsibility of our cause with the support of the Arab countries, for our problem is that the Arab countries are conspiring against us! They are the ones that housed us in the camps and they are still conspiring against us in the camps. Among the important points we should discuss is the refugee issue and their return, which is something we should preserve. In Al-Baqa’a Camp, about 100 or 150 thousand Palestinian refugees live in an area of one kilometre to two kilometres. I know people who live in small houses built with wood and zinc; you would cry if you saw them. What else shall I describe? What I am saying is that my friends and I loudly reject that someone would negotiate in our names. We are not against negotiations, but we won’t allow anyone who lives in their vila and whose wife bathes in cologne while I can’t get clean water for my children, to negotiate in our names. What else shall I describe? What I am saying is that my friends and I loudly reject that someone would negotiate in our names. We are not against negotiations, but we won’t allow anyone who lives in their vila and whose wife bathes in cologne while I can’t get clean water for my children, to negotiate in our names. I want to say that he represents the Palestinian people. Who gave him this right to represent us? (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

For me it’s normal; I have the right to return to my land…. It is normal that I live abroad and don’t know the candidates, but we follow the news of Palestine, and we follow everything that happens in Palestine. And the issue is not about judging a person as good or bad if I don’t live in this country. It is true that we are distanced… what are they bargaining over? They are bargaining over the “Right of Return” for the refugees. We don’t live in Palestine, and someone else is electing the person who will be negotiating in our name. I went to many places with the purpose of filling in applications, and in every place I went I was told that “my opinion doesn’t count”. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

The second point is that all negotiations should be open to the public and not behind closed doors, and they should be directed by Palestinian national structures and not by the Palestinian Authority or people appointed by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza. They should be directed by the national bodies, and these negotiations should be open for discussion to the public and open for the Palestinian population. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).
I think it's very important that we get that message across, that people don't have the right to speak. Those negotiating now do not have the right to speak for Palestinians, they have not been given that right by us and whatever they are negotiating has not been approved by the Palestinian community worldwide, and the highest committee should be Palestinians worldwide, not the people negotiating, not even the people living in Gaza, or the West Bank Palestinian community. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

I don't have faith in the peace process. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)

I think what tends to happen sometimes is that politicians tend to think that they should negotiate for things that they can get and that's why they get to logistic solutions. But there is no indication that they will get a two state solution. Instead, we should have people at the Embassy who participate in the decision-making process. The Embassy should include official employees from the community to convey the opinions of the community members and to force the Embassy to take their opinions into consideration. (Participant, Public Meeting, Slagelse, Denmark)

We demand the PLO to establish a centre, at least, to which I can turn to if I face a problem, or a complaint office. I'm not demanding a large project, just a modest one: to have an international spokesman for me. I am not an Egyptian, I am a Palestinian. Here, everyone turns to their embassies which treat them as citizens. What if I quarrelled with someone, where is my representative here to protect me? What is the role of the PLO in this? It is supposed to protect my rights, but it became a bureaucracy from which to take residency permits and endorse papers. As a defender of its citizens, it has no role at all. The Egyptian government takes care of our interests. We are subjected to the Egyptian government. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

For me, I prefer direct contact. To be able to go to the Embassy, not on my own of course, but as an Association. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

Now, the situation is different. There is now a consulate which offers services for the citizens who have problems or who are jailed. The consulate was established to serve the Palestinian citizen; it should be the legitimate authority for any citizen who has problems. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

Up till now we don’t have a country. Our representative here is supposed to convey our problems — or to share our problems — because he is one of us. For it is not logical to call Ramallah or Gaza directly when we have problems: we are meant to convey our problems to the representatives in Madrid who should then assume responsibility of the issue. But for ten years now there have been almost no relations at all between Madrid and Barcelona, or with the rest of Spain. There is no structure of communication. If we want to solve a certain problem, we usually contact people we know directly, because fortunately we know people inside from when they lived with us in Barcelona, and who are now in the National Authority. If not, we wouldn’t have this channel to contact them. This is a very important point. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

From previous experience, I think that the role of the PLO should not be undermined, because the PLO is supposed to be our representative, and the office of the PLO serves as an Embassy, and we are supposed to convey our national demands or national visions through the PLO, and this requires activating the PLO’s role. The PLO’s office should reach out to people and look into all their problems. Meetings must be held with the knowledge of people’s addresses and knowing who the newcomers are. It must know newcomers and their addresses, and open its doors to meet people’s needs, whether social, statistic, or personal matters. For example, I was asked to present a certain paper in Sweden. For some reason the office was supposed to help me, like any Embassy in the world would do, in case I needed something, or had a lost certificate for example. At the same time, it must convey our national desires, i.e. our role in the formal representation of the PLO. We must be in contact with it. If any national conference were to be held, for instance, one of us must formally participate to listen to the comments and to inform us about

b. The Role of Offices, Consulates, and Embassies

I just want to say this for your consideration, that we had a PLO representative in our community who lasted one year. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

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Any citizen who has another nationality would resort to his Embassy when seeking protection or help. Therefore I demand my Embassy offer me this as a Palestinian. We don’t want money from it, we just want it to defend us, and we want to feel that we belong to this Embassy which can protect us when we need protection. This is all what I ask from my Embassy, which is my country. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)
them. I repeat that the PLO’s office is the closest and most appropriate structure to assume these tasks. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

I think we should focus on reaching the PLO, the PNC, or the PA. I think that our Ambassador was a director in the Authority — he is responsible, and it’s his job to be responsible for all the Palestinians outside. I think we are reaching a point where we need an official representative for the Authority to finance such a thing, to fund it, because nowadays you have no one that could volunteer on a constant basis. We should have offices in the major areas, major cities either in America or any where else in the world. One person or office would be the link between the community we are in, and the Palestinian Authority or whatever it is PLO or PNC. They can gather information, go out to local organizations, they can gather emails and addresses and they can get all the information and then process it into a directory that has ten thousand persons. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

I am against any action taken outside the framework of the PLO whatever it is. We also demand, as Palestinian community in the UAE, to have the right to participate in any future elections inside. This can’t be achieved except through our Embassy and consulate abroad. Thank you. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

How is it determined, the process by which the ambassadors are assigned? There are countries where Palestinian ambassadors have been there for twenty years — what is the process of assigning ambassadors? Do the people living within the city have any say in that or not? If the ambassador is leaving, we don’t know why, and that is a problem. Just make the process clearer so they could actually reach the people they need to reach. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

We have heard on the radio channels that there is an embassy for the PLO in the Kingdom, but I can assure you that no one knows for sure that the Embassy deals with the daily issues, except for celebrations attended by the Ambassador. (Participant, Public meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

What we want is for the Embassy to take our opinion into consideration if it wants to do something in this country. That’s why we should not be a part of the Embassy. But the Embassy would take our opinion into consideration if we became active and strong as a community. The Embassy should represent me, we are a part of the Palestinian people here, and we think of the Intifada here and how to support it. That’s why the Embassy should consider our opinion. The Embassy is administered in a particular way. We, as Palestinians in this country, form part of the Embassy. When the Embassy wants to take a certain decision, our opinions as the Palestinian community here who form part of the Embassy should be taken into consideration when making this decision. (Participant, Public Meeting, Slagelse, Denmark)

We should have an embassy to serve as a representative institution for all the refugees. The PLO is not fulfilling its role. We should demand opening a formal political dialogue with the Lebanese State to solve all the problems. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

The problem we have is that our community doesn’t trust the office. These are old dregs which we are not able to remove until now. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

Considering that the ambassador is the highest ranking official, he should make the contacts and build the channels. As an ambassador, how would he contact people? He should himself know people and organize an annual party, for example, where traditional food and sweets would be served. In my estimation, the ideal form of our economic, civil, political and social existence in this country would be achieved through having a connection with these organisations. We should categorize the committees and force the embassy to deal separately with every committee to help it with its program. This is the best way. It is impossible to ask the ambassador to contact every person. We should program ourselves to form these committees. For example, there is now a committee named Alfa. And we need to hold a meeting in the embassy on an agreed upon date. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

That’s why I agree with [Participant] that there must be a constant and direct communication between the community and the Embassy, so that they become one thing. This means that someone from the community must have a direct communication with the Embassy, perhaps not with the Ambassador as this sister here says, but with someone at the Embassy, because there are employees at the Embassy who are accessible. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

The Palestinian Embassy is supposed to create channels of communication, and announce the formation of an assembly for Palestinian refugees, and establish a headquarters for this assembly, who will assume the task of solving all the problems they face. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)
A final suggestion would be to have a diplomatic Palestinian representative institution to represent us in the country where we live, and abroad, even if it was on the Embassy level, and to have the Palestinian Ambassador in the host country speak in our name, to stop feeling lost in Al-Shatat. Therefore we wish to demand having an embassy in Lebanon, and we wish the media would take interest in this demand. We are 350 thousand refugees, yet we don’t have an Ambassador. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

There are no strong relations between the members of the Palestinian community, or between the Palestinian community and the embassy or the consulate. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

There must be an embassy in Lebanon, so that it can serve as a legitimate representative for Palestinians and a guarantee for the rights of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

I might disagree with what our brother mentioned; that we need an Embassy for the Palestinian state. Here, rather, we need an office since we live abroad. The organization that represents us and speaks in our names and expresses our identities as Palestinian refugees is the PLO. We need an office for the PLO to pursue the affairs of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

The opening of the Palestinian Authority office was nothing but theatre from the Palestinian Authority. It isn’t the best channel for me to communicate any more as a Palestinian living in this country, whether to communicate with the PLO or other organizations. Because when you call this office and talk to the director, he would say that he is the representative of the Palestinian National Authority, and that he tells with Ambassadors and Parliamentary Members, and not what is happening in the community. La Hawa wala Quwwata il’la billah. [There is no power and no strength save in God]. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

They say that the Palestinian Embassy has no role, so why don’t we activate its role so that it can hold activities and seminars for refugees, or organize periodic meetings for them in its headquarters? Or why don’t we open special offices for refugees? In Kuwait, there were schools for the PLO, and we knew that we are Palestinian refugees, and that the Jews had taken over Palestine. Let’s organize activities for the kids to make them know their country and play at the same time. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting Amman, Jordan).

If you have a well established powerful institution that performs good work, be sure that the ambassador will search for you to see this strong institution. (Participant, Women’s meeting Athens, Greece)

He just says that they want to make sewer drains, and that they want to move the trash from here. That’s fine, but what about our problems? Where are our stolen rights that were stolen by the former regime, and which are more stolen by the present regime? Who will defend our rights? The Embassy? I don’t think so, for it is so weak, and it doesn’t have any authority, because it is in itself a remainder of the former regime. It doesn’t want to do anything because its relations are old ones with the former regime. We need it to support us, and we want to achieve something real. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

We don’t want to waste your time, but concerning the local representative; there is no one to represent me at present. We are a new committee, and we are trying, through this committee, to work and develop issues. We hope those who join our committee in the future to be our representatives and to convey our voice. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

As for our brothers in Bahrain, we participated with them in the elections. When there was a possibility to study the universities in Bahrain, the role of the Palestinian Embassy was positive in solving the problems of Palestinian students who live in the eastern area to study in Bahrain. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

In fact, the biggest problem Palestinian refugees suffer from, whether inside the camps or outside them, is not having a representative to claim their rights. At the Parliamentary Palestine Committee, we claimed a number of the refugees’ rights, and we managed to obtain some of them. For example, we talked to His Majesty the King about allocating scholarships for some camps’ residents to study in the University of Jordan, and we managed to
provide them with 300 places instead of 200 places. And we talked about receiving medical treatment in government hospitals, especially for those who don’t have a national identity number. This issue is currently under discussion by the cabinet. The Health Minister is preparing a project for treatment, under an optional health insurance, and they may secure money to implement this project from the donor countries. The point I wish to stress here is that there is a need to have a representative who knows this issue and is able to claim our rights. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

In our past work with Palestinian activist groups, the nature of the groups meant that those involved within the group or organization were keen in keeping it together; and at times they lost the bigger picture. In that case it is important to work on a project to project basis. For example, to work with national representatives or others in the old guard might mean that they will try to control the project, and we should work independently and then it becomes more effective. What do you mean by working independently? If everyone is as keen as you to work independently there would be no unity in action. I meant work independently not individually, and by independently, from the PLO representative and the like, as he or she may not necessarily consult with the people. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

Where is the Embassy? We hope that our voice will be heard by the Embassy and the Palestinian leadership, so that they can get to know our suffering and our difficult conditions. We are more than miserable. Let it be known to our Palestinian people, for the Palestinian people enjoying any rights. The leadership must necessarily consult with the people. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

We need someone to represent us here in Lebanon, like the Palestinian Embassy. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

The Embassy must organize activities. The Ambassador is sitting alone while closing the Embassy door on us. Why doesn’t the Embassy organize activities for its community? (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)

In Iraq, whoever has an Iraqi document can’t find an institution to renew their documents. We contacted the Embassy in Qatar; and agreed with it to renew our travel documents, or those two documents. Those who have Iraqi documents call this Embassy to renew or extend these documents with the Iraqi embassy there and return them to us, thus some kind of communication was created. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

The point somebody mentioned was about the Palestinian representative in Canada not representing the Palestinian community, in that he represents the PLO to the Canadian government. I totally disagree with that. Actually the job of the Ambassador is to represent the community of your nationality in the country that you are currently living in, speaking with all the authority of your country. That’s what a definition of an Ambassador is. I believe that an Ambassador should represent the community of his country in the country where he is posted. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

We can have a local consulate, and this consulate can be the site where we can communicate all of our needs and communicate with each other. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

Is it possible to establish our relationship with countries without a national representative, or a legitimate representative of the Palestinian people the PLO with all of its structures? Even someone who is not from the PLO is from the Palestinian people. Negotiations and brotherly dialogue are now under way in order to form one organisation to represent the Palestinian people, and in order to choose one representative in front of the entire world. And we should have a very strong relationship with this representative. This unity in
work on Palestine should never be connected with any sensitivities; it should be based upon work in the interest of everyone, and not in the interest of certain people or sectors of society. (Participant, Public meeting, Khartoum, Sudan)

I would like to see us more organized, more empowered. It is not just talk, we should think about how we can empower ourselves, how we can organize ourselves, and how we can make our voice heard, this is a very important issue. There was the PLO umbrella that could take care of our necessities, before the Authority forgot about our needs, before they forgot about Jerusalem, I don’t know what Abu Mazen and the people around him are doing. Actually I am afraid of what they might do, so the only authority for us should be the PLO, and I don’t know where the PLO stands right now, I don’t have this information, I know Qaddumi and I disagree… we should help the PLO. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

Holding organizational monthly meetings for the camps. The Palestinian Embassy should be the base of the different areas in Lebanon, and should be like a channel of communication between it and the other areas. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon).

The role of the PLO is to send advisors and delegations so the situation could be explained. They deceived us with the Oslo agreement, and teach them how to love each other. We should cooperate with each other. How could we do this if you are building while the other tries to destroy what you have achieved? We should cooperate with each other. We should support this community along with its efforts and working mechanisms. Moreover, we should fully support community members. (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)

There must be common solutions between the Palestinian leadership and the new Iraqi leadership. This is a very important point. The matters must be discussed between officials. And if there wasn’t a common language between officials, between officials of the Palestinian community in Iraq, and between the officials in the Iraqi government, the Palestinians in Iraq will continue to be seen as unimportant, and their rights will be lost. As an official who is responsible for the Palestinian community in Iraq, I must talk to the Prime Minister, and Education Minister, and Immigration Minister, and with the Minister responsible for our rights as citizens. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Huniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

The positive thing is that everyone is talking about the need for unity of the PLO. (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

We are an inseparable part of the inside and the outside. When any Palestinian child is killed by an Israeli officer our hearts cry for its mother. Also, many Palestinians here can’t feed themselves, although privilege and luxury exist, as is well known. But in some areas this isn’t true; am I not right? These representatives should also achieve social solidarity between the Palestinian people, and this is very important to unite them more, and teach them how to love each other. We should cooperate with each other. How could we do this if you are building while the other tries to destroy what you have achieved? We should all work together in order to change this bitter reality we live in. We’ve met in many meetings in the past under the leadership of the PLO, to form a social committee to solve all these problems, but they didn’t approve it. We need social activities and so many things to solve our problems inside the country too. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates).

Demands and suggestions: the essential demand is to organize the relationship with Lebanon, and create some sort of a single official political representative. As for recognizing the legitimacy of this Palestinian existence, we are lost and dispersed,
2) Demands of our Representatives

c. The Role of Political Leadership

If there was an authority or a structure to guide this Palestinian community in Iraq, would these people deviate from our national principles? Certainly not. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Za'faraniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

And we can't find a way to express ourselves, because we are not allowed to do this as a result of the hostile policies against us. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

In the recent period, indigenous nations have been networking worldwide, and there is this UN Draft Convention on Indigenous Peoples, and I don't think that Palestine is represented in that, so in terms of demands from the PLO. I would like to add for the PLO to think about working with indigenous peoples worldwide, both under the UN umbrella and independently. (Participant, Public meeting, Toronto, Canada)

My suggestion is that there must be a formal organisation to work through, and that initiatives should come from this institution. It is possible for each of us to suggest a million ideas, not just one. But the essential is how to achieve these ideas. And any effort to achieve a certain idea needs financing. We can start by developing social work in the community, but such work needs financing, which can be attained from the Palestinian Authority and the PLO or the rich Palestinian groups in Al-Shatat countries. There are some poor Palestinian groups which are not able to rent a centre. And any community or gathering from the Palestinian communities has the capacity to rent headquarters and provide financial support. It is vital to agree and coordinate the way by which Palestinian companies or the rich Palestinian groups will support poor Palestinian groups, to enable them to have headquarters and provide all that is necessary to form communication and links, whether via the internet or by issuing a daily, or weekly, or even monthly newspaper, in order to connect the community with the other communities in Al-Shatat countries, or between the members of the community itself. Is there a Palestinian institution that would provide this support to the poor Palestinian communities and associations or not? And how will these communities work in the aim to perform a national activity? The work Palestinian associations are doing abroad are considered national activities, whether it is cultural, social, sport, or political work, or celebrating national Palestinian occasions. Do we have the capacity to convey these demands to support the community? Is there a possibility to convey this community's voice to the PLO, or the National Authority? Is there a possibility to convey this community's voice to the international institutions that are concerned with the Palestinian cause? (Participant, Public meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

As for international organizations, we demand the Palestinian Liberation Organization work through these international organizations. Iraq has become an open country, so they can discuss these issues with the United Nations' organizations and institutions which already exist in Iraq. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

Demands and suggestions: the essential demand is to organize the relationship with Lebanon, and create some sort of a single official political representative. As for recognizing the legitimacy of this Palestinian existence, we are lost and dispersed, and we can't find a way to express ourselves, because we are not allowed to do this as a result of the hostile policies against us. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

I have a comment concerning what our brother [Participant] has said about councils. The idea came up spontaneously: why can't it be a task of the PLO? The PLO is an umbrella, and if we agree that all the political organizations endorse the PLO as the only legitimate representative for the Palestinian people, then where is the problem? It should have an organizing role in what happens in Swedish society in what relates to the Palestinian community through its cultural activities. This is more like a channel or mechanism of communication. I personally don't think that the PLO office is playing this role. Also it should form a new council which is informed about responsibilities and tasks, as well as the obligations of the unions and the organizations. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

We want people to stand by us and solve our problems. We want a leadership that can stand by us in good times and bad, to support us in handling difficult conditions. We don't want to solve a problem, then another; and then face a series of new problems. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

The PLO has funds to support offices. We have money, I was with them. They had food and 200 thousand dollars, and they had four hundred people from all over. These people have money. The secret is getting money from them to support these things, because funding is the main thing, it's the power behind anything. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

I personally consider anyone or any institution insisting upon the right of return as my representative on the national level. As for my representative on the local level in Rogland, to whom I can complain or resort to solve my problems, or for conveying these to the appropriate organizations, sadly there isn't anyone who can fulfill this task. I hope that a committee or an institution or whatever would be soon formed, or anyone who can convey my voice as a Palestinian. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)
I have a comment. The institutions, such as the Palestinian Red Crescent, could agree between themselves, for they know that Palestinian refugees in Lebanon face difficulties in finding jobs because they can’t provide the means of living: they don’t work and aren’t self sufficient. Why did the Crescent, which used to treat people for free, stop doing that now? I suggest activating the PLO’s institutions, such as the Red Crescent, as an existing institution. I didn’t suggest the Red Crescent is self-sufficient, don’t get me wrong. I only suggest activating the Palestinian Red Crescent association which is an institution of the PLO. There is a hospital in the camp which offers better services than UNRWA’s, but this hospital lacks a lot of things. We can offer support to this hospital through seminars and lectures, and through contacts. For example, a newborn who needs an incubator is usually taken to another hospital where the fees are too expensive. So we can call these institutions to offer an incubator to the Red Crescent Hospital. We offered a lot of services to our Palestinian nation, and we can now try to get an incubator to this hospital. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Buj el-Barajneh, Lebanon)

Palestinians are dispersed in the Arab countries with no authority to unite them, and we don’t look after each other; and we don’t have coordinated forums: everyone works on his own and for his own interests. I hope that we could have a group to represent us in the UAE or in Palestinian forums so that our voice could be heard by the PLO, which we don’t know except through the press. No one from the PLO ever invited the Palestinian community. We don’t represent the Palestinian community which includes the worker and the mechanist, so how should we convey this to them and how should we meet with them and show them that we are educated? In any case, they don’t care about us. I am from Yafa, but the Palestinians and the Arabs gave me the nationality as Gaza citizen, so they would say this is not a Palestinian, he’s from Gaza. I think this is our fault, we say that we are valuable and we should unite as Palestinians, then we can ask the others to give us our rights. Thank you. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

I want to reiterate that alongside of the Right of Return, we have to say again and again that almost all these demands can be achieved by a re-integration into the PLO. The PLO needs to incorporate communities in exile wanting to survive. (Participant, Public meeting, Toronto, Canada)

To restore trust between the PLO and the Palestinian community, the PLO must take into account the situation, problems, and suffering of the community. It must reach people, instead of waiting for them to come. People don’t just go, they want someone to defend their interests, and the interests of the people are the same of the PLO. And the interest of the PLO are with these people, because what does the PLO represent without them? In order to not let people insult and accuse us, we have to find the means and ways that are capable of meeting people’s needs, albeit 70% of them as you said. This way the community will be saying that there are people out there who ask about us and defend us. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq).

Recently, and for the very first time, they sent us an envoy. Not on the PLO level, but on the Palestinian National Authority level, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to a deputy from the Diaspora Committee who is supposed to set up communications and contacts between the Palestinian communities in Al-Shatat and the Palestinian institutions inside Palestine and with Palestine. An envoy from the PLO will also come to meet with all the institutions, and everything will go smoothly if God wills, and this way the communication with the national representative, the PLO, will be achieved for the first time. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Berlin, Germany)

I cried when I saw one of the exile Iraqi Kurds voting… I struggled in Lebanon and was imprisoned in Ansar camp, and in Al-Ramla… don’t I have the right to vote to choose my president? (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

The idea of having a Palestinian representative from the Palestinian National Council in Canada is a very good one; we should demand this from the PLO. Because as Palestinians living in Canada we should have a direct link to our leadership. We should also demand a referendum on all the elections and all the results of the negotiations that are going to happen – we were promised this and I am not sure if they were talking about the Palestinians inside the West Bank and Gaza, but we were promised that any result of any negotiations is going to be voted on by Palestinians. (Participant, Public meeting, Toronto, Canada)
It is indisputable that the PLO is the only legitimate representative. But there should be certain mechanisms. (Participant, Workers’ meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

As for the Palestinian National Council (PNC), it should, if elected, take our voice and opinions into consideration. We wonder, for example, about the process through which the representatives of the Palestinian community in Canada were appointed to the PNC. What was the criteria and standards by which they were elected as representatives of this community? What are the mechanisms of appointing them so that they could convey our needs to the Palestinian National Council? (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

Some say that our voice must be conveyed through institutions, and that there should be organisations to represent us, whether associations, unions, or federations. And we can vote on any subject related to our situation, and the result can be delivered in the name of the community – to note that the community in Koge says this or that! (Participant, Public meeting, Koge, Denmark)

The PLO is the only legitimate representative for us, and its institutions should be rebuilt on democratic foundations based on elections. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

I also think that the elections to the PNC should be geographically based and not sectorally based. So for example there should be a representative from Canada that is elected by Palestinians living in Canada ... there should not be appointees to the PNC appointed by the president. (Participant, Public meeting, Toronto, Canada)

I have four points: preparatory points and points related to demands. I think the first step that the PLO must take is get the PLO’s house in order, and not to limit it for one group. We, as Palestinians living in Lebanon, feel that the PLO is just one group. Now we would like the PLO to recognize other groups that represent a part of our people. The next thing the PLO must work hard to get the Palestinian Authority to respect it as the only legitimate representative, in order to make the PLO’s job inside and outside the camps easier so that it can function. The third point is that we should rethink our relationship with the PLO. The relationship starts from top to bottom, but we, as Palestinian refugees, should think of the PLO as the representative legitimate authority, as we agreed. We are a part of this society, and we demand to rebuild the social, political, union, media, medical, and legal structures of the PLO. We used to see it as an organization which interacts with its people before the invasion, regardless of its factionalism. But there were organisations, and there were unions, and labour federations, and we must play a role in activating the PLO’s institutions to embrace all of the Palestinians lives in Al-Shatat. The last point is to re-establish the popular representative institutions on the basis of elections. It is another duty of the PLO and the Lebanese government. (Participant, Public meeting for Disabled Persons, Beirut, Lebanon)

How does real representation work?

Either through elections or certain mechanisms. Representative mechanisms vary between nations and issues. In the UAE for example, we have tribes, each tribe can choose someone to represent it in the Shura Council. The Palestinian community is well known, and if it spoke, everyone would listen. Elections need not necessarily happen in every area. There could be elections for certain figures known and respected by people. These representatives should follow their words up with action. And they should represent all classes, not only the rich, but also the poor. Most of our people are educated but they are occupied with their daily concerns, so anyone who represents the Palestinian people in any area should care about their people’s issues in the UAE, in any region, in order to solve them. He should be gentle with people; we don’t accept to be servants to any but God. The other thing is the discrimination between people in the north, west, south, and east, and between the outside and the inside. There is no difference between the Palestinians inside and outside, so the PLO should affirm this, and the
conflicts between the inside and outside must end, because we all share the same cause.  

Forming a higher committee for the PLO or its national institutions that represent the Palestinian people, like the Palestinian National Council and the other institutions, should not be done before conducting elections in the societies of Palestinian communities abroad, and Palestinian assemblies in the Palestinian camps. Representatives of every community should be elected by the community itself, so that the members of the Palestinian National Council can be elected, not appointed.

Also there should be democratic elections in the federations, the unions, and the Palestinian Women’s Unions to correctly represent the Palestinian people, not on the basis of appointment, as happens now. The General Union of Palestinian Students, which was active before Oslo agreement, should be reformed and restructured. Other federations which were active in the past should be activated by conducting democratic elections in them. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

If we rephrase the question, we can demand having the right to vote. Yes, this is what is wanted. (Participant, Public meeting, Sønderborg, Denmark)

I think we should create an infrastructure for electing national representatives. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

As for participation, I suggest that all those who hold Palestinian nationality and live in cities or camps should have the right to vote; to vote for the one who is going to govern Palestine. (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

Essentially what has been said so far is the need to have an elected representative for the Palestinian National Council, where the constituency is geographically based, and not factions or sector-based, and that the Palestinian National Council would not be appointed but be elected. That there would be a registry of Palestinians worldwide, and a census of Palestinians world wide, with a suggestion to have Palestinian Identity Cards, and that the recognition of a Palestinian would be interpreted broadly. We are all agreed that the definition of a Palestinian should be someone who has a Palestinian parent – either father or mother – and that has some genuine connection to Palestine. (Participant, Public meeting, Toronto, Canada).

As for the issue of voting and participating in the elections by the community members, these are subject to Palestinian regulations, and the way of doing this also depends on Palestinian regulations. Some time ago the Danish external affairs Minister wrote about participating in the Iraqi elections, I wrote to him saying: you say that participating in the Iraqi elections is a democratic necessity, but why don’t you say the same thing about Palestinian elections and demand also democracy for the Palestinians? He replied saying that it depends in the first place on Palestinian electoral regulations, not only on international resolutions, and that this issue should be determined inside Palestine first. So if we had a constitution that grants Palestinians in Al-Shatat the right to vote and participate in elections, the other countries in the world would not object. (Participant, Public meeting, Aarhus, Denmark).

And why don’t we have, as Palestinians, the right to vote? (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark).

The only chance that was available and that could have united all our people was Palestinian elections. (Participant, Public meeting, Hillerød, Denmark).

What surprises me is that our fundamental principle is not based upon voting. It has never been the case that I can convey my opinion to you on the basis of the voting, not UN Resolution 194, nor the basic issues like the final resolution of the Palestinian lands, especially abroad. They could call us in Denmark to vote on a certain issue, and we go and vote, but why should I vote if I’m not able to express my opinions on the issues of the final

I shall start with the PLO and the need to restore its dignity on the basis that it is the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. We have felt that its institutions have been dismantled, and that some of its representatives don’t represent us any more, like Yasser Arafat. We know ourselves more than he does. We don’t want a passport or an identity card. Things shouldn’t be as they are now. I have the right, as a Palestinian, to vote in order to choose the person who will represent me, so that I can guarantee that the rights of the Palestinian people, endorsed by United Nations’ resolutions, will not be lost or renounced, especially the right of return to our country and properties. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Homs (A’ideen) camp, Syria)

Part II: Findings

2) Demands of our Representatives

d. Participation, Elections, and Accountability

When elections were held in Iraq, they asked the Iraqi community to go to voting boxes that were placed here in Sønderborg, but when the Palestinian elections were held, Mahmud Abbas didn’t mention us. Why? (Participant, Public Meeting, Sønderborg, Denmark)
2) Demands of our Representatives

d. Participation, Elections, and Accountability

We should have a role in the elections. Why should we leave the decision in the hands of our brothers in the West Bank and Gaza alone? If we want to be a democratic nation, the elections must include everyone. In addition, elections to the PLO must be improved to be better than they are now. (Participant, Public meeting, Oslo, Norway)

We, as Palestinians, have the right to vote and elect the president. (Participant, Public meeting, Sonderborg, Denmark)

I think there are two issues after the presidential and legislative elections. A Palestinian Parliament, of course. There was dialogue held between the factions in general. This means reactivating the PLO’s institutions. We gathered some suggestions. One of them says that an election for the Palestinian living in Al-Shatat must be conducted. This is one of the suggestions that depends upon the Arab regimes which host Palestinian refugees. But there is the issue of credibility now, in front of international opinion, over Iraq. Iraqis had the chance to vote wherever they were: why not the Palestinians? (Participant, Activist meeting, Athens, Greece)

First, as a Palestinian refugee, I have the right — and we all have the right — to participate in the legislative, municipal, and presidential elections which were conducted. If you want to know how, I can point to Iraq as an example. Iraq was invaded two years ago, yet all the refugees from all over the world went to the embassies in the countries where they live and voted like everyone else. And I, as a member in the PLO who belongs to the cause’s office, have the legal right to have an embassy in Lebanon, to be able to vote through it, and to express my own opinion, because expressing the personal opinions is one sort of democracy; it is participating or popular sovereignty, the rule of people by people. We miss the presence of a Minister of Social and Refugees Affairs who is specialized in Palestinians’ issues. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)

On the Authority level, elections were conducted in the occupied territory, in Gaza and the West Bank. All of us living in Al-Shatat were informed of that. And maybe some of us didn’t want a certain candidate, but then no one took the opinions of the Palestinian people; nor was there a referendum in the camps to know what we really want. So what is happening now is a very good thing, we at least know the situation on the Palestinian level. Especially as we, who live in Al-Shatat, feel lost and undergo catastrophes in Lebanon. We experienced more trouble over the 16 years of the Lebanese civil war than the Lebanese people. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

The PLO, the legitimate representative which is internationally and globally recognized, should work on a democratic basis. This means under the banner that says Palestine is for all Palestinians and not just for one group. Sadly, there is great neglect in our society at a time when there should be good planning. Everyone is working in their own interests. (Participant, Public meeting, Burj el-Barajneh, Lebanon)

We agreed within the group that there are three organizations with which we deal. Politically, there are the PLO and UNRWA, and then on the service level, there are the popular committees and the NGOs. There are different points of view, but there is general agreement between two people who said that the PLO is very good, even excellent. But some say that there is something wrong in the PLO’s way of dealing with things. Their idea was: why don’t we elect and conduct elections in Lebanon. The focus was on Lebanon so that we elect those who represent the PLO’s official. Our brother Abu Mazen is this official, so they elect the National Council or the Executive Committee. But we, as Palestinian people who live in Lebanon, did not suggest or elect him. Now whether he’s good or bad, that doesn’t concern us, but he is accountable to us as Palestinian people, so we should be the one who make the choice. Therefore there should be elections by the Palestinian people in order to elect those people. (Participant, Students meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

I think that the refugee issue should be raised in the current negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. This is the basic issue that should be emphasized, in addition to the rights of the Palestinian community abroad. The community is not handling the refugee issue as a political one. The community has the right to vote and to participate in the political process. If I exercised my political rights, I can also exercise my other civil rights. (Participant, Public meeting, Sana’a, Yemen)
I can live in Europe for a thousand years and at the same time insist on the right of return. But we need to seriously participate in the political process, and it is very important that the PLO allow the refugees to express themselves and their wants. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

I really think people who think hard, and who know right from wrong, can go ahead and remember the program. Because I think what they are talking about now does not happen like this in reality. Abbas didn’t come from nowhere, and Arafat was just disregarding everybody, and he did what he wanted to do... So what we must do in our connection to them is implement certain things that one can never take away. They can take power now and agree to this now, because you and I don’t have power to influence them to do otherwise. They just don’t care. They do what their program tells them to do, whether it’s Qurei’, whether it’s Erekat, whether it’s Abu Mazen. It’s just the way it is and that’s why we should implement our programs. We want to know where every Palestinian in the world is, who are their ancestors, who are they, and their addresses, which village, and where is their land, and all that stuff needs to be documented, since where they are can enforce our own power. So people from the US will be one of those asking for voting rights for the Palestinians, the second generation can do the same thing. I am talking about the generation of Abu Mazen and Arafat, I am saying that we should have input. So we should communicate with them, whether it’s a leader or an organization. It will not be to ask for the impossible by yourself, this is an Authority that took over. Whether you like it or not they took over, your rights are being taken away in this country. The mentality of a new way of thinking will take care of Palestine, and we can vote from here on the rights we don’t want them to take away from us. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

I wish the example that was presented was France or America. There are Palestinian communities in Britain, as in Saudi Arabia, who elect and choose the community council. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

Everyone is studying the procedures for reactivating PLO institutions. And I think that this is the core issue for us as a community, to have an elected National Council, and to clarify our structures and our right to elect our representatives in it. (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

How will we communicate with it if there is no representative of ours who we elected to the National Council? How are we supposed to convey our voice? We should elect representatives for the communities in the National Council, and we should participate in electing them, in the hope that if we want to convey our voice, we shall know who will do it. (Participant, Public meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

The institutions of the PLO should be reformed on the basis of elections and proportional representation. The civic committees were created in the latest stage following the marginalization of the PLO, and the beginnings of a search for a culture. The right of return committees still work with the Palestinian youth. These committees could be one of the channels through which we can convey our voice. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

If they could convey the idea of the Right to Return and refugees’ compensation, and if we could vote, this would be enough. And may God bless them. (Participant, Public Meeting, Sondenborg, Denmark)

The first thing is that the Palestinian communities, wherever they are — and we are discussing here the community in Saudi Arabia and more specifically our area — should have representatives for the community who are directly connected with an official body of the PLO’s institutions. (Participant, Public meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

The PLO can create internship positions. They asked from communities some one for the summer, to work with the PLO in Tunis or whatever; and

There should be a democratic relationship and participation between the refugees and the leadership. Besides, since the PLO has become our identity, and since it represents Palestinian identity and the body which embraces all segments of the Palestinian people, and since it is the only sponsor for the Palestinian people and manages all its affairs in addition to negotiating in its name, it should let people participate, even if they are distant from it. This should be done through communication between the people and the leadership, and later between the representative leadership and the people whom it is supposed to represent. (Participant, Public Meeting for Disabled Persons, Beirut, Lebanon)
A refugee and a citizen, I want to give to Palestine while I live here. I am different from the people who live inside Palestine, why did I get out? Before I talk about the elections, and since I don’t live there, I must talk about my right of return. How can I have a right to vote, how can I vote for anyone since I don’t live in my country and don’t know anything about this person. I can’t elect someone I don’t know anything about. What right do you have to elect while you don’t even live in that country, and since you won’t gain anything from electing him? (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

As our brother said, you should seek to change the convention so that they will allow us to vote. This elected body or committee should exercise pressure on the formal organizations to enable us to vote and participate in the Palestinian elections. (Participant, Public Meeting, Aarhus, Denmark).

The aim of a popular conference is to make us participate in the Palestinian decision-making process, not only to give our votes to the authority and the PLO. I think that the PLO should represent all sectors and classes of the Palestinian people; it should be revived, because, unlike what [participant] said, it was absent and frozen in the last period. There was a meeting of the Executive Committee with the Palestinian government. The institutions of the PLO should be activated so that all the Palestinian communities abroad can have a political role in the national council and in the PLO; not only a voice and support, but also participating in the decision making process. Therefore our democratic representation is aimed at participating politically in the struggle, so that we can have a voice and real participation, not only in Italy, but also in other areas of the Arab world. We have five million Palestinians, which is greater than the number of Palestinians in Palestine, and they achieved by the democratic representation. So the goal of establishing Palestinian institutions in Italy is to make the Palestinian presence prominent there, not only for the community, but there are other gatherings, so the diversity of the Palestinian people should be taken into consideration and exploited, including the Palestinians of 48. I also forgot to mention that it is necessary to find a formula to represent the Palestinian people who live in exile to actually participate in the decision making process. This means that we have the right to define our fate, and it should not be imposed on us through any negotiations. There is a suggestion that all the Palestinian communities all over the world elect at least one deputy and meet once yearly at least. (Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)

The Palestinian politician should be elected on the basis of being elected by the Palestinian people living in camps and the refugees in Al-Shatat countries, for they say that the PLO represents Al-Shatat and the Palestinian people, so the PLO should be a democratic body. (Participant, Public Meeting for Disabled Persons, Beirut, Lebanon)

For me, my natural representative would be someone I am involved in electing especially that we are supposed to have a parliament-in-exile, the Palestinian National Council. But currently the Palestinian Legislative Council, who are supposed to have their elections early on next year only represents people in the West Bank and Gaza, and they don’t represent anybody in Al-Shatat or the refugee camps, so we need to be part of...
Part II: Findings

2) Demands of our Representatives

d. Participation, Elections, and Accountability

We have the right to participate in any decision taken from inside Palestine. And we have the right to participate in any political decision and in institutions. The Palestinian people must be considered as a united nation who exists in more than one place, but who participates in everything as a united nation. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

I live comfortably, all thanks to God, and I enjoy the status… there are funds from the PLO, some of which are for martyrs’ children, but unfortunately those who assume important posts take these grants. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

I don’t want to take much of your time, but it is necessary to activate the PLO and to free the embassies from corruption. We also wish to have a channel of communication between our people in the inside and the outside and in Al-Shatat. There also needs to be appropriate foundations and structures. They are only pursuing their own interests. The PLO outside Palestine represents corruption, it doesn’t represent the Palestinian people, it only represents corruption; it represents the son of so-and-so and the son of such-and-such. (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

We shouldn’t lie to ourselves and each other. The leadership is flawed, and so is the Authority, the organizations, Palestine, and everything. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

As a Palestinian who lives inside…. Perhaps the thing I need most is to be aware of my cause and not to fail to participate in the Palestinian elections. I must participate even if I live far away. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We can draw attention and ask the right to vote. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

So an election must be made to elect members in the camps to represent the Palestinian communities within the Palestinian National Council framework, which is the united Palestinian Parliament for all the Palestinian people. Of course this matter has been neglected for a very long time. No one has discussed it and no elections are being conducted. We said that we want independent people to join the popular committees and speak in the name of independent people who don’t belong to certain factions. And we said that we want to elect someone to represent us in the PLO, or more than one person, of course, in the National Council. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

When you are an immigrant, you change a lot. You love to smell your history, and you brothers and sisters become the solid truth. By the way, those who came with us from Libya were shocked by the reality they encountered. The situation was totally different. They couldn’t live here. Some of them returned to Gaza, and they felt lost in Gaza too. Imagine that you are not able to be like the Palestinians inside, because you have different qualities than them, and at the same time you are not able to be an Egyptian, for your history and roots are different. You are not able to be anyone! Maybe the right of return will eventually work. Maybe things will improve when I return and implant myself again in my land. I don’t know. Maybe I want to be a Palestinian in the shape I dream of. When I see people vote, I cry. I have the right to feel that feeling. My brother was appointed to supervise the Egyptian elections, and he was very happy; saying that for the first time in his life he feels that this right is not forbidden. Although he didn’t practice this right, but he was happy to watch it being practiced. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

In the case of return to the PLO, representatives to the Palestinian National Council for the communities should be elected to be real representatives. (Participant, Public meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

We have the right to participate in any decision and to elect half of the PNC, so the people that are elected for the PLC are half of the membership of the Union, and supposedly all the political factions have agreed at the same time that there should be elections outside for Al-Shatat they all have, and now supposedly all the political factions have agreed on this point, and now it seems that its pushing forward. I hadn’t heard this before, someone has mentioned this to me. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)
I don’t know if perhaps some people who were in the Gulf would know, but there used to be direct taxation to Palestinians that would go to the PLO and I don’t know if this was good or not. I don’t know, but perhaps this could be a way to get a Palestine fund or tax for Al-Shatat, which can solve some problems, creating programs for Al-Shatat for the agencies that exist. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

If you please, about this issue, any Palestinian should not receive help unless he is a member in the community and unless he pays his subscription fees. The Embassy must not stamp his documents or help him get whatever document. In the past, the General Union of Palestinian Students used to impose its view on the Embassy because it had power, and because it was active and effective on the Greek political scene. It used to organize national Palestinian activities, and raise money to support the PLO. The union now is weak and doesn’t have any ability. (Participant, Public Meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

e. Inclusivity

We find it strange that the PLO doesn’t have a means to represent Palestinian institutions for the disabled. What is important is to ask the press office to write a memo representing the handicapped in Lebanon in conferences held in the Arab world. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

There are Palestinian societies that are totally neglected and are not included in studies and statistics. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

What we notice is that the refugees’ role and the refugee issue are neglected in the negotiations. Also the refugees don’t participate in democratic political processes, and they can’t express their opinion or elect their national representatives. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Heleweh camp, Lebanon)

Of course we affirm that the PLO represents all the refugees, but we want it to play its role without this nepotism and tribalism. We don’t want the PLO to encourage the tribalism which emerged lately, or familial connections which weaken the PLO and the factions, because they are remote from the people and their problems and concerns, and they can’t achieve any progress for Palestinian society. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Heleweh camp, Lebanon)

I might not be able to express what I want to say, and tell whomever what is supposed to be done, do you follow me? But they must have an important role which should be defined by certain organisations. Of course as soon as the popular committee is reconstructed, women must have representatives in the popular committee. And the PLO bears much of the blame. This is very important, because there are a lot of old fighters who were deserted by their organizations over a certain disagreement; those people are victims. And this is a big class of people in our camps, which are deprived from everything. This is because the organizations themselves and the PLO did not treat them fairly. Take me for example, and there are a lot of people like me, I have 5 kids, no, 5 girls and one young man, who has graduated from the university, and there is no work. I went to all camps, and we used to have a committee for the old fighters, but more than one organisation indirectly forbade us from continuing. One feels that this sector is very deprived. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

There is no doubt that everyone agrees that the PLO is the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, yet here in Lebanon there is discrimination. For example, when they arrange the PLO’s budget, it is meant to represent all the Palestinian people and solve all social problems in the camps. Look, for instance, at the camps in the south, and you will find them like heaven. So why do the other camps lack these things? It is supposed to handle the refugee camps as a whole, and not individually. The other thing is activating our institutions. Frankly the institutions have turned into private institutions, and if you have money, you will have control, otherwise you won’t. They used to give medicine in the past, what do they give now? There are some institutions which were closed
down. The second issue is that unfair laws against Palestinians decreed by the Lebanese authorities should be dealt with. (Participant, Workers meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

Mr [Participant] said something about the scholarships which are granted for the Tyre area. There is centralisation in everything. Even the delegations who come from Palestine stay at Beirut or Tyre. They don’t head north, the north is always neglected and the scholarships come only to Tyre and Beirut, but the north does not get anything. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

f. The Need for a Census, Research and Statistics

Do we know where every Palestinian in America lives? I don’t think we do and I don’t think anybody does. Therefore this person or this regional office could be the one that finances and organizes the Palestinians outside of Palestine. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

Activating the role of the PLO’s institutions is a priority. Another priority, among the suggestions, is something useful to merge the practical side with the theoretical one. But how would we make statistics? (Participant, Activist meeting, Athens, Greece)

What about [UNRWA’s] “Families File”? Why isn’t there a file for the families and their statistics in the Embassy? We want the names of the community’s members, where are the names? We’ve had enough. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

If you are a refugee and you go to the PLO and ask for certain documents they would not give them to you. Therefore such an exercise is important, even to put a request to the PLO, in order to say: as refugees we want access to our data. So when we talk about data on refugees, it doesn’t stop at data that comes out of just this exercise — we have lots of different data that we need access to. I just wanted to point that out. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

On the level of civil rights, the PLO, our representative, should establish a fund for social assistance for disabled persons in the same way it is paying someone who is bearing weapons in the refugee camp. It also should conduct social research for the handicapped. There are disabled who can’t afford to buy bread for their families. They are entitled to receive consideration, for they also fought from their wheelchairs just as those who are armed fight with their weapons. Therefore we demand to establish a support fund. We officially demand that the representative of the PLO in Lebanon coordinate and establish this fund and pay salaries to disabled Palestinians who are unemployed, unrepresented, and who don’t own any property. (Participant, Public Meeting for Disabled Persons, Beirut, Lebanon)

There should be statistics of refugees in all the areas in the world. I think that this is the task of the PLO, and the PLO can do this task easily. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

I thought of a point concerning preparations. Sadly there are no statistics for the Palestinian community in Stockholm and all of Sweden. This negligence could be, of course, the office’s fault. When elections were conducted, people asked me if I had voted as a Palestinian. Even though I don’t have the right to vote as a Palestinian who lives in Sweden, but I thought about it. There is no foundation, and no name to prove my identity as a Palestinian. Here we get back to the issue of identity. I only prove my identity by registering with the Palestinian association in Stockholm, but this is not legally adequate. Consequently there is a need for us as a Palestinian community in the host countries to say our opinions in the future, if we ever gained this right, or to convey this decision to the Authority. These links should be documented to prove my identity. Am I a Palestinian? What proves that? Giving Palestinians who live in Sweden identity cards as some sort of inventory is a good idea. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

To tell you the truth we have very limited information and there needs to be more agencies about Palestine, we need information more than ever about the other refugee communities in Palestine. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

I think to form a kind of communication, to build communication with Palestinians around the world. We have to have a census; we have to know who they are, where they are, what their names are. If we have their names we can then be able to communicate with them through mail, magazines, and newspapers… So lets have a census and then we will worry about how to communicate with each other. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

What about the institution that looks after the census of land that was stolen? The Palestine Land Society in England. I think perhaps the PNC or...
Palestinians Register: Foundations and Directions

When I went to the Palestinian embassy and told them that my son is imprisoned in Libya and that I wanted them to help me see him, they told me: “let us first help ourselves”. They all take salaries; the most humble among them is paid 2800 pounds. Why don’t they give him just 2000 pounds, for example, and dedicate the rest to poor Palestinian families? As for [Palestinian official], who is now a consultant, his office was like his own apartment, he had a very young secretary, and he was acting as if he was the boss, and he yelled at me! I told him that I am not begging him for money and those Palestinian businessmen pay to them and therefore they should give Palestinians the money, and I asked him: why don’t they give money to anyone? He answered saying that they are free to do what they like. They sent their children to study in France and America and our children are wandering in the streets! He was paid something like five or ten thousand pounds, why don’t he give some to others? They keep asking us to leave telling us that they will contact us, but they never do. They are supposed to support us and to seek out the poor to know their needs. The embassy does not offer anything. They are immoral, they are not legitimized and recognized authorities.

The other organisation which is responsible for us, or which we consider responsible for us on health issues is the PLO, with its institutions like the Red Crescent. This means we must activate the PLO’s institutions to enable them to pursue the issues and affairs of Palestinian refugees in camps. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

Whoever should support the work the Palestine Land Society does, which is incredible work. The work is super comprehensive. Dr. Salman Abu Sitta just published an atlas for Palestine includes area photographs of much of Palestine and as much information possible of what happened to our land in Palestine and each village, existing structures of this village or non-existing structures. I think it’s really important for our representatives to support this work and contribute to it; I am sure this is information that would be useful to our representatives. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

g. Services

Why can’t Palestinian religious figures contact countries and ask them to facilitate and respect our travel documents? Why don’t the PLO work on improving the papers of the Palestinian people all over the world? (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

First and foremost, we demand our Authority to help us in health and education issues, especially social problems, because there are a lot of Palestinian families who are not only in Hilwan, but also many other regions of the Republic. The Union of Palestinian Worker knows about them. There are Palestinian families who are below the poverty line. We demand that the Palestinian Authority address a letter to the Embassy asking it to mandate a deputy to search for such families, and to try to give them a decent life. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

We should demand financial donations. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’faraniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

The Palestinian camps don’t have legitimate and recognized authorities. You are today a Palestinian living in Nahr El-Bared Camp, but when you get out of the camp you feel that you are a stranger, that you are not a human being. So what is needed is to activate the PLO’s institutions and give them impetus and momentum to protect the Palestinians who live in the camp. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

What can the community do to solve its present problems? There are issues like residency, providing jobs, and our current miserable living conditions. At present, we can’t do anything. Let the Embassy, which is an existing institution, solve our problems, and have any member of staff it mandates solve our problems with the new regime, especially our pressing residential problems. The neighbourhoods of Za’faraniya and Hurriya are unstable – what can be done about that? Why doesn’t the Embassy appoint an employee to go to the Department of Immigration and Emigration to save the neighbourhood from its unstable situation? This neighbourhood contains 38 families and the Za’faraniya neighbourhood contains 70 families. There is also Al-Amin neighbourhood, which is also unstable. Why doesn’t the Embassy do something, and appoint an employee to go to the Department of Immigration and Emigration? Second, there is the issue of residency. Some employees are uneducated; they use offensive and immoral language, even with women. What happened with me was that I couldn’t stay in line; I have warm blood. And our honour, as Palestinians, is precious. What’s the reason for this carelessness? The community only wants to improve its housing and residency conditions and meet its pressing needs. Who would employ a widow or a handicapped person? How will they live if the Embassy doesn’t help them? (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

After Oslo there was this thing of ma’ashat al-shuhada [allowances for the martyrs] and then they were completely cut, and people are going begging in order to receive them. So it’s very important to know where the funds are going, and who is receiving them, and where is all the documentation? (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

The embassy does not offer anything. They are immoral, they are not legitimized and recognized authorities.

We have done so many things. We should demand financial donations. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)
Every Palestinian hears the same answer from the Palestinian Embassy. So we want the Palestinian Embassy to be fair. We have the right, as widows, to receive assistance from the Palestinian Embassy, because other countries donate money for us but we do not receive anything. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

There is another issue, which concerns who represents me now, and who doesn’t take any steps to help me. The Embassy employees should live with us. Let them come into the camp and live with us and see our suffering for themselves. Why doesn’t he look at me the same way he looks at himself, why? He should work hard for me, and for his people. It’s not about envy or anything like that, but let him visit the neighbourhoods, especially the Hurriya and Za’faraniya areas, which are the most horrible. The last flood destroyed our houses. My house is unstable, how could I live with my children in this house. Who bears the responsibility for this? (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

We demand that the PLO provide specialist clinics inside the camp, because there are families who live in difficult and miserable conditions, and their members can’t afford to go to specialist doctors outside the camp, as this would cost 40 or 50 dollars. Besides that, UNRWA clinics don’t fulfil the required needs, as there is no medicine in their pharmacies. We suffer from psychological and emotional problems because of the political and financial circumstances, and the pressures we live under; and there is no medicine nor specialist doctor to treat these conditions. We also need a house for the elderly. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

The PLO should offer free medical treatment and build schools. Here, UNRWA reduced its services. Let’s say that it must build clinics because it is responsible for the Palestinian people on the level of services. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

Now, let’s talk about the PLO’s office here, which is now an embassy. This office is granted ten places at the university and five places in higher education. Few people know that. Yet its employees either sell them or give them to their relatives and friends. One of them, for example, would give his son or daughter a free place, and we don’t know anything of what is going on. UNRWA is not involved here at all.

Are these places still available and were they transmitted from the PLO’s office to the embassy? Yes they are. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

The bottom line is that I agree with everything just mentioned. But there is another point which relates to university studies, and the responsibility of the PLO. What happens here is the majority of our youth finish high school without being able to complete their studies. We want to demand from the PA – it is true that our representative is the PLO, but I see that the scholarships which are granted from the European countries and America and from all over the world go to the PA. The Authority represents us here by granting Palestinian refugees here a part of important scholarships. There is no need to insult, but it doesn’t fulfil the ambitions of the students, especially those who are clever. Rashidieh area receives 10 scholarships, including two for medical school, and there are scholarships in Rashidieh for engineering school, and also in the Ein el-Hilweh area. The north receives a scholarship for Arabic literature. This is what is happening. The PLO and the Palestinian National Authority are responsible for our students who can’t study. We are doing the impossible to enable them to finish high school, and then we give up. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

First we emphasize that the PLO is the only legitimate representative. What we wish for is a budget to be created to help existing institutions in the camps, like popular committees and health centres. And this will serve as a supporting role for Palestinian people. For example, I have ten kids, and five kids who need to go to school, and I can’t afford to do that. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

We also demand that the PLO improve the services of the Palestinian Red Crescent through staffing and doctors, and offer support in order to ease the pain of our people on economic and health levels. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, El-Buss camp, Lebanon)

As for our students, there is Siblin College, which is insufficient. It doesn’t accept our students unless they have a recommendation. Why don’t they establish institutions? Siblin College only accepts someone who has finished fourth grade, but what about the student who finished third or even second grade? Such young men are wandering in the streets. This is a very difficult social situation. Who will foster such kids who got out of schools -- and they are many. We suffer a great deal from this problem. My son graduated from Siblin College, yet he is sitting at home, he doesn’t have job opportunities. There is another thing: we demand to have an Embassy. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)
Anyway, it is obvious that we suffer a lot here in Egypt in everything relating to residency, moving, education, and work. As an example of the residency problems, anyone who is over 20 years old should prove that he is either working or studying in higher education. But it is impossible to study in higher education without the approval of the security services, whilst also paying fees ranging between three to seven thousand dollars for the university. We used to pay the same fees as Egyptians, but Palestinians were prevented from studying in state schools or entering colleges of medicine, engineering, political science, economics, or pharmacology. The last procedure was, in fact, revoked in the days of Hosni Mubarak. What is noticeable is that the PLO never intervened to claim fair treatment for Palestinians here. I think that if it did, this would have been useful, and the government would have listened, because it is justified. I recall that one of my friends spoke with the late Yasser Arafat, may Allah forgive him, and told him about our suffering, imploring him to talk to the government. But he answered by saying: “Why! Do you want to dwarf the revolution?” as if the revolution is merely about shouting.

This happened in 1984. I think that the PLO did not intervene for many reasons. Mostly because it feared its involvement could be at the expense of personal interests. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

The location of the National Fund for Palestinian Students is in Al-Hamra in the Shatila building. It used to offer financial aid for the Palestinians who repaid this grant in the long run, but now its terms are not feasible. For example, in the first year the student has to put a guarantor through a request with a lawyer – but would I resort to you for money if I already have a guarantor? We ask [a Palestinian official] or the PLO to reactivate the National Fund for Palestinian Students. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)

We wish to have a library in the university for scientific research to help university students who need to conduct research, because they are forced to search out such resources. They should have them within the university. Also, we would like to have a book on Palestine history, and a library that contains books on Palestine history until now, so that our children could know their history and better understand what has happened to us. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Naher el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

As for renewing documents, they come up with a new rule every year. They complicate things even more when getting work permits, and they would refuse granting them for any simple reason. Of course we always demand our Authority and Abu Mazen to give us a Palestinian passport, because we are not seeking to have Egyptian nationality or Egyptian documents. We want a Palestinian passport so that we can be safe and secure, and feel that we have a value among the nations of the world. At least they should give us a document if not an identity card. We want a Palestinian document to be able to move and get travel visas from Embassies. It is very complicated to get a visa to perform the Hajj. We can’t travel without a document. We beg God that they would give it to every refugee in the Arab world, especially those in Egypt. Let them give us an identity or a document so that we can live like everyone does. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

With regards to the PLO, it suffers from severe malfunctions. As for the camps, we wish that the security committee would handle the multitude of problems that confront us inside the camp. There is no legitimate authority here. We go to the popular committee and they tell us that we can’t do anything. Where is the accountability of the popular committee? Where are those institutions which don’t offer anything? We demand only that.

(Participant, Worker’s meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

If you search for resources on student activists [in the past] who maybe were not aware, or who were too young [to document their activities]. Sometimes you correlate something historically. So, it is their responsibility – be it the PLO or someone else – to be able to help students with historical facts and trends or whatever happened. And there must be a preservation of these

(Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)
artefacts. Sadly you find most of these things on eBay, for example. You’ll find documents on the Palestinian revolution in 1974 on eBay and then someone buys it and it disappears in someone’s private collections. But we don’t know where to find information on specific things, we only have access to books written in English. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

Here, we are also deprived of scholarships. Many students can’t afford to continue their studies because they don’t have money. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

There are certain difficulties from which university students suffer; like securing university accommodation. And also there is an absence of any role played by the students union to defend their interests, especially before the educational body that exerts pressure on Palestinian students. This pushes us to demand elections for the Union of Palestinian Students. The PLO used to grant such scholarships, they would be obtained by way of nepotism and favouritism. This pushes us to demand elections for the Union of Palestinian Students. The PLO used to grant such scholarships, but it doesn’t any more. If there are scholarships, they would be obtained by way of nepotism and favouritism.

The employees’ kids at the Palestinian Embassy have priority in jobs. The Embassy refuses to take our applications. And if they did, they would shelve them, and they wouldn’t even contact you to apologize because they couldn’t employ your children. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

I wish to improve my situation, and I hope that the Authority would support those who live here in any possible way. For example, to provide a job in any bank, or in the police, or in any company, even if it has nothing to do with computers. I just wish to improve my situation, because I don’t have any chance to do this here. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

I am saying this because no public committees emerged from the community in order to deal with the Iraqi government efficiently. The Palestinians of Mosul, Basra, and Za’faraniya have so many problems. And there are Palestinians who left from the beginning of the war; lest we have any bad reaction from Iraqis. Many of them refuse to go back to Baghdad. Amongst our community there are doctors, engineers, and PhDs who don’t have jobs; they are unemployed. And the lowest degree anyone has among the community is of an undergraduate. But they don’t have jobs. So, you, as a Palestinian official, must fix the community’s situation, and help them to find a job, or offer them assistance. But, alas, none of that happens.

When I was in Lebanon at the AUB in the eighties and nineties there used to be something called the Palestinian Student Fund where Palestinian refugee students would get funds to continue their education, but in the early nineties this completely collapsed. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

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I am saying this because no public committees emerged from the community in order to deal with the Iraqi government efficiently. The Palestinians of Mosul, Basra, and Za’faraniya have so many problems. And there are Palestinians who left from the beginning of the war; lest we have any bad reaction from Iraqis. Many of them refuse to go back to Baghdad. Amongst our community there are doctors, engineers, and PhDs who don’t have jobs; they are unemployed. And the lowest degree anyone has among the community is of an undergraduate. But they don’t have jobs. So, you, as a Palestinian official, must fix the community’s situation, and help them to find a job, or offer them assistance. But, alas, none of that happens. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

I also have something else to say. The General Union for Palestinian Workers is not fulfilling its responsibilities. It should make the necessary contacts with companies and institutions, especially Palestinian ones, to create job opportunities for Palestinian workers. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

I am a refugee from Palestine. I came from a town named Yabna in the Yafa district. I travelled into Egypt several times with my Palestinian passport which requires a lot of procedures to be valid for travel. The cost of this is very high, and the procedures are very slow. Frankly, the Palestinian Embassy doesn’t offer any services or assistance to anyone; its procedures are routine and very costly, so that the host country may be more merciful than the embassy when it deals with us. For example, when I got my university certificate from Gaza, I endorsed it at the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from a Palestinian representative office in Egypt, which was in the governor’s administration. Of course, I paid all the necessary fees and I also had it endorsed from Al-Azhar University. I did that as soon as I graduated in 1986-1987. When I came to Egypt I wanted to match my certificate to continue my studies at Cairo University. But when I presented my certificate they told me that I need a seal from my Embassy to prove that the seals are correct and that the certificate is still valid. I told them it was already endorsed but they said I just needed to renew the seal from the Embassy. So I went to the Embassy but they refused to endorse it, telling me that these are old seals, and that I have to return to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to endorse it again, and pay the fees again, because every stage has its fees and its signatures. They just enact laws without considering the situation and financial conditions of citizens. The amounts are low
because the financial situation of Egypt is weak. The people can barely afford to eat with their low salaries. I went several times to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and they kept sending me again to the Embassy, and the Embassy did the same thing. Finally they told me that I should return to Gaza and get a new certificate and endorse it from the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Gaza, and then bring it back to them again to put the seal on it. I entered in a vicious circle and I missed the opportunity to enter university that year. They are supposed to facilitate these procedures not complicate them. Of course what happened to me at the Embassy happened to many others, and with every Palestinian refugee here who wanted to endorse his certificate in Egypt through the Palestinian Embassy. It is the same boring routine, which are also very costly and very depressing. When asked about insurance at the university, considering that I am a Palestinian with a Palestinian passport, the fees are extremely high compared to an Egyptian student who would at most pay 300 or 400 pounds, while I was supposed to pay 1000 sterling in advance, in addition to the other fees, as well as my living costs. If I enjoyed the same rights the Egyptians enjoy, I would have gotten my certificate long ago. The ambitions of so many people are crushed in the face of such obstacles. Therefore, I demand the relevant institutions treat us fairly concerning the rights of citizens in the host country we live in. I think that we should enjoy rights in the same way that we fulfill our obligations. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

There is another thing: some time ago, the Embassy issued passports, charging fifty dollars for the passport. The fifty dollars doesn’t mean anything for some, but there are people who can’t afford to pay fifty dollars. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

When I went to Lebanon, for example, the Lebanese authorities took away our Palestinian identity (travel document), leaving Palestinians in Denmark with no physical evidence to prove we are Palestinian. Why doesn’t the Palestinian Embassy in Denmark issue an identity card to refugee Palestinians who live in Denmark, proving that they are Palestinian? (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)

My birth certificate was in Jaffa; I was registered there. Once I wanted to retrieve it, and it costs a lot of work to try to get it from Amman. This document was destroyed, along with the documents of other people. And I don’t know if there is any chance to find some of these documents. I don’t have a birth certificate, and I don’t have any documents to prove that I am a Palestinian. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

This is an important issue for the Fedayeens and military officials: why doesn’t the Palestinian Authority coordinate with Arab countries – like Jordan, Syria, and the Gulf countries – to facilitate our travel to these countries? Last year, the Palestinians going to Hajj from Iraq were returned. Why doesn’t the Authority solve this problem? There is a Palestinian passport. The Palestinian population has been forced out from its homeland and has suffered a lot for a long time – why won’t anybody help them? (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’ataranya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq).

Welcome to Barcelona. Two years ago I confronted a problem when I went to Palestine because of identity papers for passports and renewing passports, and the Israelis returned me because I have a Spanish passport, so I came back here. I didn’t renew the Palestinian passport since seven years ago, and they asked for unattainable documents here, and the Israelis said that I must return to this country to renew my passport. My question is about the capacity of the Palestinian Embassy here in Madrid – is it enough to solve our problems here abroad? I think that it should guide us on a lot of things, especially documents and passports, such as an in-good-standing certificate from the country there. We are working individually, as brother [Participant] said. We wish that the Palestinian Embassy would sympathise with us. I am among those who recall seeing the Palestinian Ambassador just once here in Madrid. But we in Barcelona and Catalonia want to see him; we want him to help us solve our problems, and to feel that there are actually people who care about us. With all my respect to brother [participant] since he is from the PLO, we should criticize, because we are facing problems and we can’t find anyone to help us. I hope that we interact more through actual work, not just through talk. We demand any Palestinian Authority or the PLO to solve some of our problems concerning entering and

I have a Palestinian passport without a national number, and I don’t accept to stay in this country. I am 66 years old - what did I gain from this country? A washing machine, a television. That’s what I gained all my life. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)
getting out of the country, and we are hoping to get some assistance on this. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

My daughter is not getting papers because we are Palestinians. What does that mean? That means they are asking the generation in their sixties to go away, and we have kids here with nothing to prove that they are Palestinian, nothing to document us. I am saying we should demand this documentation for the kids, even if your wife is American, and your kids are saying I am Palestinian, then your kids should be recorded as Palestinians. We then come to the issue of rights that [participant] and the others are talking about. We want to vote from here and we want dual citizenship. All of that will come after they are documented. I am looking for this. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

Where is the Palestinian passport that we have applied to have 10 years ago, since the Authority first came? (Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany).

We can raise the issue of having a Palestinian ID or passport to the Palestinian Embassy on the basis that it is proof that we are Palestinians. When I got married; they asked for a paper from the Embassy to permit my marriage, but when I went to the Embassy and asked for a Palestinian ID, they wanted to know where I was from, and when I said that I am a Palestinian from Lebanon, they demanded proof. I said that the Lebanese had taken away my ID from me. In this case, we want some proof that we are Palestinians, and that is why we are demanding to have Palestinian IDs and Palestinian passports. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark).

There is a passport approved directly from the President’s Office for businessmen or travel documents so that they can travel. This was achieved also for other situations, like with families. For example if I have a daughter who got married outside Saudi Arabia, say in Emirates, it would be very difficult for her to stay in touch with us, her family. (Participant, Youth meeting, Damman, Saudi Arabia)

There is an official letter in the Palestinian Residency Department that says they will remove Iraqi nationality from Palestinians in Iraq. I went to receive a six month residency document, and they offered to give me Iraqi nationality in exchange for giving them my Palestinian identity card and those of my children, but I refused. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za`faranja shelter, Baghdad, Iraq).

I think this is a great idea to have identity cards for Palestinians. I think we have to be careful that it’s not only for refugees but it’s for citizens of other countries at the same time. I think it could be similar to what we have seen with the indigenous people in Canada – identity cards raise a whole set of issues. But it seems like a good idea. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

There is an important thing, which is unifying Palestinian identity all over the world. This means creating a Palestinian identity which includes the Palestinians wherever they live, whether in Syria, or Lebanon, of the West bank, or Gaza or elsewhere, for they are all Palestinians. And I mean of course creating a defined Palestinian identity which the refugee in Lebanon can take to define his identity as a Palestinian, and which must be preserved and inherited from the father to the son; a permanent identity. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon).

Our right as a people — from a humanitarian and not a political side — is to have a Palestinian passport to move freely in Lebanon and abroad. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

There are certain messages that we would like to convey to the PLO and international bodies, like residencies, going in and out of the country, and passports. These are among our basic requirements. Let’s talk about suffering; if you went to renew your travel document or your residency, you would face a hard time. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

I don’t consider the Palestinian Ambassador the national representative of the Palestinian community in Canada. The Palestinian Ambassador is the representative of the PLO to the Canadian government, he is not representative to our community here to our organizations. I think it’s very important to follow up on this issue and that we have a representative, this brings out another issue which is we need to determine who are the Palestinians in Canada, we need to have a study of some sort that can determine numbers, determines locations, and hopefully can issue maybe even IDs in order to participate in elections. I think the PLO should start registering Palestinians worldwide, because now if you look at the numbers in most countries nobody really knows what the percentages are of Palestinian refugees, there are mainly refugee population, and I think this was mentioned earlier like in Denmark that to have actually the demand for those IDs since it would help them to get involved. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).
But we can’t say that the PLO has no role in solving these problems. A lot of people, especially the community members who came from Lebanon, resort to the PLO to solve their problems. And whoever wants to go to Lebanon needs proof from the PLO that he is a Palestinian and a resident of Lebanon, in order to solve his problems with the Lebanese Embassy and in order to be able to see his family. Also Palestinians who come from Lebanon resort to the PLO to take proof that he is a Palestinian and a resident of one of Lebanon’s camps, so he will be able to request humanitarian asylum in Germany. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany).
II) Host Countries

After the peace initiatives of 1977-88, some regulations were created against us by Sadat’s Camp David treaty. The Egyptians began treating us like foreigners while previously they treated us as Egyptians. So laws that were applied to foreigners were also applied to us, for residency permits, school and university fees, and the like. We can’t even study at the universities.

(Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)
1) Channels of Communication with the Host Country

a. Existing Channels

As a Palestinian community, we don’t have a committee to communicate with the Europeans. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark).

I personally don’t have any relationship on the state’s institutional level, the relationship exists only on an official level. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq).

There is communication with the host country which is achieved through the PLO’s leadership and through the factions, and the problem lies in the Lebanese State. (Participant, Workers’ meeting, El-Buss camp, Lebanon)

As for our Palestinian voice, we have a Parliamentary Committee. We communicate with the Swedish Parliament, the Ministry of External Affairs, or the Swedish parties through Parliament. There is a Parliamentary Committee consisting of six parties and we constantly communicate with them. Some Palestinians got their residency through this Parliamentary Committee. There were about 1500 Palestinians who were refused residences, but through the Parliamentary Committee and through exerting pressure on the Swedish Immigration Minister and on the Swedish Cabinet Presidency, we managed to get them residences, and the route to giving residency to Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza was opened. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

Sadly, means of communication with the state do not exist. The only way to communicate is through the popular and security committees, but as we have just discussed the weakness of such committees as a result of their being very old, communication with the Lebanese state is difficult. The Lebanese state practices racial discrimination against the refugees to the benefit of its citizens, in matters relating to civil, social, political, and housing rights, so that it is very difficult for anyone of us to work in his particular or specialized field. They also deprive us of our right to own a property outside the refugee camp. Therefore, we hope that the officials and this state would treat both refugees and citizens fairly. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

I am not sure that the Canadian government has an open channel for the Palestinian community to speak with. I don’t know if they have any channel with any community to speak with, they usually speak to their MPs as their member of parliament. I am not sure if that is a channel for a Palestinian to speak to the government through a member of parliament, which does not represent the Palestinian community. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

There is the Department of Immigration and Emigration, and there is a Palestinian section in this Department which organized a course to register and categorize the Palestinian refugees, such as Palestinians who have a Jordanian passport, Palestinians who have Iraqi, Syrian, Egyptian, or Lebanese documents. It is a plan to mainstream them in the Iraqi society, and to solve the housing problem, by giving the refugees pieces of land as they used to give the Iraqis. This way they accelerate the process of ensuring houses for the Palestinian refugees. The houses which the Department of Immigration and Emigration are arranging for the Palestinian refugees are temporary, according to them. They are just temporary leased apartments. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq).

Until now, we couldn’t establish relations with the government, because there isn’t an established government to date. Everything is temporary. The other issue is that the powers and parties that we have contacted don’t have any authority; they just promise to write articles in their newspapers as a way of giving us justice. The Embassy does not have immunity; it has limited authority and limited capacities. Therefore both the Embassy and the factions have been severely criticized by the community, which has a right to do so, for neither the Embassy, nor the political factions know the conditions in which we now live. They know I have a problem that must be solved. Even under the former regime, we used to solve our problems on the phone, with the help of the Liberation Movement Centre. They settled some of our issues, and got some things done for us. Now, there is nothing of that. Now we are targeted by populism. And this populism is killing us. We are increasingly worried when our children leave the house. I forbade my children to go to work because of what happened yesterday. I mean the protests against Palestinians. We hear insults and curses in streets, and we don’t counterattack. Not because we are cowards, but because we don’t wish to ignite a war; for it is like straw which will continue to burn if it catches fire. And as you said at the beginning, this community is limited in number. That’s why I always say that it is wrong to push things to limits, instead we should absorb the problems, and we must be like the sponge which absorbs the buckets of water. Because if
war starts and trouble begins, we will be crushed under their teeth. First, we are few, and we don’t have the capacities to face them if any trouble begins. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tabaj), Baghdad, Iraq).

As for our representative in this country: we don’t have one, of course. This is a natural consequence of lacking any foundations – an association or the community. I mean not having a representative to represent us to the host country we live in. Of course, we don’t have civic structures or institutions. There is nothing more than social gatherings. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

When we first started to work in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s and opened our office in Riyadh, our task was to solve Palestinians’ problems in Saudi Arabia in what relates to passports, and the legal, social, and civil issues that you talked about. There was a positive response from officials in Saudi Arabia, and the situation was addressed by solving all the problems we presented to officials in Saudi Arabia. This positive response led to addressing this situation while granting us exemptions for everything relating to passports with the Interior Ministry and other governmental bodies, like proving identity to study in schools or universities. There were exemptions for Palestinians to solve their problems. For example, when teachers’ contracts were canceled in the early 1980s, first in the western area, some people in Saudi Arabia said that Palestinians suffered so much, and we said we should help them in solving their problems. Brother [representative] officially suggested this, and they didn’t refuse and they exempted Palestinians. So everyone left Saudi Arabia except for Palestinians. We told them about social problems also. For example, what would happen to the family of a pensioner here if he became ill and if he had a Lebanese document? They asked what was necessary to fix this, and we asked them to exempt such cases and allow them to live here, and they didn’t refuse. Also there are Jordanian citizens who live in the West Bank and can’t return there, and they agreed to exclude any Palestinian whatever his nationality is. Therefore, any problem that we present to them, whether social, legal, or civil or related to the passports, would get a positive response. Now the situation is improving after the stagnant period that followed the 1990 second Gulf war: We hope this improvement will resolve our legal and social problems. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

b. Recommended Channels and Actions
The question was about the means of communication with official entities. What are they? I would say that if we organize an event at a non-official level, we should talk about it ourselves. However, if we organize an event at the official level, if we invite some political parties for example, we can then ask the Embassy to invite so-and-so officially because it is the Embassy. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

Are these official institutions that represent you or volunteer ones? Are they officially registered in Greece? How do you prefer to contact the host country? Through the government or the people of that country? I mean, regarding this matter that I brought up, you can’t contact the host country except through Europe…. Why would I put the community in a certain situation, while I know the answer beforehand? I think we should strengthen ourselves to be a powerful community, for the Greeks don’t feel the Arab’s existence in Greece. We don’t have a presence on the political or Arab community level. The Arabs don’t exist on the map. But couldn’t we have a role in influencing the Greek government? As Arab citizens we pay taxes, we work, and we pay. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

We should agree upon one entity- be it the embassy or the community- to represent us in our contacts with the government of our host country, Greece. Once we agree upon a representative, we would have one common point of contact. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

I disagree with the deputy who said that there is a committee called the Palestinian Parliamentary Committee. It is true that this Committee exists, but the refugees’ cause in Jordan is ineffective. Why isn’t there a special committee in the Lower House of Parliament with the name “Refugees’ Committee”? Why isn’t there a ministry or an official institution or a private one? And I don’t mean the Department of Palestinian Affairs which doesn’t represent the Palestinians or the refugees in anything and which doesn’t offer them anything. I am a Palestinian refugee who lives in this country, and this department hasn’t achieved anything for me. Why isn’t there a department or a ministry with a minister from the Jordanian government with the name of “the Refugees’ Ministry” so that it can be a witness which affects all aspects of the cause, whether in the negotiations or the international conferences or in dealing with the problems which concern the refugees in the area…. That’s why I am demanding to establish an official specialized ministry or department in Jordan with the name of the Refugees’ Department to be the coordinator and the real connection between

**Host Countries**

1) Channels of Communication with the Host Country

b. Recommended Channels and Actions
the international bodies and institutions and the PLO and the refugees themselves and also the Jordanian government, and to fulfil its role honestly. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

Lobbying is a very good idea but you have to have the community behind you – you have to make the individuals in the community take the demands to the government that you are trying to represent. I think before we start thinking about lobbying we should look inward, into our community, and we need to activate our community that is isolated and marginalized in the political system in Canada. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

As for the law, it is not compulsory. And the municipality is free in deciding whatever it wants. You should exploit the situation and impose your terms on the municipality nominees. You must negotiate with any party that supports our cause on the basis of giving him your voice in exchange for him fulfilling your demands. I am positive that there is more than one party who is willing to meet with us to discuss this issue, not only at the municipalities’ level, but also in the Parliament. We must act collectively regarding any issue that concerns the community. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark).

I want to emphasize the role of the community, because we are not the only community in Greece. The Syrian community has its representative, and so does the Egyptian community. Therefore, the community must focus, while performing its institutional rule, on working with the rest, because, as we mentioned before, the Embassy’s role is a political one. This means that if I would like to solve my social problem, I must do that through the coming together of the whole community. It is also important to stress the relations with other communities, to benefit from their experiences and strength. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece).

As for contacting the host country: a committee or a special body can be formed, which consists of Palestinians who have Greek nationality. It can be called the Greek Palestinian Committee. This committee must have relations with highly important leading figures who have weight in Greek society. And these relations must be on the Greek level, not just on the Palestinian level, so that it contacts, say, various parties and mayors, to convey our demands and problems to these bodies. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece).

Why don’t we participate in existing Jordanian parties? (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We demand the host country, Lebanon, to open an embassy for us here to be a central authority for Palestinian refugees. At this stage, we don’t want more than that. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

Sadly, means of communication with the state does not exist. The only way to communicate with it is the popular and the security committees, but since we discussed the weakness of such committees as a result of being very old, communication with the Lebanese state is difficult. The Lebanese state exercises racial discrimination against its refugees to the benefit of its citizens on what relates to the civil, social, political, and living rights, so that it is very difficult for anyone of us to work in his specialist field. They also deprive us of our right to own a property outside the camp. Therefore, we hope that the specialists and this state would treat the refugees and the citizens fairly. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

We forgot something that we have agreed upon, which is the security committee that is needed in the camp and which would be a central security reference to the state. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

The relationship with the host country should be the relationship between the country and the political leadership which represents the Palestinian people. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, El-Buss camp, Lebanon)

As for the PLO, at the level of the host country, there must be a special Embassy and a follow-up committee to pursue the Palestinian cause on cultural, social, health, and communication levels. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashidieh camp, Lebanon)

We also demand a Palestinian Embassy to represent us practically before the host country which is the Lebanese State. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashidieh camp, Lebanon)

In Sweden, a percentage of nearly 99% here have Swedish nationality - we have Swedish nationality. If we wish to act legally in order to pursue our case with the Swedish Authorities, what will they consider us as? We are refugees who gave up previous nationalities when we signed up to have new ones, and we consider ourselves as Swedish. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

As for the second and third points, they require, as you mentioned, the approval of the Swedish people; their views of communication through the unions of political parties, for instance. We
Host Countries

I) Channels of Communication with the Host Country

b. Recommended Channels and Actions

Among the essential and most important needs is the ability to exert pressure on the state in order to annul regulations restricting the right to work and own property. This could be achieved through a direct relationship between the PLO and the host state.

( Participant, Worker’s meeting, El-Buss camp, Lebanon)

The second point is political activity in Britain. This brother talked about political activity or political effort by the Palestinian community in Britain. I just want to ask one question, how many of us asked his son to register in any British party inside Britain? Unfortunately, none. Why? (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

We who are living in Al-Shatat countries are different. For example we don’t have to contact the host country, for we became part of this country. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

The problem is that they didn’t recognize Jerusalem as part of Israel, and I think this is an advantage. So let us take things from this direction, speak with parties and Swedish authorities as well as the government, with a petition collectively signed by all Palestinians. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

The relationship with Lebanon should be established through the PLO and this relationship should be good. And the state should – or rather we prefer that the state would – open a Palestinian embassy or an office for the PLO, so that it can be a political and national representative body for the refugees living in Lebanon. Also, the Palestinians in Lebanon should have some rights and they shouldn’t prevent them from working or owning a house. Also, he shouldn’t be blockaded in the camps. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, El-Buss camp, Lebanon)

Another issue is there is an old Resolution (No. 203) issued by the Revolutionary Council in 13 September 2001, which says that the Palestinian should have the same rights and assume the same duties as the Iraqi, except for the right of “citizenship”. Why don’t we endorse this law with the new regime, so that the Palestinian is no longer lost, and in order to build a strong relationship between Palestinians and Iraqis? (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurria shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

In the past, there were committees between us and the state. But now there is a security vacuum between the community and the state, who admit this policy of theirs is part of the Badr militias. This means that if any Palestinian met with Al-Ja’fari, the Prime Minister, or with Abd Al-Aziz Al-Hakim, the leader of the Islamic Revolution, who are both Bader leaders, they can instruct the Badr militias to ease, directly or indirectly, the community’s suffering, whether on the state ministerial level or on the street level. These instructions are the right of Palestinians, in order to live, or their right to have real IDs. These goals must be achieved before talking about UNRWA or international institutions, because if we didn’t first secure the community in this country, we can’t secure it through international institutions. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurria shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)
Channels of Communication with the Host Country

b. Recommended Channels and Actions

There should be representatives to represent us before the host national authorities. (Participant, Public meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

In terms of communicating with the host country, we have listed certain organizations like the Canadian Arab Federation and Palestine House, which have played a role in communicating with the Canadian government and exercised some kind of lobbying role. But in both cases they haven't been clearly held accountable to the community as a whole for things they have done. An example given here earlier at this meeting was the Canadian Arab Foundation, which created very warm relationships with the Toronto Police. To ask if this is what Palestinians in the city would want, since the Toronto police have lead the march for Israel and have sent all the chiefs of police from Southern Ontario on educational training missions to Israel. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

Canada was involved and they wanted to play this role in Bosnia so they had many judges in Europe. And they actually boast about such capabilities - having so many international judges that investigate these things. I don't know if you read the news but Sharon now is being nominated for a Nobel Prize. Today Italy nominated Sharon for a Nobel Prize, so many of those people that committed these atrocities are still alive in Israel and they should be questioned at least. There are professors in Israel, and people in academia who actually record these things, and there might be international responsibility. But also it might be good to communicate with Israeli professors and people that research these things. In the case of my uncle I was able to find an Israeli army historian, because I actually have an uncle missing in Israeli prisons about whom finally last year we were able to get some documents that the prisoners do exist; as before they were denying this. There are people who open this information, even it is not mentioned publicly, so maybe it would good to form links with these people. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

We notice that the policy of the Foreign Ministry increasingly favours Israeli interests. If we had a political lobby to exert pressure on the Canadian government, it wouldn't favour the oppressive Israeli policies against our people in the occupied Palestinian territories in such an obvious way. Or it would at least be neutral, without favouring one party over another. The reason for Canadianavourism is ideological, not economic. The reason is that is not only in Canada, but also in most western countries and the United States foreign policy is based on interests not on ideology. What would make me sympathize with the Palestinian people if I don't engage in political or economic interests with them? (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

Pressuring Canada to increase the funding for UNRWA is one important thing. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

I demand Canada increase its financial contribution to the UNRWA agency that takes care of Palestinian refugees. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

I am just going to list the demands that I have, and that many people might share. One is the cancellation of the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement; two is stripping the Jewish National Fund from its charitable status; three is taking a very clear position in favour of the Palestinian refugees right of return to their lands in 1948 occupied Palestine and the restitution of their land; and stopping the deportation of Palestinians from Canada. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

I'll tell you my point of view as a person who has been living in Denmark for 17 years, and who works here, and knows this country very well. The least that should be done now is to issue regulations that can enable Palestinians to preserve their identity. Then they can be attached in a manner that is more psychological; which is to make them feel that things didn't come to an end just because they gained Danish nationality. But we don't have a structure which connects Palestinian people with each other correctly. (Participant, Public Meeting, Copenhagen, Denmark)

I suggest that we make a recommendation about forming committees to the Danish government. That we, the Palestinian community in Denmark, insist upon the Right of Return and Resolution 194. (Participant, Public Meeting, Helsingor, Denmark)

Our demands are simple: that they recognize us as Palestinians living in Europe, and that we are still Palestinians, and that we have the right to return to our country, and the right of compensation. (Participant, Public Meeting, Sondenborg, Denmark)

There are many different problems whether in Palestine or here in Norway. Yet even if we talked and talked, if we don't get Palestine back, we will not be able to return. Instead, we will simply stay in Al-Shatat. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

If anything is going to happen we have to make it happen. It must come almost from the top. It is almost like a chess board: the US is one of the major players from my point of view -- that's the way I see it. You know, right now, the USA isn't
really involved in the attempt of the peace process and the pullout -- not as much as they should be -- and the only way they are going to be involved is if we start voicing our concern from the US from within. I would say that the G8 countries, those are the ones who are going to push. You know if you stay silent - you know out of sight out of mind -- that's the way I see it. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

We should hold meetings with the Canadian government. We don't have a problem, but let's talk about the problems of our brothers in the Arab countries' camps, and also the camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, who suffer from legal and living problems, in addition to their terrible financial situation. Although refugees in Palestine don't have a problem in contacting and communicating with their national representative, the PLO, or with the Palestinian Authority. What is needed from us as a Palestinian community in Canada is to offer them political support so they can confront Israeli oppression, to provide for their economic needs, and to offer financial assistance. Also to form a political lobby to exert pressure on the Canadian government to adopt a more balanced attitude to the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, and also to support the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their country, which is a humanitarian and legitimate right that all people enjoy. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

What is it that one doesn't have in Denmark? I need my political belonging, I need to belong to my homeland. When I watch the killings in Palestine on Al-Jazeera TV, I can’t go out to the balcony, screaming that this must not happen. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)

2) Status and Conditions of Palestinians

a. Existing Conditions

By the way, I also confronted a problem in the school. I wouldn’t call it discrimination lest the issue be exaggerated. But they [Egyptians] treat you on the basis that you are an Arab, and the Egyptians say that they are non-Arabs. They also accuse us of performing bombing missions. There is also characterization. They categorize the Palestinian as a violent person, thus they are afraid of us, not knowing what one is, exactly. The people are ignorant regarding this matter; even the young people don’t comprehend the idea of the Palestinian cause correctly. They have a lot of misleading information. These ideas have their effects even on issues of marriage. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

A social problem took place some time ago and it was broadcasted in the radio. An Egyptian girl named Basma or Nesma married a Palestinian man, and he took his two daughters and left the country. As I see it, it is not a big crisis. An Egyptian man might do the same, and he might kidnap his children while denying that. What I want to prove here is the way media handled the issue as if this was all because he is a Palestinian. There was a media fuss over the issue that all the Egyptians refrained from accepting Palestinians as husbands for their daughters. I will give you another simple example. During the Gulf War, my father liked to listen to the radio, someone reported him saying that he is a spy and a secret agent. This caused us problems for a while. These are simple examples. In every university, there are people to track the Palestinians to report their behaviour and relations with the Egyptians and whether they are integrated or not. This affects Egyptians. But now, the notion that Palestinians are frightening is beginning to change. There are people who worked hard to change this point of view, including the Egyptian media. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

They used to say that Palestinians support Saddam, and at that time we had a big presence in Iraq. The issue was very sensitive for us as Palestinians. I was in preparatory school and I could feel the issue. I used to see my father holding his radio close to him following the latest news that he even got diabetes from the terrible news saying all Arabs were against Iraq. He used to go out to the balcony to listen to the radio, while our neighbour was watching him. He hated him because he is a Palestinian, and he had this idea that all the Palestinians are disloyal, so he reported my father to the security service saying he is a spy, and that he was sending wireless messages “through the radio”. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

We live in a country which respects people and their civil and humanitarian rights. The Canadian State respects us as students or workers, or even as a community or Palestinian society living in this country, regardless of the policies of the Canadian government which favours Israeli interests. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

We are forgotten, and Denmark where we live is increasingly trying to keep us isolated. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)

On the government level in Lebanon, it should create job opportunities and respect our youth, and equality between educated Lebanese and educated Palestinians in schools and universities. The prices of medicine should be monitored. (Participant, Women's meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)
What are the political and social problems we would like to raise with these entities? There are many issues and problems we need to raise. Everyone has problems. I can’t personally raise them all. The Norwegian government which is third highest on the international scale, the Norwegian people who have the highest living standards in the world – themselves suffer from many problems. I am a refugee in this society, and I sometimes face injustice and racial discrimination. I also don’t know many areas or workplaces or some laws in this country. Solving these problems requires both joint and individual effort. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

I believe that there are many addiction and unemployment problems here in Uppsala, and imagine there are big problems. Yet these problems could have a programme or institutions trying to resolve them. I think the only way is to exert pressure on the Swedish government so that it would intervene on our behalf. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

In general, we had good relations with the Iraqi people, and with the Authority. Sometimes we were given some rights, other times we were deprived of these rights. Occasionally, they would give us public jobs, and we were given some civil rights. A number of refugees were employed: they would give us normal jobs, minor ones. And things are not like what they have been accusing us of, claiming that Saddam Hussein used to give us thousands of dollars. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq)

As for the health issues, no one supports us, neither Egypt nor the PLO nor the Embassy. We pay to receive medical treatment, and we don’t have health insurance from the time we leave school. We now have social insurances for workers. However we are not treated like Egyptians. When Egyptians get health insurance, he gets a card and starts getting his medical treatment at the state’s expense at public hospitals. But we only have insurance, and we are not allowed to get medical treatment in their hospitals. Of course, we can ask the labour union or the Ministry of Labour in Egypt to coordinate so that we can get health insurance on the basis that we have social insurance. But we don’t have the right to receive medical treatment like Egyptians, we pay for our treatment. And this is discrimination. The Palestinian Embassy plays no role at all in health issues, and it doesn’t intervene even if we face health or work problems. It doesn’t do anything for us as we are refugees. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

As for residency permits, if there is an explosion in the street, they arrest everyone who is in the street at the moment of the explosion. They ask for people’s identities, and if they see you are Palestinian they take you along with the detainees. A number of Palestinians were arrested this way for people’s identities, and if they see you are Palestinian they take you along with the detainees. They were arrested for merely being Palestinians. May God protect us. A few of us have Iraqi identities
and those of us with them are not being harassed. You don’t say that you are a Palestinian in the street lest they arrest you and charge you with whatever crime. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

There was once a Palestinian who had a screw loose, so they arrested him in the street and tortured him, charging him with carrying out many bombing operations, and he admitted, under torture, that he did. He is crazy, he didn’t do anything, and he can’t think clearly, how could they charge him with that? He used to say yes every time they asked him if he was responsible for this explosion, or that act, for he is crazy and doesn’t know what he is saying. They made him appear on TV, and asked him, while everyone was watching. He said I did so-and-so. At present, any Arab they arrest would confess anything under torture, while, in truth, he hadn’t done anything wrong. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

They consider a Palestinian as a lost soul who doesn’t have any support. Why don’t we take his house since there isn’t anyone to support him? (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

Lifting the blockade on camps means giving us security and safety. When you feel emotionally comfortable as a citizen, this means you enjoy security and safety. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

Palestinians suffer from the problem of residency papers in the countries they live in, and from exile and lack of access to education. It is said that Palestinians have a lot of money, so higher fees are imposed on us! We hear this all the time, and there is the humiliation we go through in the airports and on the borders in order to get into another country. On the health level, we suffer from lack of treatment at hospitals. As for work small, miserable houses, which can’t be borne even by mice. And we are still suffering from this situation. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

We have been living in Iraq since 1948. This disaster happened while we were still living this same life, nothing has changed for us. And even in Saddam Hussein’s era, our conditions did not improve. On the contrary, our conditions were bad until this new regime came to accuse us of being given financial assistance and oil by Saddam. But this is not true! And we are suddenly accused of terrorism by the new regime. There are bad people, of course, who have always existed in the world. We have been mistreated, and it has become very difficult for us to live in Iraq. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq).

They totally destroyed Palestinian refugees in Arab countries and in other countries. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

The Arab countries destroyed us. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

They treat us like foreigners here. I live in Egypt but I am a Palestinian born in Palestine. I was raised here and am married to an Egyptian woman. I work here; I have a car and work as a driver. They treat us really badly here and they demand a lot of documentation, also residence permits are very costly. They fight us. The way the Saudis and Libyans treat us is much better. My son is six years old. I enrolled him in a private school and I paid 1200 pounds of fees while Egyptians pays 100 pounds. This year the residency permits became even more costly. Getting a permit to work is very difficult as well. You would apply today and get it after four months, or even a year. We are very tired and we badly need help. I want to return to my country, to Gaza, so that I can feel that I am worth something. What you’re worth here is the money you have. For example I have a car and when I went to license it, I paid around one and a half thousand pounds for the fees. When I registered it under a name of an Egyptian, my brother-in-law, we only paid 100 pounds. There is a kind of discrimination between Egyptians and Palestinians. (Participant, Meeting, Hilwan, Egypt)

And job opportunities, I think that our suffering in this field is obvious to all, and the situation is the worst in Lebanon. Nevertheless we suffer from this problem in all of the Arab countries. (Participant, Public meeting, Khartoum, Sudan)

The regime was exerting all kinds of pressure on us, and we are enduring here in extremely harsh conditions. That’s why we live in camps in such...
b. Rights and Needs

1. Civil Rights

I cannot say that we are refugees, because we do not enjoy any of the rights that refugees enjoy. We are foreigners who live in Egypt. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

After the peace initiatives of 1977-88, some regulations were created against us by Sadat’s Camp David treaty. The Egyptians began treating us like foreigners while previously they treated us as Egyptians. So laws that were applied to foreigners were also applied to us, for residency permits, school and university fees, and the like. We can’t even study at the universities. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

There is no follow-up from the Lebanese government which doesn’t care about the Palestinian people. Certainly we are a burden on the Lebanese government which treats us as if we are not human beings, and as if we don’t have any value. For example, it doesn’t take our actual conditions into consideration. We wish to develop a means of communication between us and the Lebanese government through the PLO. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashidieh camp, Lebanon)

The Arab governments, intentionally or unintentionally, always seek to remove the refugees’ cause from Palestinians minds, including Jordan. Although Jordan in particular is a host country that asks the Palestinians to preserve their Palestinian identity while having Jordanian nationality – and this is an odd contradiction! When we raise the slogan saying “Jordan first!” this is as if we don’t have any value. For example, it doesn’t take our actual conditions into consideration. We wish they would help find us jobs and equality in work, and with residency permits. We are 1948 refugees, it is not logical to be asked for residency fees or demand that we pay penalties. I was born in Baghdad in 1956. Now, anyone who lives in a certain country for five years is entitled to have its nationality. But I have lived in Iraq for fifty years. There are incorrect measures which are being practised against us as refugees. The new regulations, and its current procedures, mis-treat us. Whatever. I work as a taxi driver, but I hear a great deal of terrorizing our community here. I think we should really raise our voice about it. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq)

As for the treatment during Saddam Hussein’s era, it was pretty good, although it wasn’t as the Palestinian people wished it to be. But it was good in general. After the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime, many parties entered the political scene from nowhere. It is true that there are national parties, but the Sh’ia parties are the ones holding the power, and deciding everything at the moment. We hope that things will get better in the future, but this will need a big effort, especially from the national Arab parties. Because we, the Palestinian people, are not going to stay in this country for ever. They are supposed to treat us in a good manner, like when the parties themselves were refugees when they were working abroad. Let them treat us in the same manner until Palestine is free, even if we were lying on each other, for Palestine will never be free as long as the present representatives of the Palestinian Authority are on the scene. We wish they would treat us like refugees who have rights to learn and get medical care, like human beings. We wish they would help find us jobs and equality in work, and with residency permits. We are 1948 refugees, it is not logical to be asked for residency fees or demand that we pay penalties. I was born in Baghdad in 1956. Now, anyone who lives in a certain country for five years is entitled to have its nationality. But I have lived in Iraq for fifty years. There are incorrect measures which are being practised against us as refugees. The new regulations, and its current procedures, mis-treat us. Whatever. I work as a taxi driver, but I hear a great deal of terrorizing our community here. I think we should really raise our voice about it. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq)

2) Status and Conditions of Palestinians

b. Rights and Needs

We want Canada to end all secret trials because it affects all members of our community, every single person that we put on these trials. Secret evidence has been pretty much against Arabs. It’s continuing, it’s going to increase, and this is a major worry in the community. In this culture of security the so-called age of terrorism is really terrorizing our community here. I think we should really raise our voice about it. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

Basically, there is no refugee who knows Danish laws that relate to the refugee issue, like what your rights and your obligations are. You may know simple information about your rights, but you don’t know the rest of your rights, because you are not skilled in the law that is needed for such a situation. (Participant, Public Meeting, Helsingor, Denmark).
No one will help you anywhere. In the streets you can read the slogans against us. And if the National Guard or the police ask for your identity and know that you are a Palestinian, they would curse you, and arrest you, only releasing you after many long hours. You can’t work in any far away location. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’faranyia shelter, Baghdad, Iraq).

I want to talk first about the host country in which we live. There are refugees in Syria, and in Jordan, and also in Lebanon. I think that the refugees in Syria are enjoying their rights, and the state treats them just like Syrian citizens. And it is the same situation in Jordan. Yet in Lebanon, the Palestinian people in the refugee camps did not receive any of their civil rights. Now if we want to talk about the camps, their residents live in miserable conditions. But the Palestinians in the camps, especially in Lebanon, only want to be safe and have their rights. I implore the Lebanese state, which is the host country, to classify some activities which represent the Palestinian people in order to devise a proper solution to this nation, so that it can live safely in dignity to enable it to return to its country. Because we don’t want to live in Lebanon — it is just a host country until they implement the right of return for the Palestinians. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Burj el-Barajneh, Lebanon)

The simplest Palestinian citizen has a lot of demands, like the right to own property. Why can’t Palestinians own a property? This can be fixed based on certain foundations. For example, to give a Palestinian the right to own only one house, not many houses or even institutions, and that ownership rights should be based on the number of people in that Palestinian family. (Participant, Students meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

As for the host country, there are some suggestions to claim our civil, humanitarian, and social rights, as well as lifting the blockade imposed on camps, and free the pressure upon parents. Then, most importantly, we claim the right to work for Palestinian citizens, and to communicate with the PLO’s institutions and its leadership. And we demand and suggest opening an embassy for the Palestinians in Lebanon. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

As for the relationship with the host country, we demand to lift the blockade. The concerned entities should exert pressure on the state to ease its procedures for the camps in the south. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

We think that the host country, Lebanon, does not only neglect the refugees, but also imposes very tough security procedures that makes it very difficult to go to work, school, or even the hospital. There are people who don’t go to work because of these procedures. In this regard, the role of the political leadership of the PLO is central. The leadership should discuss all these matters at an official level with the government. It should discuss the improvement of the camp conditions and seek permission for construction materials to enter the camps in the south. We know that here we don’t have rights or work or anything. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

We demand that the state ease its arbitrary procedures imposed on the camps and lift the blockade. Also we should open an embassy or an office for the PLO in Lebanon to look after refugee affairs, in coordination with the Lebanese state. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

Let them just give us our rights, let them support our young people in the hospitals, and work with them. Let them give us the same rights as Palestinians in Syria or Jordan have. We don’t have any rights in Lebanon. We insist upon the right of return even if they give us our civil rights. We just want our rights to be able to live like the rest of the world. No one really knows how we live since we are deprived from these rights and live in such miserable conditions. So we demand our rights and we insist upon our right of return, and we would leave everything in Lebanon and go back to our country at any time. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

As for the host country, we thank it for hosting us for 57 years, but we demand the state to give Palestinians here their rights, albeit just a small part of their economic, social and civil rights. We also ask it to maintain channels through the popular committees and to build a strong relationship with it. The Lebanese state should take into consideration that we are a nation who holds on to its right of return, and our identity, and that we
Host Countries

2) Status and Conditions of Palestinians

b. Rights and Needs

The freedom of media here is suppressed. We are deprived of the most basic and simplest social rights, and you can see that the camps are under blockade. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

I think we should stop this discrimination against Palestinians in our country. It should be stopped from here. We have to let the US government know that we are here. When we go to Israel we are humiliated and searched, and this needs to stop, and maybe Israel is doing this so Palestinians won’t go back. So we should work hard from here with the organizations. This is the most important demand, to stop discrimination. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

I don’t wish to distinguish between different religions, but there are no mosques here in Greece, and there isn’t a cemetery. This is a very important issue. I have friends who left Greece because they said that they want to know where they would be buried after they die. The Embassy has been there for twenty years. But we are a Muslim civil society in Greece, yet we don’t have a mosque or an Islamic cemetery. The country would not approve that, and our governments are not pushing the country to do this. Our government says that these are European countries. I think that this issue can’t be resolved except through Europe. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

As to channels of communication in the host country; first they ought to respect the nationality of refugees and not discriminate between peoples, and respect our civil rights. This is what is written in the Lebanese constitution and this is what one of its articles refers to. Amongst other things we should discuss are the rights of Palestinian workers, and also the lack of labour unions; Palestinians are not allowed to work in 72 occupations. In addition to that, working hours for the Palestinian worker are not defined although working hours for the Lebanese are eight hours a day. Moreover, the state does not give us any guarantees as Palestinian refugees who have been living here for 54 or more than 57 years. Everyone says that the Lebanese doesn’t really know his country; yet neither does the Palestinian; anyhow we insist upon the right of return. Yet despite this fact, they are abusing our social relationship with Lebanon, and the most obvious evidence is that we, as Palestinian refugees, can’t own property in Lebanon. If there is a rich married man his children can’t inherit his wealth for it becomes the property of the state after his death. As for the issue of not participating in the elections, we, as Palestinian refugees all over the world, don’t want to participate in the elections, but on the educational level, we, as students in the Lebanese university, are not allowed to vote in the university. The Palestinian refugee in all other countries has rights. In Syria, for example, they treat the Palestinian refugees just like Syrian citizens. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)

Note that every time heated disagreement breaks out between the PLO’s leadership and the government here, new arbitrary regulations are issued against the Palestinians. These regulations remain in force even when they come to an agreement. So we have a lot of arbitrary regulations. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

We want full ownership rights – whether I want, as a Palestinian, to own one or ten houses. (Participant, Students meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

The reason that I can tell you so much is that I live this situation. It is very humiliating that we should be stopped at checkpoints. A lot of discussion also takes place if someone brings electrical supplies into the camp in order to install or change something. They are trying to humiliate us. I consider lifting the blockade on the camps a basic demand that we discussed, and which needs to be raised in order to be emphasized. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

I think lets go back to the fact that we don’t know what are the exact problems. A lot of people don’t and I think this would be true for any of these organizations that do these studies. First of all we need a Palestinian representative, we don’t really know who the representatives in exile actually are. Second of all we need to have representatives of Al-Shatat in Palestine. I believe that I am not being represented in Palestine, I have no representative in Palestine and we need to have a representative in Palestine. Let me finish. A lot of us in the community are not comfortable in speaking about American foreign policy towards Palestine, about oppression, we can change that with limitations and having rights in this country as American citizens. In reality what makes us wary is the American Patriot Act. The act states that you can be arrested for speaking out against the American government and, if that’s true, then we need to have more
information submitted to people in branches and offices so they can relate it to their communities to help us understand what the facts are. I know that Palestinians in the Ramallah Community have actually been accused of raising funds against America, where in fact they were buying sweets for Palestinian children. How ridiculous is this? And people are hearing this stuff and it can be dangerous and it’s frightening to people and we don’t have enough information accessible to us. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States.)

From the legal side, we demand that arbitrary laws which deprive the Palestinian from many rights, like his right to work, are annulled. There are also laws which forbid Palestinians to own a flat. These laws should be revoked and an office of the PLO must be opened to pursue the concerns of Palestinians in this country. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

In the first place, to live as citizens in the Arab countries, which was declared in the Casablanca Protocol: that the Palestinian people should live as citizens in the host country and exercise their full rights in work, living, and housing. The civil issues which should be stressed and discussed with the host Lebanese state is the right to implement all the international resolutions and to pursue the concerns of Palestinians in this country. (Participant, Public meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

The civil issues which should be stressed and discussed with the host Lebanese state is the right to work and the right to own houses, in addition to implementing all the international resolutions which relate to legitimate human rights. (Participant, Workers’ meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

The right to own a property from which we were again deprived. The Palestinian is not allowed to buy an apartment. We have the right to lift the blockade on the camps. We are living in a prison, and we suffer from very difficult emotional and financial circumstances. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

The right to own a property and to enjoy the social security for the Palestinians. When we first came to Lebanon, we were able to own a property or buy a house or a land. This law is cancelled now, and who bought a property

There is discrimination against Palestinians in other Arab countries. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

If you were a business man who needs to travel often, the last thing you would need is to have to go to the passport department to get an exit and return visa issued, and bring a paper from your sponsor. This is not a useful system for us. Unlike those from Egypt or Bangladesh or Pakistan who come here to get some money to start their lives with, we, the Palestinians, have been living here for a long time like citizens, and we spend like them, if not more. So why can’t we form committees and be treated like Saudi citizens, and why can’t we travel wherever we want or own a house or buy land. The Palestinian leadership is supposed to discuss the situation of people who live in this country and work towards getting them some facilities to live in a better way. We don’t demand to have nationality. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

All we want is for you to give us part of the freedom that human beings enjoy everywhere. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

Most young men who live here are educated yet they are not engaged in the jobs they were trained to practice. They are working as labourers. Perhaps the conditions we live in allow us to do so, and perhaps our parents couldn’t get us to schools, but we are an educated and literate nation. Most of our young men have had high school and are working as labourers and can’t find a job. This is a big problem. Until when will we continue to suffer? Maybe we endured these circumstances, but our children are now growing up—how are we to make sure that they will be safe if they can’t even have a house to live in decently, and if they are not allowed to work, or eat, or drink. This is impossible. We wish to solve this situation now and we want this to be heard at the top levels. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

ii. Right to Organize

In fact, there are several civil institutions that deal with refugees’ issues in the refugee camps, like the clubs, youth centres, and cultural centres. When such centres were established, they were effective and serious, and the Palestinian refugees in Jordan were feeling the same attachment to the Palestinian cause and the refugees’ cause. But when these centres turned into clubs of the Youth Ministry after the disengagement (from the West

Part II: Findings

2) Status and Conditions of Palestinians

b. Rights and Needs

Most of the people here have suffered a lot during long periods that perhaps exceed forty years. It can mean a lot having any kind of support from the PLO, as we live in a foreign country. Because our situation here is very miserable we can’t obtain nationality from this country and so we become a burden upon it. There are no resolutions from the Arab League that prevent us from taking nationality. We can’t move in and out of the country. Consequently those of us who have Palestinian documents are very disillusioned with no aspirations or hopes. I bet that all of the attendees at this meeting can’t plan what to do during one single week; they are not allowed to travel nor learn nor do anything. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)
there is a law allowing the Interior Minister to “close down any association without giving reasons or referring to the courts”. We own lands and halls, mosques and schools, but these can be revoked at any minute. In addition, we are not allowed to discuss politics. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

There is something else. Sometimes there are programs at the United Nations and in Canada about supposed multi-culturalism that should allow Palestinians to organize around their cultural heritage and such things. And by the way in the United Nations there are a lot of conferences for stateless nations. Now I think somehow Palestinians always resisted being part of that organization… I am not really sure, but it is worth studying what are the international bodies that protect stateless nations in terms of preserving their cultural heritage and different programmes. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

This must begin from the universities, where the percentage of refugees among universities students is very high. We can start from there… we, as refugees, can find our representatives; whether this level of representative or a higher one. We only want our voice be heard, because even if we are too many in universities, the university rules would not allow you, as a refugee, to represent the refugees. This is difficult and has limits. If we ever want anything, we must loudly demand it, because we are not stealing – this is one of our rights. We want a representative body in the university or in a certain city, but this is not something to declare. You can find this in the camps where there exist the biggest constituency for Palestinian refugees. It exists in the camps. That is why we want someone to represent us in these camps. I know these camps, and if I ever want anything, I know how to get there. And I think that the university student has a philosophy too, because he has an opinion and he is educated and bold. I once participated in a demonstration, and the other day I was summoned before the Dean of Student Affairs, and because I was carrying the Palestinian hattah (scarf), the Dean took it from me. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We have the right to have an embassy here in Lebanon. (Participant, Students meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

We have the right to have a legitimate representative here, which is the PLO, while taking into consideration the right of protection and the right to express our opinions. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

Especially after Munich, we were put under the microscope of the German security services, and Palestinian civil organisations were banned. The student and worker unions were outlawed. Any Palestinian unionist activity on German soil was prohibited. This situation has gradually ameliorated. There are still some legal issues, but there is a notable level of Palestinian activity that is evident in the streets, the demonstrations, meetings, and in Palestinian areas in Germany. So long as one did not threaten the German order; their activities were tolerated. The peak was reached when the organisations were re-established; the student and worker unions. The important issue here is to have a Palestinian will. (Participant, Public Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany)

Are these monthly or weekly gatherings internationally allowed, and does the government of Saudi Arabia allow them even if they were? I want you to understand what I’m going to say very well: Saudi Arabia doesn’t oppose anything. On the contrary, it offers support on both security and political levels, yet we should respect the country’s policy. Saudi Arabia is isolated. Saudi Arabia prevented us from establishing training camps. It can’t prevent us from doing anything. Don’t just offer interpretations about the country without any basis. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

Political work inside the university by students is forbidden which consequently limits the national role students can play. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Homs (‘A’dreen) camp, Syria)
In Egypt, they get very upset from the activities we perform. We have a committee called the Arab Committee for Liberation and Return. It is named the Arab Committee, unlike all the other right of return committees, and it includes non-Palestinian Arabs, it aims to achieve liberation and return, not just return, for, as we have seen, Palestine is an Arab cause, so all Arabs should participate in it. There is no return without liberation. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

iii. Status
I am a Palestinian refugees and I live in Hilwan. The Palestinians face so many problems here for example when one wants to get some papers from the Embassy. The Egyptians treat Palestinians badly, and the least they say is that they are not living in their own country. The way of dealing with Palestinians in this country is really disgusting. You are ping-ponged from one person to another when you want to get your passport issued or some documents, and you also have to pay a lot of money. Any Egyptian would say to you that you are living in Egypt because of what their country offers to us, but they don’t realize that we are living in this country with our own money. We are paying money to get our residency permits like any tourist would do. When I studied I had to pay in dollars, since I am a Palestinian, unlike Egyptians. I always used to study science and she got A grades in all her classes, and she was entitled to get a scholarship. But they gave it instead to an Egyptian student, telling her that she can’t take it up, because she is a Palestinian. We are very united as Palestinians, unlike them. Also, as a Palestinian you have to pay a certain sum, say 25 pounds, to take the exam and you will pass. (Participant, Meeting, Hilwan, Egypt)

I get very frightened when the residency permit of my son ends lest they take him. His residency must be renewed ten days prior to its expiration or they would deport him. They made my son pay a huge amount of money to grant him residency. Where would he go? And he can’t stay here without a residency permit. The same applies to his other brother, my son’s brother, Rashad, who has six kids. He sent money to him to help him get his residency permit, do you believe that? His brother lives in Gaza, and he has six kids, and he is a taxi driver…. What can I say? He also sent 300 pounds for each of them so that they would be able to make three years residency permits in a way that enables them to return to Palestine if they can. We take these exit and return visas from the Mugam’ma here, otherwise our residency will be invalid. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

The Ministry of Social Affairs used to offer us social services “in birth and in death”, and used to help us with proving our residency in Iraq. This function does not exist anymore – it can give you a letter for the hospital. It is solely an administrative body. This body currently coordinates with residency authorities; one takes a letter from it for residency. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Zay’ānaniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq).

I live as a human being, a citizen, and a refugee. I have a five-year passport, but when I wish to visit Palestine, they take away my passport at the bridge. Why? Is it because of security and sovereignty reasons? Ok… define for us the standards so that we can know this security and sovereignty, so that we can avoid crossing the red line. The standards in this country on what relates to this are not clear. I demand to clarify them. As Palestinian or Jordanian refugees, UNRWA and this country deprived us from a lot of services. The brothers from Gaza Camp and many others in other areas are deprived from the right of engaging in political life; there is no voting nor running for office. Thank goodness that there are UNRWA’s women’s committees through which men and women can articulate the needs of the camp and of our poor people. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

There is a Jordanian woman who is married to a Jordanian who works with the Authority in the West Bank and Gaza. This woman has a Jordanian passport and a national number; and her children are Jordanians. Yet eventually they took her passport and that of her husband as well as her mother’s away, and she is given a temporary passport. Why? Where would such people actually go? (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

In the past, the late Wasfi El-Tal issued identity cards for us; these were civil identity cards that allowed us to move and work and stay in Jordan. They gave some of us two-year passports, but it is very difficult to renew them, not to say
anything about approving them. You would also face problems when you travel from or to Jordan… In the end, all we can say is that we are better off than others, especially those who don’t have any documents at all, those who are stateless. We tried to form a committee for the Gaza people, and [participant] knows that, and we contacted the Interior Minister and the Prime Minister and the Minister of Social Affairs, but then they tried to oppress each of us, and the solution was to forget the whole issue. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

When we applied to have nationality here, the final clause dictates that you will give up your nationality whatever it was previously. When I went to Lebanon, I already had my Danish passport. The official asked me where I was from, and I said I was a Palestinian, and then he asked me to wait. And when I asked him what he wanted, he said that he was going to the archive to find my document in order to delete my name as a Lebanese Palestinian refugee because I am now Danish. This means that if all the people here went back to Lebanon, not one of them would have Lebanese origins. (Participant, Public Meeting, Sondenborg, Denmark)

Since the nineties, the Iraqi travel document for Palestinians has been useless for travel to Arab countries; it has no value and no one recognizes it. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’faraniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq).

As for the community’s conditions after the collapse of the monarchy, perhaps they were a little better under Saddam Hussein’s regime. He built buildings for them to live in instead of the stables as they used to, and they were given simple rights. And they treated us then like Iraqis in matters like nationality and services. I mean to say that there was a big jump towards giving us some rights, albeit simple ones. In spite of that, we were hoping to be better treated by them, and to be given broader rights. The

My father did not go to see his father because they prevented him to do so; he needed an authorization but he didn’t get it until after three days. Yet by this time he was buried. My grandmother wanted to come, but they didn’t give her authorization until after four days. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

We demand that countries who have refugees stress that we are Palestinian refugees. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

I acquired Danish nationality, and I have my two daughters with me. One of them is registered UNRWA and the other is not, so I sent my daughter’s papers, and the Lebanese government endorsed them, but it didn’t register her; but UNRWA did. (Participant, Public Meeting, Sondenborg, Denmark)

We are all Palestinians. We spent many years in this country. There are people who spent forty years here. So why can’t we get residencies like the Yemenis in the old days who used to have free residencies allowing them to go wherever they want without being bothered. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)
The services that were offered to the Palestinians in Jordan are not available in Syria or Lebanon or any other country, but at the same time, we do not enjoy full rights. Yet we are Jordanian citizens, but can't work in top jobs like the military institution. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Amman, Jordan).

They haven't restructured electricity in the camps for 50 years. If we want to talk about the problems which Palestinians in Lebanon are facing, there is the passports problem. Why can’t Palestinians have a passport to represent them, and have a certain number of passports especially for the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. (Participant, Students meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

The community needs to cooperate with the PLO, because there are some legal issues by which it can support it. It is the organization that represents us when dealing with the German authorities and represents the interests of the Palestinian people in front of the German courts.

What I want to say is that we live in a country which totally rejects legal principles of immigration, and consequently refuses all international regulations. Imagine that a child who is born in Germany is not considered German, and therefore isn’t entitled to have German nationality, and Germany can’t be considered his country. A law was issued in Germany in 1/1/2005 which was (according to the press and advertising and talks and discussions), supposed to solve the problems of a range of immigrants, which includes many of the Palestinians who live in Germany. In fact we belong to those who entitled “without nationality” and we don’t have documents, and these people are not known, even to the PLO. The result is that all immigrants who arrived to Germany, even in 1989, have lived in this country for fifteen years. They no longer have political asylum, or residency, or a place to work. These people don’t have documents and thus became a category called “without nationality”.

They refused to perform an eye operation for my father, so he had to enter a private hospital and pay four or five thousand pounds. This problem is not really serious, but imagine if it was: you would have no choice but to sell yourself. My father is a taxi driver, and I don’t want to tell you how they treat him in the Department of Motor Vehicles just because he is Palestinian, I can’t describe the degree of torment. By our house there is a photocopying centre that told us most of their earnings came from us, as every other day we have to copy papers for work permits or other permissions. We are constantly copying documents. If a security service employee arrests a Palestinian in the street, this would be another story. He would curse him saying horrible things and he would give him a hard time. Didn’t I tell you that we are demanding our simplest rights? (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

So this law was a big issue, and they announced that they will solve the “without nationality” problem, especially for those who have been living in Germany for eighteen years, or those who have clean legal record. They claimed that they will be given a residency based on this and people began to provide the evidence they had. Meanwhile, the German authorities were in the process of contacting the Lebanese government to try to get passports for those who couldn’t formally issue passports from the Lebanese Embassy.

The result was that the people who applied received letters written in German which demands that whoever wants a passport from the Lebanese Embassy should give them his residency permission. But to print the residency form for these authorities you need to have a passport. These poor people used to ask some private institutions for this, but they were told that they will be given a residency provided that they issue passports. And when they went to get their passports, they took them to the police station without warning, and they were immediately taken to the airport and forced out of the country. This happened three times during the last few weeks.

At present we have a problem. People who hear about this will not apply to have passports to get residency permits; they will stay without documents and without residencies. So it is hard to find a job, and also their children will not be able to go to schools. This is really a huge social problem. Had this law been implemented, the situation would have changed, and people would have been given residency, and the “right to work”!

The result has been that people who have been living here for 15 years can’t register their children at schools, or have them to learn vocational skills. So the students who finish high school must depend on themselves and find a job. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany).

I have temporary nationality which means that I don’t have a Jordanian passport. This would mean that I’m renouncing my Palestinian identity, but I don’t want to do it. Every new Iraqi government imposes new regulations upon us. We don’t blame just this one regime; we blame all of them. Each new president imposes new laws on Palestinians. Each time they give us new identity papers. When the first refugees came to Iraq, they were given a ‘refugee’ identity papers. When the regime changed, they gave us a ‘resident’ identity paper. Under the new regime, the permanent resident ID paper was cancelled and they gave us temporary six-month resident identity papers.

All over the world, whoever has been a resident for five years in a country is granted nationality. Yet we have been living in this country for 56 years, and they only give us six months residency cards?! Where is the justice in this? Is this justice? (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’faranya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq).
and renouncing my rights. I am in a host country.
(Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

There is also the freedom to move around and travel, I mean passports. There are many Palestinians who don’t have passports; they only have those green or blue identity cards. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashideh camp, Lebanon)

I can’t go to the centre for residency permits lest I hear humiliating language. How could an old man or woman go there? How could I go, if I were very timid? How would a woman go? How would Abu Tariq go, with my respect to him? A lot of people suffer from this. The other issue is housing. You came here and you took photos from the outside, despite it being known that this situation was raised more than once. We will help you, and we will raise 100 dollars for you. You want 50 dollars from the club, we will get you 100 dollars from the Embassy, and you saw that road. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

Another issue is immigration. They appointed a cruel person for us to deal with who is a curse for the Palestinians. He speaks with one arrogantly, saying for example, “you are the father of so-and-so, and your father is so-and-so, don’t you have a room?” If this person was appointed by the Embassy, what is this? (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

Most of the Palestinians who live in Saudi Arabia have neither citizenship numbers nor identity cards. (Participant, Public meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

Basically we want to draw the refugees’ attention to the fact that there is someone who cares about them. Take the refugees in Jordan or Lebanon or Syria; they are a group of people who live, in one way or another, in several areas called refugee camps. The state gave them passports or certain documents that identify them as refugees, in contrast with native citizens. But here in the kingdom, most of the refugees don’t have documents; they are refugees and I am one of them. There is another part who are considered citizens of Jordan or Syria. These do not stress the point of return of the refugees. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

Why don’t we form a committee to exert pressure on the Arab countries to cancel the guarantor system; our guarantor is the PLO. We need to be free without having to constantly renew residency with its high fees. There are people who really can’t afford to have their children aught as well as pay their residency fees. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

iv. Education and Labour
As for education, they have the expression “newcomers”. When you want to enrol in a school or a university as a Palestinian you should receive permission from the newcomers department so that your son can enter a school. Of course, there are no government schools. All the schools available for Palestinians here are private ones, because they consider us foreigners. Palestinian students pay in sterling or dollars or their equivalent in Egyptian pounds. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

The university fees are very high. I used to pay 1500 sterling, and it costs 3000 for science specializations. After the new system concerning Egyptian mothers was applied, these students would only pay 10% of the total sum, along with the fees in Egyptian pounds, which comes to 200-300 pounds. But we still pay for medical treatment, and you can’t get medical treatment in public hospitals, only private ones. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

In the days of [Jamal] Abd Al-Nasser, my son and my daughter were in the finest schools and the best universities. They never took money from us. Now students here pay 2650 pounds and need another two thousand for other things, and when he goes to the doctor he has to pay 50 or 100 pounds. Where would he get such a sum? (Participant, Meeting, Hilwan, Egypt)

The refugees’ cause and the Palestinian cause have been removed from the curriculum of the Education Ministry; and instead a parallel program under the subject of human rights was introduced. This program is supported and the media promote it with signs everywhere. Has anyone ever seen a sign in the street or on the top of a building calling for “the preservation of the right of return”? And if someone put such a sign up, we all know what his fate would be. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

As young refugees in the camps we suggest here that what we need are opportunities. Why can the children of military people and those who work in the field of education enjoy scholarships? There are scholarships for the residents of the camps,
regardless of the number, but 200 scholarships is not sufficient for the population of the camps! Is there anything that can qualify us to receive such scholarships? (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

They do not recognize Palestinian students as international students so I am not sure what the latest update is on that. But if you are a Palestinian student you cannot apply for certain funds that are available to every international student, because there is nothing called Palestine according to Canada. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

Palestinian students do not enjoy any electoral right in the Lebanese universities, undermining his role at university. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

Unfortunately, there are a lot of Palestinian families that can’t afford to have their children taught in private schools. I am poor and I can’t afford to have my children educated. I heard of another man who withdrew his daughters from school and is not able to have them taught in private schools, so he only left the boys at school because there is not enough income to teach his daughters. This is in itself a problem for Palestinians or foreigners who live in Egypt. When my father was still alive, he told us that he could not have been able to educate us if they had applied the new system of universities fees when we were studying, for we are six kids and he hadn’t enough money. But fortunately this system was introduced after we graduated. The last university in which the system was introduced is Al-Azhar University. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

The first thing is that university students or students who have finished high school can’t find anyone to support Palestinian refugees. Maybe it is true that they used to give scholarships so that students can finish their studies. I am talking about Palestinian refugees in Jordan. Who is responsible for Tawjih students? They get high grades, 80 or 90%, but they can’t get a place at the university. Who is responsible for letting them finish their studies? They don’t get competitive chances to study in the universities. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

As for education, I have one question to all the sisters here. If we made statistics up until 1982, we can find the educational and cultural statistics for the Palestinian people in the refugee camps are very high. But from 1982 up until today, this percentage has decreased to less than half. We should research the reasons for this; is it the economic situation? We want to avoid this problem so that our people will not grow up ignorant. This point should be thoroughly studied. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Buji el Burjineh, Lebanon)

The Gaza Camp citizens are currently treated like foreigners, and they pay for university in dollars. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

Giving the Palestinians in the camps all the civil rights and providing the social assistance and educational scholarships to students who have high scores so they might study abroad. So that Palestinians in Lebanon can achieve the same educational level of Palestinians in any other Arab country. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

I have been living in Egypt for 36 years. We want jobs for our children who work one day and then have to stay home for days. I have here two kids, my son and his wife live with us. When my children go to the Embassy, they are told that there are no jobs unless they know important people. The Egyptian government hardly manage to employ its own people. We are thankful to the Egyptians who accepted us in their country. But when we go to the Embassy, they would give us a hard time just to document some papers, and we also pay 50 or even 100 pounds for the application. We demand that the Embassy provide jobs for our children so that we can live in dignity. Where could we go and to whom could we complain? The Egyptian government does not employ Palestinians. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

Job opportunities: employing a Palestinian horrifies the private sector. My brother, for example, has a Masters in Arabic language, and in order to work in a private school, he must obtain security clearance from the government. You would hear horrible things like “we don’t employ Palestinians, they are terrorists”. One is nothing to them. They treat Palestinians as they treat those from the Gulf area whom they regard as investors who will take their money and leave. This has affected most people, as well as the private sector which deal with you as if you were a thief who came here to steal, or a terrorist. These ideas were encouraged and it has produced a crisis in the sphere of employing Palestinians in Egypt. They are starting to consider those who have an Egyptian mother for certain occupations such as engineering and law. I think the lawyer’s union is the foremost in this field. Maybe because it has realized the size of the problem so it began to treat Palestinians in a different way. It also calls for giving Palestinians or Sudanese certain exemptions. Things started to get easier when this system of including those who have an Egyptian mother was applied, and it has helped Palestinians find jobs. There is no problem working in law for Palestinians, because it is an open occupation and

Unbelievably, he [my son] once worked in the cement sector for two days, and then they asked him about the identity card. He said that he does not have a card, so they knew that he was Palestinian, and they fired him. Also some time ago, some Egyptians gave him work and he worked for five days taking 10 pounds daily. Finally, they asked him about the card, but he said he is a Palestinian and he was fired. (Participant, Meeting, Hilwan, Egypt)
2) Status and Conditions of Palestinians

b. Rights and Needs

We demand that the Lebanese government creates job opportunities. We know that the current economic situation does not provide many opportunities, and there is no doubt that there are no jobs for some Lebanese citizens, which means that there are no jobs for Palestinians either. But it can at least grant Palestinians the right to work. We have engineers and doctors who don’t have jobs in Lebanon. Their employment is limited to the camps. Why should a Palestinian lawyer who studied four or five years work in an office where he would stay late writing up all the information on the case, and at the end a Lebanese lawyer goes to plead it. This Palestinian lawyer has the right to go to court and plead the case himself.

( Participant, Students’ meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

Why can’t Palestinians work in the army or security services? Why can’t he work in state jobs? This is a part of the citizens’ rights and they are endorsed by the constitution; why can’t Palestinians enjoy them? (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

What is happening is that you try hard to find a job that can’t be found, in spite of their being resources. Yet they are reserved; you feel that your place is reserved for another person. You can’t find an alternative except to leave the country, or work in lowly occupations, a taxi driver for example. For no one in this job asks you where you come from or what your nationality is. For the employer, you’re just another worker; he doesn’t care if you are Palestinian or Egyptian. You find university graduates working in these jobs.

( Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

I have a job but it is not with the government or with others, because that is very difficult. For me, I don’t want anything from the Egyptian government because sooner or later I will leave. Egypt doesn’t allow Palestinians and foreigners to work in the public sector. Lately public institutions have been privatized so that even the Egyptian worker can’t find a job in them. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

We are only allowed to work in jobs that require hard labour. We should demand that the state annul work laws that don’t allow Palestinians to work in many classes of occupations. We have thousands of unemployed young men. Some of them are university and college graduates. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

There is no canteen or restaurant in any of the factories, and we don’t get a break. And even ill workers can’t take a break. And there are no services for our children. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Sbeineh camp, Syria)

There are no job opportunities for our students after they graduate. The host countries and the Gulf countries and the Palestinian companies should create job opportunities for them. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

As for the economic aspect, there is the work permit, and how to get it. All Palestinians don’t have organized structures to be part of, except professionals like engineers, doctors, and lawyers. This means that they don’t have unions like those which were inside the PLO; the journalist’s union, lawyer’s unions and engineer’s union. In the 1980s, all the activities and dealings with these unions were blocked under regulations introduced in Egypt, except for the worker’s union. So we all had to get permission from the worker’s union. I am a researcher and should therefore be categorized under a research category, but I am under the journalist’s union because I can’t contact or deal with the Egyptian journalist’s union or the Palestinian press union to get me a paper proving that I work in the Egyptian media in order to get permission. So I am forced to write in the occupation space in my passport any occupation, like freelance salesman or car technician, so that I can get a work permit. You find many Palestinians who do that, although they may be honest but they don’t have a choice, for they can’t find a job. Under Egyptian law, 1% of the employees of any institution must be foreigners, whom the institution pays taxes and special social security for them and also a special health insurance in addition to their salaries. So any employer would prefer not to employ Palestinians, hiring instead Jordanians, to escape problems they would have. This created a crisis with Palestinian Jordanians who come to Egypt, because they can enter Egypt any time without a visa, and they can get their education exactly like Egyptians, and if they are studying in the private sector they only pay the fees, and in the university they would only pay 10%. Also the economic institutions would employ Jordanians whether they are of Palestinian origin or not. So the real unemployment rate amongst Palestinians has increased, although after that many PLO allowances were cancelled on the basis of it (except for the martyrs, whose families continue to receive their salaries). Another entity under the name of the Palestinian Association was created. It offers assistance for Palestinian families in the “poverty salary” program. But it asks for papers that are difficult to find, in order to give you as little as 50 [Egyptian] pounds or...
100 pounds at most. This amount is nothing in the economic conditions of a country like Egypt. But at least many families have started to receive money from it. The Palestinian women’s union used to offer part of the donations it gets from charities on a voluntary and unorganized basis. According to the special procedures in the PLO, we should have proper allocations. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

There are a lot of Palestinian graduates, and there are also vocational workers who are unemployed. And if he goes into any company or to any vocational institution to work, they get crazy when they know that he is Palestinian. They say to him that they must first employ Iraqis. And they start insulting him and asking him if he was a terrorist. Why can’t Palestinians in Iraq enjoy the minimum of his humanitarian rights? We want to live in dignity the same way every person would like to live. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

Suitable jobs which fit Palestinian talents are not available, although our educated sector is high in our society. And the social and structural bodies and organizations that are meant to study this problem and devise solutions for it are either absent or incompetent. (Participant, Student’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

Palestinian students are not able to practice skills in any institution or company after finishing their studies. (Participant, Student’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

We have discussed the political, legal, social and civil issues. We first mentioned the issue of job opportunities which are not available for our youth who can’t work in any field once they graduate. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

On the social level, we are deprived from the right to work. People are working and the country overlooks such laws although that it is not formally obliged to do so. We don’t have the right to work, but we want jobs for graduate students to become doctors, engineers, and lawyers. This country is supposed to help those people, in addition to the PLO and UNRWA, by creating jobs for them to enable them to help their families. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

Among the most serious problems for refugees in Lebanon are not having civil and social rights. Palestinians are not allowed to exercise their right to work, or allowed to work in 72 occupations. And if a worker, or teacher; or even a doctor can find work without permission, he does not enjoy any rights or compensation. He can also be fired if the employer wishes to do so. Our people with all its sectors are facing the worst kind of racial discrimination. Although we are protected by Lebanese law we don’t enjoy the rights ratified by the UN General Assembly about the right of the Palestinian refugee to work in host countries. (Participant, Public meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)

As for the Palestinian camps, we demand certain work opportunities to be defined, like doctors and pharmacist. If any Palestinian wants to open a clinic or a pharmacy or any agency outside the refugee camp, he will need a license, and we demand that he could obtain such a license. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

I agree with all that was said by the previous participant, because she spoke about the essence of the problem. But I want to add a few more things. Even if we Palestinians have Canadian or any other nationality, our legitimate foundation is always the right of return. We will not renounce our right to our land, country, and property for as long as we breathe. Also, as Palestinians in Lebanon, we face great dangers concerning education, health, civil rights and labour, where we are deprived from working in many occupations. I want to give you an idea about me. I am a trained nurse and an expert in this area. I have a diploma and a work permit from the Health Ministry to work in Lebanon as a trained nurse. This requires that I go to the Ministry of Labour to get a permit to work in Lebanon. At the Ministry they told me to leave, and that they will answer me in Lebanon, but three months went by and I went again to the Ministry and they told me to apply again to get the permit. I remained with no job or work permit. Then I worked as a nurse in Maqassed Khariyya Hospital the Lebanese hospital in Beirut. But they told me that they must say in the job application that I am working as the cleaning boy, because the law of the Ministry of Labour which allows Palestinians to work in certain occupations and forbids them from working in others. And I worked on this basis for one year and they gave me a card that says that I am a cleaner, not a nurse. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)
Palestinians are not allowed to engage in 74 occupations which any citizen in the free world can practice. For example, he is not allowed to become a doctor or a lawyer, and he is not allowed to open a clinic outside the camp. This leads to huge economic pressures that force him, like other skilled people, to leave the country, if he can find a way to, for it is very difficult for Palestinians to move freely or travel, especially to neighbouring Arab countries. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

The principal demand for refugees who live in the camps is to lift the economic blockade imposed on them. Forbidding Palestinian to work in 72 occupations regardless of his major at university makes him unable to meet the Lebanese labour force. This either forces him to hang up his certificate - whatever it is - and just forget about it, while staying home waiting for any lost job opportunity, or leave his family and undertake the problems of being refugee again, alone. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

The Lebanese government has so many negative elements. First there is the right to an education. For example, we study and take the baccalaureate, and we go on to university to study what we like for many years. Ok, we are allowed to learn but we can’t work in the specialization that we studied. There is racial discrimination here. When I go for a job interview, for instance, the first thing they ask me is “what is your nationality?” and when they know that I am a Palestinian, I don’t get the job. This is racial discrimination and sectarianism. The sectarianism is between Muslims and Christians, and the racial discrimination is against the Palestinians. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashideh camp, Lebanon)

The civic and social issues relate to improving job opportunities for Palestinians inside the camp. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashideh camp, Lebanon)

We want civil rights including the work and to no longer be deprived from working in 73 professions. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)
Part II

III) Humanitarian agencies and other international institutions

They come here, take pictures of us, and take away all the relief assistance. Where is the support that we are supposed to receive? Our situation never improves.

(Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’taranya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq.)
The main reason for the humanitarian crisis is that the donor countries are reducing their assistance, diverting funds to projects that don’t even exist. The international community is negligent, due to the terrifying and scary hegemony of the United States which leads the charge of the transnational companies. In this context, money started to flow into illusory projects, the so-called “peace projects.” This is the cause of people’s suffering, and it all continues because Israel doesn’t respect the international community and doesn’t abide by its resolutions. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

Our suffering and problems will not be addressed by the Iraqi government or our national representative or the Embassy. We must lay our problems before international institutions, so that they can help us and offer us humanitarian aid. And this necessity is part of the Palestinian people’s suffering. Don’t expect from the Iraqi government to solve our problems. I can hardly fulfil my daily routine of loading and unloading shipments not to mention that they want me to pay 160 dinars in penalties. This is in addition to the curses, insults and offensive words we hear daily. We remember the day when a ranking officer in the residency department attacked us, saying: ‘what do you Palestinians want?’ He insulted us, asking, ‘why don’t you leave Iraq?’ We were humiliated and we just left. That’s why I am saying that we should raise our problems at the international level. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Humiya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

What I want to say is that we only want to convey our voice. We want the Right of Return and we insist upon it. And we want our voice to be heard by everyone including the PLO and the international institutions which are involved in the situation. (Participant, Public Meeting, Aarhus, Denmark).

1) Refugee Status

a. Non-Registered Refugees

There are thousands of refugees who are not registered by UNRWA, especially those who live in Aqaba and Wadi ‘Arabá and in some areas of the Jordan Valley, who don’t have identity papers or a passport, and who are marginalized. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

I don’t think we give the issue of unregistered refugees enough attention. We speak about the right of return and usually that refers to the people registered by UNRWA but there are people living in refugee camps who UNWRA does not count. So we need to raise this point and address what will happen to people like myself. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

There is also the problem of the NR [Non Registered with UNRWA] who is neglected by UNRWA. I am from the NR [Non Registered with UNRWA]. I don’t get any help from the Students’ fund and I don’t have the right to receive medical care. This must be a fundamental concern. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

On services, we have a health clinic with one doctor who treats all types of patients. There are many Palestinians from ‘Akrad Al-Baqara village who were not recognized by UNRWA. When they were finally recognized, they were able to get medical treatment from the agency’s clinic which serves nearly fifteen thousand refugees. However, the medical supplies dedicated to the camp were not increased. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Sbeineh camp, Syria)

b. UNRWA, Ration Cards, and Legal Status

When a sick person with a chronic disease asks for their help, they ask him to demonstrate that he is not a beneficiary of the UNRWA health insurance scheme. However, the UNRWA program provides little more than aspirin. What more does UNRWA ever give than this? And if he is registered, would you deprive him from a surgical operation, which is very costly? This is one of the main sources of refugees’ suffering. When those who live outside the camps want to be treated, they are told that they don’t live in the camp and that they don’t have health insurance and hence have no right to receive medical treatment. Sometimes I wonder what the definition of a Palestinian refugee really is. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

Do you know that the ration card is the only evidence of the true number of Palestinian refugees? The United Nations does not grant you a ration card unless they have your name from one of its institutions. I only received Residency Status based on my ration card. When I contacted the Danish authorities they enquired about whether the United Nations had my name. When they found my name on the United Nations’ lists, they gave me the Residency Status. Regarding the statistics relating to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, it is illegal now to add any Palestinian who was born outside the country. When a Palestinian child is born outside Lebanon, it is registered in the country of birth, not in Lebanon. I don’t care about the Lebanese identity; I am interested in the ration card. No one in the whole world can take it away from us, for our children’s names are added to the “ration card.” (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark).
Of course I am a Palestinian, and I know that we have ration cards, but obviously we’ve lived in Europe for many years. My late father died long ago, and naturally our children have increased. But certainly none of our children were registered in UNRWA or any Palestinian records. It is very important that our children feel that they are registered as Palestinians, because the belonging should be a real one. This issue must be raised in order to find a solution to it. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

Take [participant] for an example. He has brothers living in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait, and they now have children who were never registered. This means that they do not have an UNRWA card. This is the point, as a proof of being Palestinian they should be registered. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

They took away everything that contains the words ‘Republic of Lebanon.’ All that we have left is the ration card which is not issued by the Republic of Lebanon. (Participant, Public Meeting, Sondenborg, Denmark)

This ration card helped a lot of Palestinians. A lot of Palestinians improved their financial condition and left the ration card. But at the same time, this is the only way to prove that I am a Palestinian. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

Of course I was registered with UNRWA, but only since I was 14 or 15 and I don’t know what has happened to my registration now. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

I still have an UNRWA ration card at home, although I wasn’t born here I still have it from Geneva. But I have faced a problem in acquiring identity papers which I was told could not be issued. (Participant, Public Meeting, Sondenborg, Denmark)

When the Palestinian people came to Iraq for the first time as refugees, the United Nations and the international organizations were supposed to register their names in the United Nations’ records, like the Palestinians in the neighbouring countries who were registered as refugees. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq).

As for the Right of Return, it is a sacred right guaranteed by all the international laws. There is no organization, even if it represents the Palestinian person that has the right to renounce this right because it has two dimensions. It is a collective right for the people, and an individual right for every Palestinian. This is what I wanted to affirm before I began. As for UNRWA, it does not exist in the Gulf countries, because the agency has a specific definition of a refugee. Four definitions for the Palestinian refugees have been discussed in negotiations, one of them the agency’s definition, and there is the American definition, the Israeli definition and the European definition. Perhaps the participants of the Palestinian meetings can give you a clearer idea about the needs of the Palestinian refugees in the Gulf. Whenever the issue of the Palestinian refugees in the world is discussed, the refugees in the Gulf are excluded under the pretext that they are financially well off, and since there is no UNRWA in the Gulf, then they are living well. The problem is that they always ignore this point. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

As a Palestinian from Lebanon, I feel that what I need is what was expressed by our brother the engineer; which is to be able, when I renounce the Lebanese nationality, to call the Lebanese Embassy after five minutes and get my identity card. But, as a Palestinian, when I renounced the refugee card or the passport of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, I didn’t have contacts, as if I don’t exist in the world’s records, but I think I’m registered on what they call the ration card in Vienna. But they erased all records in Lebanon, which means that if I want to issue a refugee card from Lebanon, they would check the records and tell me that I have European nationality (with four red Xs which indicates that this is European nationality). The minimum right Palestinians in this country should enjoy is to be identified or to belong to his original nationality. (Participant, Public Meeting, Copenhagen, Denmark).

The Palestinian Authority and the PLO must assume the responsibility of registering the refugees in Iraq with UNRWA. They must exercise pressure in this direction, because our community can’t get to the United Nations or its international organizations, whereas the Palestinian Authority has a representative at the United Nations. He must also discuss the issue of registering the Palestinian refugees in the United Nations’ records with the representatives of other Arab countries and with the United Nations itself. They must raise the problem that there is a forgotten Palestinian community of no more than thirty thousand people. We are not many. Are we really a thorn in their sides? We could be absorbed by any of Syria’s camps. One hundred and twenty thousand Palestinians live in Al-Yarmouk camp in Damascus. Let them consider us Sbeineh camp, our number doesn’t even compare to those in the large refugee camps. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq)
You don’t have the right to be employed or to work. You can only conduct your own business. Can I work like an Iraqi? No. They used to give us relief for a limited period and then they cut it off. That who trades can steal, and that who has a Jordanian passport can work and gain money, but the Palestinian that holds a travel document has “his mother cursed during his father’s wake.” It’s a miserable wretched condition that we’ve been living for years. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’faraniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq).

**2) The United Nations and UNRWA**

### a. Perceptions and Understandings of UNRWA

To clarify this point, when talking about UNRWA, Palestinians consider it to be the only witness to their tragedy, and that the refugee cause would dissolve in case of its absence. The refugees consider its absence to be a threat to the Right of Return and to the Palestinian refugee. (Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)

Why doesn’t the European Union consider supporting UNRWA which already exists and which already has international structures and legitimacy? There is no doubt that it is merely a symbol and not a representative entity, but it is a political symbol of the tragedy of the Palestinian refugees, and at the same time, it was established to offer services needed by the Palestinian refugees. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

I am not against improving the living standards of the people; on the contrary, I think that this is very necessary. But I just want to affirm that this should be done through UNRWA. It is an existing international entity which has existing frameworks and structures and which is internationally recognized, and it is a symbol of the Palestinian exile, but it is not of course a representative symbol. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

Since 1948, they have claimed that UNRWA was formed to care for our interests, and to preserve our rights. But this is a big lie, for it neglected our rights and lost them. International law and international legitimacy are all a big lie! (Participant, Public Meeting, Koge, Denmark)

As for the needs of the refugees, there is a very poor class of refugees. Our insistence upon UNRWA is based on the fact that it is an international witness to the plight of the Palestinian refugees. Although it bears the name of Relief and Works Agency, the services it offers are negligible. The majority of the refugees don’t benefit from it, but we insist upon it until it is time for us to return to our country, in the same way we try to preserve every grain of flour or every tablet of Aspirin. We demand an improvement in its services, especially with the rise of unemployment from which most of the people in the camp suffer. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Homs (A’ideen) camp, Syria)

UNRWA is implementing projects to help the Palestinian refugees. With the donations it receives from other countries and international organizations, it offers them employment services, education, and sometimes medicines. Why don’t the EU members increase their support to UNRWA to enable it to improve its services and offer more help? Why doesn’t UNRWA sponsor the right of the Palestinian refugees to return, that is demanded everyday by the refugees in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan and in other parts of the world? There were many projects offered between 1949 and 1952 relating to the Right of Return, why didn’t the European Union revive these projects to help the refugees return to their country? What I’m saying is that it is not the international organizations that always demand and entrench the Right of Return; it is rather the refugee himself who is suffering in the camps. (Participant, Public meeting, Berlin, Germany)

Concerning UNRWA, I read some parts from a book on the Right of Return. The legal situation of UNRWA is different from that of the agencies that were established for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. The Palestinian refugees in the camps think too highly of UNRWA’s role, believing it to be a witness to 60 years of refuge. Practically it doesn’t represent that, it is rather a political institution with no actions. It doesn’t even offer information to serve international law on the issue. The Right of Return is marginalized. So what is needed from UNRWA? The problem isn’t with UNRWA; rather it is with the United Nations and its law. If the UN can’t implement the resolutions it passed relating to the Palestinian cause, then we should form fact-finding committees to take these issues into consideration for the Palestinians. (Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)

My view is that strengthening UNRWA as it is now would be a negative thing. For example, does strengthening UNRWA involve certain figures from this institution? We don’t have organizations that work for Palestinian affairs especially in the United Nations and its various bodies including UNRWA. I don’t really trust what UNRWA has done for Palestinian refugees since it was first created, but I support maintaining it. There are suggestions of abolishing it but this is of course a political not a
practical goal. So is your goal political or practical? By political, I mean registering UNRWA as an entity which exists in order to just maintain the “refugees’ right”, and by practical, I mean that we will still get the funds from UNRWA which continue to keep the Palestinian refugees who live in the camps in a state of anaesthesia. (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)

On relations with international agencies, the most important agency that works for us is UNRWA. Although it is not fully performing its role it should keep on helping us until we return to our country because all the countries in the world took our country, not just Israel. This means they are all responsible for our people, so UNRWA is an extension of the donor countries which are those that support UNRWA. Therefore UNRWA should continue helping us. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

I want to say that UNRWA is responsible for the Palestinian people’s affairs, their health and education services and for providing their daily basic requirements, but it doesn’t properly fulfil its obligations. We have to pay for everything from our own salaries. (Participant, Public meeting, Busfi el-Barqineh, Lebanon)

As for UNRWA, [participant] was a student in one of UNRWA schools. There is a flaw within the UNRWA framework, and the role can be activated through many projects, including recruitment of the Palestinian labour force, rehabilitation of UNRWA schools and hospitals and clinics. There is also an idea to form a committee from the donor countries to examine UNRWA situation and to see where their money goes. There are suggestions to develop the wells, the educational coverage, and repairing the camps in Lebanon in general. (Participant, Students meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

In short, we don’t have a sponsor to protect our rights in the camps except for UNRWA which provides for our many needs, such as education, social and health services. But it is clearly noticeable that these services are declining, from the cultural and health services to scholarships which became restricted to fewer students. Yet students need to find jobs and educational opportunities outside Lebanon because they are rare in Lebanon and because they seek a decent life and hope to build a better future for themselves. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

The Palestinian refugees in exile, especially in the areas in which UNRWA offers services, greatly suffer from the politicized orientation of the agency’s work which aims to pressure the refugees into surrendering the Right of Return. The suffering of Lebanon’s refugees is a good example of that; they are deprived of job opportunities so that they are forced to migrate. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Homs (Aldeeen) camp, Syria)

UNRWA represents the refugees’ status. It was established to offer them services until it is time for them to return. Relating to the development committees, in theory they have a clear remit but practically problems remain. The services offered to the refugees in the camp are not adequate; the economic situation is very bad and the many factories located around the camp are full of young workers who skip school. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Beineh camp, Syria)

It is true that UNRWA is providing services, but this is an obligation on behalf of the international community. Looking back to the foundations of these organizations they were created to serve the refugees. They are financed by all the countries in the world. They didn’t offer a favour for the Palestinian people, our nation suffered a tragedy and was forced out of our country, therefore the capital they have is for helping these people. But as we noticed, America always politicizes humanitarian projects, like those which serve the refugees in providing education, health and food. Also, America uses these humanitarian services to achieve its own interests and bribe the Palestinian people into renouncing their legitimate rights.

I agree with those who demand improvements in the situation of Palestinian refugees and the services provided to them, which is something endorsed by the UN. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

Why is the whole world dealing with UNHCR while we deal with UNRWA? (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

Thirdly, and I am sorry if I took a long time, is UNRWA. I agree with what [participant] said about the nature of UNRWA, but UNRWA should remain active, because if it is weakened, this would have harmful political repercussions for Palestinians. We should insist upon UNRWA and we should if possible get the Arab countries support and increase its activities, although I am not optimistic that this will happen. Thank you. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

Our problem started with the Balfour Declaration. Consequently, Britain is to be blamed first for the catastrophe of the Palestinian people. We insist upon establishing a Palestinian state, but we also insist upon the Right of Return to our country and properties from which we were forced to leave in 1948. We don’t want to return via the Geneva accords. We are not looking for a new political address; our program is to mobilize the

Humanitarian agencies and other international institutions

Part II: Findings

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2) The United Nations and UNRWA

a. Perceptions and Understandings of UNRWA

To ensure the daily needs of the Palestinian people, especially the refugees are met, and to give them the strength to support their resistance until the Palestinian Cause is solved the way Palestinians want, we advise the donor countries to support UNRWA. We also urge the donor countries to commit to the resolutions upon which UNRWA was created, and to continue to offer the best services for the Palestinian people until their plight is resolved. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)
UNRWA is still responsible for providing services that meet our needs. It should be pressured into providing better services until Resolution 194 is implemented, which guarantees the right of the refugees to return to their homes and properties. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

b. Deterioration, Reduction, and Absence

UNRWA was formed in 1948, sorry, in 1952, with a mandate to provide jobs for unemployed Palestinians, to teach their children, address their problems, and conduct censuses. This is exactly what UNRWA has been doing for the Palestinians who live in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. As for the Palestinians in Iraq, we demand that UNRWA make us feel like we really exist and that we are not forgotten which is how we feel now. And we ask that UNRWA take care of the Palestinian community in Iraq, and provide all the services for them, as it does in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

UNRWA has no role whatsoever. I personally don’t even know where its local offices are! I haven’t seen any project or activity performed by it. Maybe it has activities in the research field, but it doesn’t have an effective and tangible role. It is important for such an agency to reach out to people and identify their concerns and locations. Does it have statistics for the number of Palestinians and their gathering places? I don’t think I have seen any such research produced by them. All the research they do is sent abroad. How can it work with people when it doesn’t even know their locations, opinions or numbers? For example, me and some friends of mine work in prominent fields and could be easily contacted.

The services UNRWA provides include medical treatment and education.

In terms of medical treatment, fewer referrals are being made. Patients’ needs are not being fulfilled. Medicines are scarce and the same things are prescribed for illnesses that require different treatment. There are also no medical specialists.

As for the education, there are not enough schools. Classes are overcrowded with about 50 or 60 students in the same class and teachers have little experience, especially of the new curriculum.

Teachers are often not able, or not willing, to fully explain lessons to their students, which forces students to take private lessons. But these students are poor and can’t afford them. Services are declining but the expenses we are incurring as a result are not being covered.

Schools also allow students to move automatically to the next grade even if they fail the exam. A first grade student, for example, can be automatically moved to the next level, until he reaches the fourth grade without knowing anything and then may be expelled from the school for failing.

If you want to talk about the services provided in a host country, take the case of Jordan which spends about 400 million dollars on the camps. This sum exceeds the money offered by UNRWA. The donor countries do not offer enough money.
to support UNRWA; their grants and donations have greatly been reduced, affecting the services provided by UNRWA. We have had the UNRWA card for decades, yet this card is worthless now. UNRWA health services are very limited. The most important services involve daily interaction with citizens. These are mainly the educational, health, and environmental services linked to UNRWA. Their upkeep is important for the preservation of the camp’s structure and the Cause. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We address UNRWA with these demands after it registers us in its official records. Basically, we should be first registered with UNRWA. We need so many things as a result of UNRWA’s fifty year absence. UNRWA should offset this deficit by creating job opportunities and building official institutions. The intellectuals and the educated should be offered jobs. There should be effective institutions for UNRWA like those established in the Arab World. The Palestinian communities in Syria, Lebanon and other countries has not suffered as in the same way as the Palestinian community in Iraq. Because, as a community, we haven’t been registered but ignored. The regime did with us as it pleased and it oppressed us whenever it wished, while telling the world that it gave the Palestinians money and provided them with protection. When UNRWA tried to register us, the Iraqi regime refused. Two years before the fall of the regime, an organisation asked to conduct a survey of the Palestinians in Iraq. We started to fill in the forms with the names of community members, their addresses, ages, cities of origin, qualifications and employment. But three days later, we were surprised to receive a phone call at the Fateh centre threatening to arrest those who were working on this project if they didn’t stop. We continued because they didn’t have the right to arrest us on the charge of conducting a survey of Palestinian people for UNRWA. Another phone call came to an embassy official threatening the same thing and the embassy was forced to withdraw the agents who were conducting the survey. The authorities even demanded that all the applications that were filled would be brought to the Liberation Movements Centre. Frankly we ignored this and gave the survey to the embassy.

The situation is now different; the previous oppressive regime was replaced by a new regime. We don’t want to be ignored. We must contact UNRWA and start registering our people so we can provide a decent life for widows and get them out of houses that aren’t fit for animals.

Our suffering is great when it comes to housing, jobs, identity and residency. Why can’t I say that I am a Palestinian? This means that I am deprived of my basic civil rights. Therefore we demand UNRWA to act as an international institution to save us from this miserable situation. UNICEF and the United Nations exist in Baghdad, and they are international institutions which have offered the Iraqis more than UNRWA has offered us. They built hospitals and schools for them and fixed their sewer system, and it is the only institution that works with devotion. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

We wish that UNRWA would act and take care of our case so as to find a solution to it. It is said that they have changed their representative here, but we haven’t seen anything until now. What we can clearly see is that conditions are deteriorating every day. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tabaj), Baghdad, Iraq).

Ok let me tell you something. When the Egyptian law regarding the Egyptian mother was passed, giving the nationalities by force of law, it was supposed that an agency such as UNRWA would work to implement this. A lot of people applied and their applications were refused. Nevertheless, it didn’t take any steps to help them. The institutions of the civil society, which are concerned with the legal aspects of this law, like the Egyptian child centre, worked on this issue. But UNRWA did not. Help with applications could have brought relief to some Palestinians: to become Egyptian citizens would have meant better treatment. It doesn’t have any involvement in this area. Is their role limited to just bringing us blankets? Ok, we were fed and covered ourselves with these blankets but aren’t there other problems?. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

I have a refugee ration card but I don’t receive anything from UNRWA, so I wonder who does? One wonders if UNRWA items are only distributed to certain people or are sold elsewhere instead of being handed out to the community. Do people request assistance? Go to one of the centres and you’ll see that they do. Assistance is sent to the Palestinians as a whole, but it is received by certain individuals. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

UNRWA is barren and useless. In order to revive it, it needs help from donor countries. (Participant, Workers’ meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

We have local institutions such as UNRWA. Although the services UNRWA provides now are much fewer than before, they continue to be reduced. We lack social, medical, and health services the most. Our kids lack a lot of things. UNRWA is not doing what it is supposed to do.

We demand that UNRWA fulfil its role and be provided with all the necessary supplies it requires.
to do this so as to secure the health services. Many people here need medicine but when they go to UNRWA they don’t receive anything because they claim that they are not allowed to provide such medicines. But most of the people can’t afford to buy them.

As for the schools and education, the system has confused students. In the past there was one shift school attendance, but now they schools are operated on a double-shift system, one for the girls and the other for the boys. There is a lack of educational staff and many teachers are not adequately qualified to teach the subjects they have to teach. The Arabic language teacher also teaches math and the English language teacher teaches also teaches Arabic. There is no specialization; that’s what we lack. We demand that they provide educational and specialized staff so that students can depend on some sort of support and a reference point so that they can complete their education and then go on to work. There are many schools here but because they don’t have one in Tilbay a lot of students from Tilbay come here to attend high school. They travel far to learn for just two hours. As for social care, there isn’t a social affairs office. And UNRWA services are being reduced. If you ask UNRWA for anything, the people there tell you that they don’t have it and that you need to find some other organisations to help you, although it is internationally agreed that UNRWA should help the Palestinian people with these kinds of things. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

As for UNRWA, I think it would be much better if it would close its offices and leave, because it has no presence whatsoever and it doesn’t do anything. The controversial problems are handled by the institutions of the Egyptian civil society in a more serious and effective way. UNRWA has no presence at all, it just has an open office in Egypt. The security services control everything. We have widows here with children, and I don’t know how they manage. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

There has been a noticeable reduction in the services UNRWA provides. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

UNRWA exists only in name. It doesn’t run projects the employ the Palestinian refugees. It has also reduced its medical services and it doesn’t offer financial support to refugees. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We continue to give the donor countries information about the conditions which we live in and UNRWA has been the institution responsible for the Palestinian people since 1948. And yet services are being cut. When someone reaches the age of 18, they cut his rations even though he may have 6 or 7 brothers to raise. On what basis do they cut our rations? They are our right. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

We don’t have educational centres for young people that, for instance, offer computer courses. UNRWA services are very weak and the federations are absent. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

UNRWA services have been cut. Also the hospital which our health services have been contracted to is very far from the camp, a patient could die before reaching the hospital. These hospitals are not equipped with up to date technology either. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

What we are offered is not substantial enough to address the social problems we face. Health conditions are very bad and the “loans” assigned to improve the refugees’ situation are negligible. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

Some UNRWA services are being reduced, such as rations and food supplies, and also education and health services. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashidieh camp, Lebanon)

We lack general statistics. We don’t even know how many there really are of us. We have suffered from UNRWA’s absence. We have never received any assistance. And we were deprived of every civil right enjoyed by Iraqis. Why are we so neglected? (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

UNRWA is supposed to be an entity or an organization responsible for Palestinian refugees all over the world in whatever country they might be. It is supposed to know their conditions and offer them services. But frankly it has no presence here in Egypt, and it offers no services to any Palestinian refugee in Egypt. I know that there is an office for the Agency here in Egypt in which only one employee works. It doesn’t deal with the public. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

UNRWA is meant to be responsible for us but it hasn’t implemented any of the resolutions passed since 1949, unlike what it has done in Iraq, where resolutions were implemented. The same happened in relation to our late brother Hariri. In contrast, the resolutions concerning Palestinians were shelved, and now the United Nations has decided to reduce rations for everyone who has a ration card, although they are only distributed every three months and are nothing more than crumbs. As for healthcare, there are about 300 or 400 patients who come to see the doctor; and
UNRWA’s health services are very poor. There is a shortage of medicine, and even hygiene. Finding jobs for the refugees is just a slogan it uses. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

UNRWA’s activities are politicised. The social development centre does not fulfil the needs of the local community, researchers don’t find out what day to day life is like. There is no help in finding jobs and building careers. People are not given loans to improve their income. The social development centre has been turned into an investment centre which is a very grave matter. It is necessary to have vocational training. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

We now need to depend on a certain foundation which should be firm and strong. We must also conduct research to demonstrate all our needs and problems. And this study must be presented to UNRWA and the United Nations to show that there are oppressed people who suffer, and tell them that they must offer them a helping hand. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Huniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

We have popular committees, so why don’t these committees take the first step in dealing with unemployment by creating projects in the camps that are entirely unsuitable for humans to live in. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashidieh camp, Lebanon)

UNRWA has done a lot of things for the Palestinian people, such as providing almost free education. We are talking here, in the Palestinian camps, about the positive impact of UNRWA, there are negatives, but we should also look at the positives.

I have already mentioned education. We all know that it provides educational and health services. But it also provides employment; many young men and women are UNRWA employees. Another good thing is that UNRWA has created a lot of job opportunities for the Palestinian people. There are also the social services provided like the rations given to the Palestinian people. However, the medical services of UNRWA have been lately reduced. At the clinic they give you a prescription to go and buy the medicine, but we don’t have money, so they don’t give us the medicine. Rations are being cut too, we now receive half the things we used to in the past. As for education, there is a shortage of stationery and the number of students in one class is over forty students. If we want the children to succeed and pass their exams, there shouldn’t be more than 30 or 35 students in one class. We also have teachers who are not adequately qualified. There are also houses in the camps which which can employ young Palestinians. We also face problems in the provision of health services. There are about 50 thousand Palestinians in Lebanon who don’t have access to any hospitals that meet their needs. Why don’t they build a hospital for Palestinians which is equipped with modern technology and a structure which enables Palestinians to receive medical care in the Palestinian community, instead of going to UNRWA which chooses the hospital and the limitations on the treatment they can receive, covering them for only 4 or 5 days. (Participant, Students meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

Jaramana Camp suffers from a lot of problems. No adequate services are supplied to the camp. All the relevant institutions in the camp are negligent. There is a whole neighbourhood that doesn’t have water. This problem is being addressed by the general body of the Arab Palestinian refugees which supervises this issue. Jaramana residents, 57 years after the Nakba, still suffer from instability. The houses of more than half of the camps’ residents have been destroyed due to the “Southern Highway” plan without the provision of alternative housing. This forced local residents to rent houses, thereby to the economic and social strain they are under. The institutions we are in contact with offered no help; we didn’t get a response from the general body, UNRWA or anyone else. Educational achievement is declining. Students quit school very early for economic reasons and poverty. UNRWA no longer cares about its educational role and we lack activity centres in the camp. The situation for workers is also difficult; working hours are very long, and there is no social security. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)
As the sister said, a clinic should be opened here. We also suffer from UNRWA, and the Red Crescent is treating us in the same way. For example, my husband was injured in the 1986 war of the camps while he was fighting to defend the camp and they wouldn’t accept to make him enter hospital unless he was referred. And to be honest with you, some would not be able to make it without the Palestinian elites which give strength. We don’t care about UNRWA, but we have negative points too. And the Red Crescent is the same. Go and search some houses in the camp and you won’t find even a piece of bread to feed their children with, can such families pay 100,000 Lebanese Lira for a doctor visit? They were treating the martyrs’ families in the same way and they reduced the services offered to them, you can find this reduction everywhere. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

Many Palestinian families suffered great hardship because of the absence of UNRWA. Some Palestinians were dragged into working with the American and Iraqi soldiers although they shouldn’t have needed to. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’faraniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq).

UNRWA is definitely negligent. It should fulfill its role because it was created to offer services and jobs for the refugees. Hence, UNRWA should be approached and pressed into fulfilling its role. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

c. Accessibility, Transparency, Inclusivity, and Accountability

If we are talking about favouritism and preferential treatment in Jordan, we should take a look at UNRWA! An employee’s son has the right to be treated immediately, while others who don’t have relatives working in UNRWA have to wait. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

There is no democracy. The foreign NGOs sometimes provide aid and it gets distributed to someone who is connected to the PLO or to someone who is connected to this or that faction. It becomes a matter of connections. This is favouritism, and it fosters tension. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Buji el-Sherani camp, Lebanon)

As for general affairs in the camp, if you know someone important you will get what you want. For example, if I am rich and know important people I can register for assistance, but there are people who are really in need and don’t get anything because they don’t know anyone important. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

I feel that such meetings are only ink on paper. I wish that such results will be translated into actions because ink can be erased by the smallest drop of water. I also appeal to the project director that this meeting would be the beginning of a good relationship with us. The European Union had previously given us promises of a good start which materialised into the opposite of a good start! What good did they bring us when they came to perform their projects and gave them to institutions supported by the Jordanian government? These institutions received grants from the European Union out of which they derived astronomical profits, while other institutions were not given anything at all. (Participant, Pilot meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We want to speak about the aid which the donor countries give, and the projects which are being created. We wish that there would be more supervision because some officials are corrupt. This water pipe which the donor countries paid for will be registered as having been received by Palestinians and we will have to pay a big price for it in the future. As the brother said, they must think that it’s a long term loan. I think that all the donor countries are registering their payments as debts that they would want to claim back from the future Palestinian state. The United Nations is doing the same with Iraq, they deduct from Iraq oil and they will appropriate it for hundreds of years. They are giving the projects to mafias, do you follow me? (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

There are provisions and aid that come from abroad which would feed us for a whole year and which are dedicated for the Palestinian refugees but where do they go? No one knows. Where are they sold? And why are they being sold when they are meant to help Palestinians? (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

UNRWA rations are given to the well connected. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

The problem is not the institution; it is the staff who run it. Staff members are exercising discrimination in these institutions. We have institutions which coordinate with UNRWA to help a certain person, yet the people in UNRWA would ask you why you accepted the help of so-and-so. The problem lies in the staff of UNRWA, and this is among the things that contribute to the reduction of UNRWA services which we are talking about. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

UNRWA is not fulfilling its duties although the services it provides are very important. We should preserve it because it is not just an office; it was formed according to an international resolution. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)
I met one woman who told me that her son works with UNRWA, and she said that when she goes to the health centre, she is immediately admitted for treatment without having to wait for even one minute. There are others who go to these centres at four o’clock in the morning to wait for dental treatment, and this woman arrives and is given medicine straight away! The problem is that we, Palestinians, are mean to each other! And don’t help each other. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

I want to make another point. If a foreigner comes to the camp, they make him photograph the most miserable house and the most miserable family then suddenly the aid arrives. But those who were photographed don’t get anything; rather, a certain organization comes and takes these donations. I have witnessed this many times. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Burj el-Shemali camp, Lebanon)

Corruption is pervasive at the level of UNRWA’s administrative services. Social support is not being distributed to those who deserve it. Education in the camp is getting worse. The unemployment rate is rising and there are no educational centres. The women’s centre is very expensive. The PLO is absent and there are no communication channels to connect us to it. I demand the establishment of administrative services. Social support is not being provided unless you know some important people. The disabled also have trouble getting their prescribed medicines, laboratory tests and x-rays, UNRWA only offers a few medicines. Disabled children who have nerve conditions have suffered especially from a reduction in UNRWA services, for the specialist doctors often asks for x-rays and laboratory tests disabled person has to pay for. The disabled also lack job opportunities. Therefore we want to speak up and appeal to your hearts to support the disabled so that each one of us can live a decent life in our society, and that one day our dream of returning to Palestine can at last come true. (Participant, Public Meeting for Disabled Persons, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

We have many institutions that just work randomly, and look nothing like health, educational, and environmental organizations. Europe has been providing assistance for ten years to these institutions, so where do they spend this money? We haven’t noticed any developments in Palestinian society. For example, in the camp, there are 20 organisations, but there aren’t any developed educational, health, and environmental institutions. The work that they do seems to be more of a means of subsistence for a certain group of people. There is no development whatsoever in society. Take Burj El-Barajneh camp, where there are 20 organisations but where there is no development. This money and assistance is being inappropriately spent, there is no research about these organisations for example. This aid should be channelled under one banner in the future which includes the PLO or a responsible organization; a common front should be formed in the camps. To begin a health or education project, for example, in Burj El-Barajneh camp, in order to examine the development it achieved after one or two years, and to make sure that the money was appropriately spent. The way these millions are spent should be organized by the European group in these local or national institutions. (Participant, Public meeting, Burj el-Barajneh, Lebanon)

Some assistance is available for the establishment of developmental projects, but its scope is not comprehensive and does not cover all the camps. Some people benefit from this assistance, which means that UNRWA indulges in nepotism,
benefiting those who have connections in the agency and in the government’s refugee committee. The different committees in the camp should share their experiences. The Agency’s services are very bad, especially with regards to medical treatment; patient referrals to health clinics fail to satisfy patients’ needs. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Herm (Aideen) camp, Syria)

UNRWA should provide adequate housing inside the camps, in addition to a decent water system. It could also build new camps in line with all the social, legal and international specifications. An important issue is that UNRWA does not offer full provision of medicines or medical expenses. There are a lot of people who are not rich, such as my father or perhaps yours, who may die in their beds because they can’t find anyone to pay for their surgery. If you went to UNRWA and told the officials there that your father or mother needed open heart surgery, they would tell you that it costs seven thousand dollars and that they would pay 200 or 2000 dollars. But how are you supposed to get the rest of the money? Shall I sell my son to receive medical care? UNRWA was founded in order to help the Palestinians and yet it is reducing its services. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)

I have a right to assistance as a patient and an old woman who can’t get to the Nuzha neighbourhood from Al-Hashimi neighbourhood, who doesn’t have money to pay for a taxi. Many women say that it is too far and can’t get there, but when I finally get there, the centre is closed. Why do they close at 12:00pm? If I need a surgical operation of some sort, I won’t find available hospitals. If I want to dental treatment, there aren’t any appropriate centres. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

d. Channels of Communication

Our communication with international institutions and any humanitarian organisations that provide services to Palestinian refugees is almost cut off in this country. There is no communication between us and the United Nations except when one has a personal problem which case one would act personally and contact them as an individual, not as a group or community. In Norway, we lack the presence of any official entity through which we can contact any international institution or organisation. (Participant, Public meeting for Disabled Persons, Beirut, Lebanon)

Since the Lebanese have divergent views about Palestinians rights, the relationship with UNRWA needs to be established through the popular committees in the camps. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, El-Buss camp, Lebanon)

UNRWA should increase its support and aid, and our relationship with it should be through the popular committees and organizations. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

There should be a relationship between UNRWA and the popular committees in the camps, and these committees should communicate with UNRWA in addition to the PLO. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, El-Buss camp, Lebanon)

Communication with UNRWA should be conducted through the popular committees and the PLO. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, El-Buss camp, Lebanon)

Communication with international organizations should be conducted through the elected popular committee which need to be reconstructed of course. This committee’s task would be to contact international organizations and those which provide services that relate to the camp and the affairs of refugees. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

The PLO is regarded as the political organization responsible for the refugees and our relationship with it is established through the unions and popular committees, while our relationship with UNRWA is established through popular committees. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, El-Buss camp, Lebanon)
We want our relationship with UNRWA to be established through popular committees. But these should be committees that truly represent the refugees and that are not based on the factions; they should be elected from all sectors of the local society. UNRWA is ultimately responsible for the refugees’ rights and the daily lives of the refugees. We should demand that it increases its support and services in the health, education and infrastructure. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

I am responsible for 11 people, and when I ask UNRWA to help me, I don’t receive anything. Our work conditions are very difficult and living is costly. When it comes to healthcare, medication is not provided. There is no communication link with the agency. They don’t employ anyone due to poor financial conditions and job opportunities are only given by nepotism. The PLO is absent and marginalized and I think that it should regain its role. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jarimana camp, Syria)

There are private organisations that may be limited to a certain category of people. But the institutions in which we work such as Al-Rajya (CARE) and other institutions are fully performing their role of communicating and acting in the best possible way they can. We don’t deny that there is a great lack of assistance but we hope to enhance their role through enhancing communication with foreign organisations. We also hope to form a new popular committee elected by the local community which will fulfil its role. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

I wish to talk about the project goals. You mentioned the refugees’ problem and their ability to express themselves. But where is the liberty that enables us to express ourselves? We are working in UNRWA Women Centres. Two years ago we signed an agreement not to discuss politics or religion, lest UNRWA is accused of being a “terrorist” organization that supports terrorism in the camps. So they banned us from talking politics and religion, while you came to talk about enabling me to claim my rights! (Participant, Pilot meeting, Amman, Jordan)

There should be parents’ committees in schools to find solutions to the problems their children face. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

I know for example that some of the refugee claims made in Canada have sought help from organizations like Amnesty international for letters of support for their cases. One of the demands would be that Amnesty would actually fulfil its mandate and give more honest reports on what’s happening in Palestine and what would happen to Palestinians if they were deported to places like the United States or Palestine. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

There should always be a Palestinian political body to monitor UNRWA and its response to demands, in particular the provision of healthcare because its services have been greatly reduced, especially those dedicated for the elderly. I don’t want to repeat what was said about infrastructure because that issue was discussed thoroughly. The situation is disastrous, especially in the winter. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

Our UNRWA camp manager isn’t worthy of his title. In addition, the popular committees are not conveying our demands, for we need a lot of things. The formal structure should be a camp manager not an UNRWA manager and the manager of Nahr el-Bared camp should discuss the needs of Nahr el-Bared camp. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

We should have another reference point in addition to the embassy, the popular committee which should put pressure on UNRWA to offer more services rather than the reductions that are taking place. There are certain things being reduced by UNRWA but at the same time people don’t say anything in protest. The role of UNRWA should be further developed in the areas of education, medicine, and infrastructure. UNRWA is reducing many of these services. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

It is important that the contact with the media be made on the internal and external levels, whether at the PLO level, or through the communities who live outside Lebanon. This media contact is not present at the level of international organizations and Europe. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

We communicate by distributing leaflets to officials and to those who are known to care and sympathise, like the Red Cross. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

We really should demand from these people that they speak up and tell the truth. Take the Red Cross for example. They have a mandate and obligation to serve political prisoners everywhere but they don’t really lobby the governments that imprison them, or the countries they are in. I think, one of the points that we need to make clearer and louder every time is that these organizations have an obligation to expose the truth to the Canadian government and the United Nations because most of these organizations work under the United...
I want to say in all honesty: if you visit a house which is very poor, the only thing its residents have to think of food since he can’t find it, or of medical treatment if he can’t have it. There may be a poor person who thinks about his country, but logic indicates that he will be a poor person who thinks about his country, if you conduct any survey you will find that that the person who can’t find them is very poor. The most important role for the students and the camp’s members is to convey their voice in various ways through such things as demonstrations and sit-ins. So has our voice been heard by the concerned institutions? Apparently not, for we can’t see any results. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

It is difficult to cover the expenses of treating those with chronic diseases, there is little money and there are so many people. We can see how many people suffer from such diseases. Therefore, we need institutions. There are some institutions, but they are for certain people. Also we need committees to follow the work of these institutions, and to record their achievements. Also, dialogues and meetings should always be held between all the labour and national organisations. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

The local civil organizations have declined. A coordinating committee should be formed to avoid previous mistakes. In the past, the coordinating committee was exclusively for the institutions that are well informed. Yet the coordinating committee should not just include well informed organisations like Ghassan Kanafani Foundation and Sumud, no, it should include everyone so that it could be common for all. As for UNRWA, the comments about it are well-known, but what we want to add is that we don’t feel that there is structure of coordination between UNRWA, the popular committee and the people in the camp. So you don’t really know what is happening there is something missing here. There should be an UNRWA representative in the popular committee. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

It’s not really about us being connected to UNRWA but also having some sort of influence over what sort of funding the refugee camps are getting what’s happening inside and what sort of support are they getting, we should probably discuss that as well. It’s not really Amnesty, its UNRWA that we should focus on, in my opinion. Thanks. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

Most importantly, the relationship between organizations should be based on coordination, not on controlling the each other and depriving them of their role. Organizations should agree on the social and day to day issues even if they disagree on the political issues, because the social issues concern all the refugees not only certain people from this or that organization. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

Of course I want to return to my country and to my village. And you know that no one likes to live as a stranger away from his own country. In general, we want to find a solution to our problems. The Right of Return Committee should be able to contact higher international organizations, so that we can solve the problem of returning to our country and lands. It should fight to affirm our Right of Return at the United Nations. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

We also want to choose a representative from the popular committee to contact UNRWA to follow up what happens in the camp, which lacks a lot of things. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

First I wish to correct some of the mentioned information. There are three committees in UNRWA but they are not powerful, they are just advisory committees with no internal system. They are elected committees, but UNRWA deals with them as advisory committees. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

There must be communication between the educational body and parents through periodic meetings. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

3) Specific Issues and Needs

During the time of the monarchy in Iraq, they pledged to meet the needs of the Palestinians that came from Palestine, to provide them with housing, health services and jobs, etc. But they didn’t fulfill their promises. We therefore demand that international organizations register and count the Palestinian people here in order to protect their rights and at least defend their “Right of Return” as refugees. We should at least be treated in the same way that the Palestinian refugees in neighbouring countries—like Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon—who have the right to enter schools and receive health services or ensuring some relief from medical expenses. We are deprived of all these services. Even the aid that comes from abroad, no one knows where it really goes. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq).

The camp doesn’t have a proper sewer system and there are no playgrounds or any other entertainment places. The elderly are marginalized and no one thinks of opening a centre to deal with their problems. Food and sweets sold in schools lack hygienic conditions and supervision. Teachers don’t advise their students about buying clean sweets. We need to also establish medical
We have demanded new land to extend the camp, but no one listens. Many of the camp’s residents suffer from a very difficult economic situation and the rate of unemployment is high. The percentage of those who live below poverty line is more than 50% and there are no new lines of credits for the cases of extreme poverty, and many cases were cancelled. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Homs (A’deen) camp, Syria)

The urgent needs which I agreed upon with the girls are numerous and include a big hospital, a dialysis centre, a high school in Naher el-Bared camp where more than 11 buses go to the Beddawi High School. We need parks for children because when they are kept in houses they get into trouble with their mothers. We must provide electricity, water and a sewer system. The number of the students in classes that contain 50 or 60 students should be reduced, we have a right to UNRWA services yet they are being withdrawn and you feel that there is favouritism at UNRWA, for example, some people are financially comfortable but receive rations, while others don’t. This is also a problem we suffer from in the camps. The need to repair the streets in the camp is another pressing issue. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Naher el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

Living conditions in the camps are very difficult. These conditions are due to social, political, or economic reasons. Let’s talk about these conditions and define these problems in detail. Some of you mentioned educational problems, others talked about employment problems, and the other issues like favouritism and corruption. Let’s consider these matters further. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We want to point out that we are talking about our problems as refugees, but what about the problems we face as human beings? There are Palestinians who suffer from particularly harsh conditions such as women, old people and the disabled. Those people have more problems and need support. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

We should work on improving all aspects of life in the camps, whether in the education, health, or social conditions. And everything should be achieved through cooperation with UNRWA and the PLO. UNRWA is responsible for the education and health services. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, El-Buss camp, Lebanon)

In my view, the first need that Palestinian refugees have is for decent housing. Most live in zinko [aluminium] roofed houses and suffer from the insects. They also need to improve their economic conditions. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Sbeineh camp, Syria)

We demand that UNRWA come to Iraq, we want it to assume responsibility for us as it does in neighbouring countries, providing such services as building schools, rebuilding destroys houses, erecting hospitals or at least a health clinic in every neighbourhood. These health clinics can, with the help that they get from international charities, serve the refugees. This implies that Palestinian refugees should look first to UNRWA and build relations with it, and then the contact should be made between UNRWA and the Iraqi State. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq)
3) Specific Issues and Needs

a. Education and Health

The other issue is UNRWA and the provision of education. Classes are overcrowded and educational tools are scarce. There is also the UNRWA clinic, in which you can’t find a single Revanin tablet from the fifth of every month. The services and social care offered to the elderly, handicapped, children and women are not at all sufficient either. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

The PLO should offer free medical treatment and build schools. This would help compensate for UNRWA’s reduction of services. It must build clinics because it is responsible for the Palestinian people at the level of services. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

Most important are the needs of the refugees and their health and education situation. There should be a hospital in the camp, and the health services offered by UNRWA should be improved. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

UNRWA is responsible for the Palestinian refugees’ affairs, yet it doesn’t have contracts with well-equipped hospitals which have adequate medical equipment and skilled doctors. Environmental standards are also poor; there are garbage containers available in the streets and the containers that are there are sometimes full of poisonous rubbish. The education system in UNRWA lacks an adequate curricular plan before the school year begins, and this results in a lot of pressure in terms of teaching the curriculum over the course of the year. Also, there is no educational authority to refer to when problems arise. Many teachers lack the necessary qualifications, there is no equipment in the laboratories and the libraries, nor are there useful computer training programmes. Not having the computer skills and unawareness of its functions in the economic society and of the useful programs. The houses in the camps can’t offer a healthy and decent life and there are no bodies concerned with housing issues. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

We also need social care institutions. We have two organisations that might introduce or provide such institutions. First, basically, there must be an entity for the social cases in UNRWA institutions. They are saying now “hardship case” which means that they increase and decrease according to the budget and offerings of UNRWA. The popular committees should be the social sponsor in the camps; we are talking now and there are more details. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

We demand free hospitals with skilled doctors and nurses. Education should also be free and elementary school, obligatory. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashidieh camp, Lebanon)

I. Education

There is only one kindergarten for children. This is not adequate and its annual fees are very high. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

I want to say that since I began teaching for UNRWA, I have noticed that there is discrimination between Palestinians themselves. If someone asks, for example, ‘where do you come from?’ and the answer is Al-Baq’a or Al-Wihdat, the response would be that people from those areas are “disgusting.” But where are the refugees concentrated? They are of course concentrated in the camps; the numbers of the refugees who live in Jabal Al-Hussein or in Sweifieh are small compared to the camps. Why do people have such a negative impression of our camps? And if we examine the conditions there, the UNRWA schools for example, we will find that each class has 50 or 60 students. We will also find that there are no counsellors in these schools. That’s why the social problems prevail in the camps. All these problems originate from schools; the child grows and the problems grow and develop with him and that is the reason why people have a wrong idea about the camps. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

There has been a reduction in UNRWA services. Students now can only borrow half the books they used to be able to and they are usually torn and unusable. They have to buy the rest of them but with so little employment available, many parents can’t afford them. We need to form committees to address the social problems Palestinian families face. Here, Palestinian families have endured a plethora of social and psychological problems as a result of the war and their economic situation. So I think that we should form a committee consisting of Palestinian psychologists to handle these problems. Educational activities inside the camp need to be increased because the quality of education at UNRWA schools is very low. We should establish centres where those who have pursued their university studies can teach the kids, because we are all brothers as Palestinians. (Participant, Students meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)
As a school principal, I’d like to mention that we have difficulty in providing school books for students. The age of school books in private schools is one year; two years in public schools, but in the UNRWA schools they are three years old! This is a big problem for our schools, when we distribute them at the beginning of the year 20-30 pages are usually missing but we have to distribute them. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

There are too many students at UNRWA schools and this matter is not addressed by the relevant authorities. New schools to absorb the rise in the number of students are not being built. The locations of schools are bad and so are their general safety conditions. They are located in busy streets and this endangers the number of students are not being built. The Palestinian artistic talent is often buried in such fields as painting, poetry, folklore, dancing and so on and not adopted by specialist cultural organisations. Favouritism and bribery are also present as well as irregularities in the hiring process in the camp. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

UNRWA services are being reduced. Students who study in its schools perform poorly and medical treatment is very limited. Additionally, UNRWA doesn’t help talented students finish their education. I suggest that they build new schools, cancel the two shifts system, raise the level of teacher qualifications, improve the relationship between students and teachers, and cover such expenses as university tuition fees. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

The quality of education provided by UNRWA is lower than that of state schools. Computers were introduced in state schools for science and math teachers, including the schools that don’t have electricity. But what about UNRWA schools? Isn’t there a relief agency, aren’t there donor countries, and support? Why do they ignore the fact that computers and projectors exist? Money is given but where does it all go? When a school building is 70 years old, how can I guarantee that the building will not collapse on the students? The school building has always been rented and the roof leaks on the students. How can students graduate under these conditions! What will they learn? They will certainly become bitter; the camp’s children will graduate as bitter people who resent their miserable conditions. This is despite the fact that they have energy and skills but don’t live under good educational, social, and economic conditions. I wasn’t raised in a camp but what about the child in the camp who quits school in the fourth grade to help his father at work? This child will never be successful unless he finds someone to support him. The problem is that although as refugees we talk to each other, who will convey our voice to the concerned organisations? (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

I want to talk about the educational level issue that she [participant] referred to. Educational achievement in UNRWA schools is very low. There should be a follow-up committee to identify the problems and devise solutions to raise the educational level because we often see students skipping schools- both boys and girls- and they stay home and so the problem gets worse. That’s why we need a committee to address this problem and to devise solutions and improve the educational performance. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashidieh camp, Lebanon)

UNRWA services are diminishing. Refugees can’t find medicines in its clinics. The PLO is absent and we want to establish connections between refugees. Our conditions are very bad. Students can’t even find a place to study. Living conditions force students to quit schools in order to work. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)
Some children are obliged to end their education after finishing preparatory school so as to feed their families. But we are now in an age of speed, development and information. What is the fault of the child who has left school in order to feed their family? Concerned organisations should at least establish a training centre or something like that to teach them a skill that they could use in this modern age we live in. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

Children who skip school should be trained and offered help in solving their problems. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

UNRWA schools should be extended and improved to absorb the large number of students. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

My brothers studied at UNRWA schools, they were successful students, and they did very well in the Tawjihi high school leaving exams. But UNRWA schools that exist now are different from those that existed in the past in terms of the quality of the education they provide. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

There is a general demand for the ending of the two shifts system at schools because it is difficult to work in the evening and it is hot in summer, since there is less learning time, the students benefit less too. There are also too many students in each class, so the teacher can’t give every student the attention or the time they need, the class only lasts for twenty minutes. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

We demand from UNRWA that it only have one school shift per day, and that it reduce the size of classes which are currently too overcrowded. Needs include assigning teachers to their specialised subjects and providing them with training and workshops; stationary should also be supplied to students and the problem of truancy should be tackled. UNRWA should also provide support for post-secondary and university-level education. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

Some students graduated from high school and obtained their baccalaureate, but with low grades and can’t afford to study in private universities. We need a cultural centre and a reading hall in the camp so that students can study. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Steineh camp, Syria)

As UNRWA teachers, we are forced to sign a document which prohibits us from discussing politics, especially the Palestinian refugee issue, with students, directly or indirectly. Whoever refuses to sign is fired. It is illegal to hang anything in schools that has a reference to the Intifada, or the [Palestinian] revolution, or expressing your right as a refugee. There were some objections, but everyone wants to keep their job. Has UNRWA assumed the role of erasing Palestinian identity? (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

Some suggest giving them money to enable them to continue their studies and no one cares about them. This is a very serious problem because these students have the ability to advance our societies. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

UNRWA should fully assume the task of educating young people. There should be Preparatory Workshops to enable individuals to develop their technical and scientific skills as well as their ability to engage with the community. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

They are trying to make the people illiterate. Even if we consider UNRWA policy, we find that truancy is a problem, with very young men aged between 15 and 18 years and their childhoods still ahead of them, quitting schools and in need of vocational institutes to learn in. Where will they work? We demand the provision of vocational institutes for these young men and help them find work. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

Those who graduate from high school can’t afford to continue their studies and no one cares about them. This is a very serious problem because these students have the ability to advance our societies. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

The Palestinian need not work in governmental departments or serve in the army or the ministry of internal affairs; but they should be allowed to work in the private sector, whether in engineering or communications or electricity. There are a lot of fields...
where the Palestinian student or worker should be allowed to work in. (Participant, Students meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

They prohibited political activity in schools. How are the students supposed to connect to their cause? (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Sheenah camp, Syria)

II. Health

UNRWA used to have special allocated beds in hospitals, but no longer has them. Public health services are very bad, especially in Al-Bashir Hospital which serves hundreds of thousands of citizens. There has been no financial relief for a long time for impoverished families who are in low paid jobs or don’t work at all. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We have a Red Crescent association but it doesn’t actually do anything. In Elias municipality in Baalbek there is a well-equipped hospital with good services, while the Red Crescent lacks many things and is understaffed. Our health clinic is very primitive; it doesn’t have the capacity and equipment which the local community needs. We demand aid from humanitarian organisations to develop the role of the Red Crescent hospital so that it can become an institution that people can turn to. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

Hospitals and UNRWA contracts with them need improvement. For example, to get to Rahhal Hospital [Mobile Hospital] which is appropriately named, takes an hour and a half. So if someone suffers from low blood pressure, he might arrive there on the point of dying. UNRWA cancelled its contract with the Islamic hospital because it cost tens of thousands of liras. We didn’t want it to contract with the Red Crescent but it did and many of our neighbours died on the road while trying to get there. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

You have mentioned that 18% of the refugees live in camps. What about the rest? Where are the UNRWA health centres for them? There aren’t any UNRWA hospitals or health centres for them. Drugs are not available, there no drugs for diabetes or high blood pressure and there is a shortage of doctors. But all Palestinian refugees suffer from blood pressure and diabetes. Also, vaccines are not available. You go at 10 in the morning and they tell you that the medicines have run out. The cheapest medicines now, especially antibiotics, cost at least ten dinars. How can poor refugees pay for it? They say that 18% of the Palestinians live in camps, ok, I live in Nazzal neighbourhood, and the whole neighbourhood is inhabited by Palestinian refugees but there aren’t any UNRWA centres or any place to go to. Don’t I have the right to have a local centre? (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

Drugs are not available, we have to buy them from outside the centre and this involves travelling. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

First, the human rights issue. We, as Palestinians don’t feel that we are treated as human beings in this country. We are deprived of rights enjoyed by humans all over the world. We also suffer from a lot of social problems. Take health care for example, health conditions in the camps are so bad as a result of the negligence of three organisations: first UNRWA, since it is the international institution which is a political expression of our status as Palestinian refugees and an institution charged by the Security Council and the United Nations to care for the Palestinians until we return to our country. Everyone can see that since the 1990s UNRWA clinics in the camps have started to reduce their services. There are no drugs, or specialist doctors. When you go to the doctor, he gives you either Aspirin or Panadol. They are making it very difficult for Palestinians to get to hospitals. First, the number of night clinics in the area is very limited and can’t absorb 60 thousand Palestinians in Akkar. Palestinians prefer not to pay transport costs to go to and return from Akkar to receive medical treatment at the hospital or to visit a patient there. Patients often think that it would cost them the same amount to go to a local private hospital instead. Consequently, people do not receive the health care which UNRWA is obliged to provide. We demand that UNRWA contract with a hospital closer to the two camps, to make it easy for people to go there and receive medical care. We also need a specialist hospital to treat the medical conditions that require specialist treatment and doctors. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

The other thing is the need to improve the medical care that UNRWA offers; providing more drugs and specialist doctors in the clinics so that people in the camps can receive health care. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)
3) Specific Issues and Needs

a. Education and Health

The other point we need to discuss is the one raised by brother [Participant], about the reduction by UNRWA of their health services which happened long ago. They engage in contracts with poorly equipped hospitals and you need to know important people to be able to enter them and get a referral from here to go to the hospital. Sometimes they claim that the pharmacy is not ready or that the number of patients they can take in is 60 and that they are already at capacity. The patient may die before entering the hospital. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

The most important problem we have is with UNRWA. For example, the hospitals which UNRWA have contracts with outside the camp. Why should a critically sick person be referred by UNRWA to that hospital? By the time the patient reaches the hospital his condition will have deteriorated. Therefore, we demand that a hospital be built inside the Nahr el-Bared camp since it is the biggest Palestinian camp [in Lebanon] with 31 thousand people living in it. Maybe this [overcrowding] is what is causing these diseases. Diseases are widespread in most camps including Nahr el-Bared camp where cancers have spread. What are the reasons for the spread of these cancerous diseases that we suffer from? We don’t have any hospitals that have dialysis machines. The patient is obliged to travel to get medical treatment. We demand that the UNRWA clinic receives more medical staff to enable it to treat patients who suffer from different diseases. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

In the school I work at, the students’ teeth are periodically examined; an UNRWA bus comes to school. Of course many students complain of toothache and some have decayed teeth which need to be extracted, but others just need treatment. But the doctor just starts to extract the girls’ teeth without treating the ones that need treatment. He examines more than 15 girls and when we ask them whether he filled their cavities, they all say that he had extracted their teeth. Why are their teeth being extracted while some of them just need fillings? (Participant, Students’ meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

UNRWA schools lack many things, such as a counselor whose job would be to guide the students and address their social or psychological problems. Also, there is not one psychologist in any of the UNRWA clinics in Lebanon, why? We demand that the UNRWA clinic receives more medical staff to enable it to treat patients who suffer from different diseases. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

UNRWA is reducing its services every month and whatever it gives us is motivated by pity, knowing that the United Nations must have a much bigger role. As for the relations between UNRWA and the camps we live in, if I suffer, for example from a heart condition and I’m in need of medication, I would go to the doctor who would not examine me at all. He would merely ask what medications I have taken, tell me that this medication is not available but that there is an alternative and he then gives me Aspirin or Panadol. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

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The patient who needs a surgical operation is not treated at the expense of the agency. Medicine is not available, so the patient is obliged to pay from his own pocket. A lot of people in the camp suffer from diabetes, but medicines are not available. This increases the mortality rate. Many people suffer from a lot of diseases as a result of malnutrition, especially children. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Sbeineh camp, Syria)

I have stitches in my back, and the doctor prescribed me a medicine which he said is available from UNRWA, but they dispense it for me. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Sbeineh camp, Syria)

Specialized Nurses used to work at the agency’s clinics caring for pregnant women. They stopped their pregnancy care services a long time ago and that increases the risk of still births. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Sbeineh camp, Syria)
The Palestinian Red Crescent hospital doesn’t have chemotherapy for cancer, nor the ability to perform open heart surgery. They should improve the Red Crescent hospitals instead of contracting with hospitals from outside like Ghassan Hammoud Hospital. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

b. Environment, Infrastructure

There are also the environmental conditions from which residents of Al-Baq’a Camp suffer, such as the pollution of water; the flooding of sewage and the mixing of sewage with clean water. There are low levels of primary health care and preventative medicine in different areas. These conditions have turned the camp into a garbage dump, not the least because the number of the cleaning workers assigned by UNRWA is limited and hasn’t increased since 1968. In addition to this the workers who die are not replaced and the government doesn’t want to employ more cleaning workers and when it employs it does so secretly so that it wouldn’t be seen as taking over UNRWA’s responsibilities. Also, consumption is increasing with population growth and this has led to health problems, tensions and social crisis. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan).

UNRWA provides one garbage container for every one thousand people, and of course this is not enough. The structure of the camps is primitive and the streets are crowded. This impacts on the environment in an obvious manner, because the camps were built within a limited space (100 or 180m²). Those who live in Hit tin [Marka] Camp have recently suffered from a garbage problem. The Jordanian television recorded this and presented the issue through one of its programs. About a month ago, this problem was solved. Now they say that they suffer from a water problem and I think that they should demand that it be solved. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We need to spray pesticides and put proper garbage containers in the camps to preserve the health of their residents. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

We also demand a hospital that is built although this won’t solve all our problems. We demand that UNRWA solve our other problems by finding better housing for families and dealing with the problem of the epidemic diseases inside camps. For the sake of health in the camp, we demand the treatment of water and ensuring that the camps are clean, with repair of the sewer system. Solving these problems is a priority and more urgent than building a hospital and treating the incurable diseases which are common in the camp. The streets which lead to the school are unpaved and muddy and our children walk through them on their way to school, this needs to be addressed even more urgently. We demand that UNRWA deal with this for the sake of the camp’s residents and its students. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

The centre for women program in Irbid is the only centre to have been built in the camp since 1953. Seven years ago, UNRWA gave us a piece of land with an unstable house in Irbid Camp. After two years we were surprised to find out that the rehabilitation centre is our partner, why? We don’t know. But since they have a humanitarian mission as we do, we agreed to share the land and we started to build the centre, but we didn’t have money! UNRWA said that it doesn’t have money to support the centre. UNRWA is just an umbrella and if we worked under it they would force us to sign a pledge to not discuss politics or religion, as the Homs Camp directly borders the oil refinery and it is therefore not suitable for human inhabitation. Many of its residents suffer from asthma, cancer and other chronic diseases. Medication is not available in adequate quantities. We lack an X-ray centre. There are more than 160 houses on the verge of collapse and yet UNRWA pledged to renew only 22 houses. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Homs (‘Aideen) camp, Syria)
I want to talk about the infrastructure of the camp. The streets are unpaved and full of puddles. The electricity services are poor, and water is brought from wells and then stored in contaminated tanks. Most of the camp residents have developed kidney problems as a result of drinking it. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

As for infrastructure, there were infrastructure projects in the camp but of course they were all projects that didn’t help to improve the camp’s conditions; they were not very good projects. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashideh camp, Lebanon)

We should develop the sport clubs in Beddawi camp. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

The United Nations is bound by Resolution 194, and we insist upon the Right of Return to the villages that we were forced to leave. But refugees should live a decent life in the camp. There is no park here, the houses are unclean and UNRWA does not give out rations. The UNRWA women’s centre is monopolized by a certain group of people. The training courses organized in the centre are very expensive, as if they were held by the private sector. There are only two kindergartens. The camp has no vaccinations for the children, and these are usually brought by a car from outside the camp. There is no X-ray centre in UNRWA’s health centre and they only refer the most difficult cases to hospital. We suffer from basic infrastructural problems. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

UNRWA works under the slogan of helping and employing Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. But there is no hiring or any work. There is just coercion and injustice from the state and no one questions it or investigates anything. We simply demand to have job opportunities for poor workers who can’t find a job. There should at least be factories that provide jobs for Palestinian people. You know and the whole world knows that in Lebanon the Palestinian people are being oppressed and humiliated. How much longer do we have to live in these conditions? (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

We need to renew the electricity system in the camp. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

As for infrastructure, we only need telecommunications. We now have the centrale but it doesn’t fulfil its duties; if you receive a phone call after 12 AM, the centrale will be closed. Also they charge for the call three or four times more. We need telecommunications – we need to have phones. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Nahr el-Beied camp, Lebanon)

UNRWA doesn’t provide any useful services. I have a piece of land and I was registered with UNRWA so that they would build me a home. But the agency didn’t do anything, which forced me to give the land to a contractor in exchange for a small apartment. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Homs (Alkheen) camp, Syria)

Our basic infrastructure must be rebuilt. The infrastructure we have has to be fixed once every few years. We almost have no electricity, I mean we don’t have it everyday and the subscription is very expensive. Some people can’t afford to subscribe, so they live without electricity which affects learning one way or another. As for the water, the clean water is being mixed with used water and is contaminated as a result. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

Regarding services, there is no water in Al-Qiatia neighbourhood; streets are not paved and there are no lights. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

We, as Palestinian refugees suffer from severe daily difficulties. We Palestinians in Lebanon, have a basic right to build an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital and this we all agree upon. Our only legitimate representative is the PLO. But I have a question: if someone had problems, would he really think that his basic concerns were those of the Palestinian state and the PLO? He certainly wouldn’t. There are many issues that concern each member of the Palestinian family and I’m one of those members. They all come down to financial concerns. Here, for example, the state offers services – and we
thank them for that—infrastructure, like drinking water, and the sewer pipes, etc... But if I was very poor how could I build a house? And if I wanted to start a family could I open my own workshop once I had had my vocational training? Can I afford to pay child expenses? All these issues are related to poverty. I have a suggestion; in order to be able to think of building our country, we need to be living more or less comfortably. So I have an idea, although it might be difficult to articulate it, maybe it could help a little. A Lebanese citizen can take a loan in Lebanon but I am a Palestinian; can I enter any bank here and ask them to give me a loan, simply because I don’t have a house? No, I can’t. So what I am suggesting is that donor countries dedicate some money available to ordinary people, as they do for the infrastructure and water pipes and roads projects. If I want to open a shop or help my son get married or have a big family, I will be under stress. Can’t this enormous stress lead people to take a wrong path? I mean when someone badly needs money won’t he do anything to get it? I suggest that donor countries, in the same way they are providing projects, dedicate a budget to the Palestinian people in Lebanon, for example, 500 million dollars. Anyone who has an idea of a project in Nahr el-Bared can pursue it by borrowing without interest until he has made enough money to pay it back. I think that if this problem is solved, we can proceed to tackle other problems and I think that this is a very fair demand. In the same way they have the ability to build projects they can give us some money for loans, so that we are just like everyone else who can go to any bank and get a loan. Thanks a lot. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

On the other hand there has been a development in the camps we live in over the last four years. The European Union joined with development projects with the aim of improving the standard of living in the camps. However, personally, I am not impressed by the project of replacing zinko [aluminium] roofs with cement ones; this is not what I call really improving living standards. We need to address the pockets of poverty in the camps and create job opportunities. There is a trend to establish lending funds to finance small projects. This experiment was implemented in the camps, and there was a big demand for loans from these funds. But we have had enough of the limited projects in the camps and we need to present something new. We are now working on giving loans for other purposes; for setting up a grocery shop, a poultry farm or buying a car, for example. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

UNRWA, which started with us in 1948 used to meet our basic needs, like supplying us with rice, flour and oil. We are now in 2004 and nothing connects us to UNRWA except a “card”. I personally haven’t used this card for years. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

UNRWA has greatly reduced its services and yet there are people living in very difficult conditions. Why don’t we demand that UNRWA reintroduce its policy of distributing rations? These used to especially ease the hardship of large families. They should offer rations to everyone, not only for the so-called shu’un (special hardship) cases, because there are large families who are living under very bad conditions. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)
Part II

IV) Connecting Palestinian Refugee and Exile Communities

We don’t have any connections here with anyone.

(Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)
Connecting Palestinian Refugee and Exile Communities

1) Individual Connection and Institutional Links

I think it is important not to forget our brothers and sisters inside of 1948 Occupied Palestine because ultimately they are Palestinian too and this is another thing we need to keep in mind when we try to build connections. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Homs (A’ikeen) camp, Syria)

As for the relations between the refugees, it is important for us to strengthen the bonds between our camps in Syria and other refugees all over the world. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

I think that we have to try to keep the links alive and a way to do it is to encourage our children to build relationships with their second cousins in the Middle East. There is no magic solution to this problem but I think the key lies in these meetings. I think that there is a lot of value in educating our children about our roots; our feeling of belonging also counts and this feeling of belonging is in all of us, even without knowing each other many of us feel part of a common movement. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

We suffer from the same thing; we don’t have any connections here with anyone. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

The Oslo agreement and its repercussions took the PLO to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and established an Authority that marginalized the PLO’s role and paralyzed it and its institutions such as the popular federations. Another impact of Oslo was to dismiss the Right of Return. This is the cause of many of the fears over the Geneva Accords and its attempt to resettle the refugees permanently. There are attempts to crush the Right of Return, hence the emergence of committees in its defence. Yet the communication channels established in exile up to this moment are not adequate so we demand better communication structures. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Homs (A’ikeen) camp, Syria)

1) Individual Connection and Institutional Links

There could be a spirit of competition between different community organizations in terms of creativity and this could lead to really brilliant work. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

Many from our camp, Baalbek (about 60%) and from the Al-Baqaa area emigrated to Denmark and Sweden. Now we have modern technology like the internet in every camp and we can communicate with our brothers through the internet via e-mail. We tell them about our situation and suffering, we are close to each other. We also see them when they come to visit us, because they are from the community and they will leave eventually. So we sit with them and tell them our concerns and they do the same. They can help us with our problems. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

The most difficult thing is being Palestinian and not being able to enter Palestine. This is the most difficult thing for me and this how I felt during my last visit to Palestine. People there are living a great tragedy that I can’t describe. To give a simple example, our house is near the airport between the West Bank and Jerusalem, and my father’s house is on the opposite side. The street is divided into two parts, one is the West Bank and the other is Jerusalem. I used to go from my father’s house to my husband’s in five minutes but now it would take five hours to get there. However, I can’t visit because I am in the West Bank and I can’t enter if I don’t have permission even though the house is on the same street. This is an example of the tragedy in Palestine. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

Young Palestinians should go and visit their towns just like the Zionists do through their Birth Right program; after all, there are a lot of Palestinians in the world with foreign citizenship. So why not plan visits to Yafa in an organised way and sponsor the youth to go back to their homeland?. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

There is little communication between the members of different Palestinian communities. It is sometimes limited to within families and between relatives through phone calls and visits from one country to another. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

I think the phone is the most important tool of communication. If one has relatives elsewhere, then there are the indirect communication channels such as the newspapers and the internet to find out about their news and the same applies to them. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

What I understood from [participants] is that we should form delegations or committees, organise exchanges and activities and go to Palestine to meet with the people there. We can see how widows live and then convey these images to the people here. People living there can also visit us here. There should also be cultural exchanges like the ones our association arranges. Group of people from here can visit the camps with the goal of meeting the people who are living under the occupation in Palestine’s camps so as to witness the violence and oppression being exercised against them. We here are also a community
of Palestinian refugees, what is our vision and problems? I hope every one of will answer this question. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

As for connections with Palestinians abroad, we should receive delegations from them in the camp, and educate them on the conditions in which Palestinian refugees live in, so that they could pressure their governments to donate money that would help us to rebuild our lives. (Participant, Workers’ meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

The other thing is exchange programs that [participant] was talking about. There are many exchange programs taking place but often informally or not very well organised, except for CEPAL which organizes something more regularly. I also think it is very important to support these efforts financially and organizationally and to build more regular communication between refugee communities and Palestinians everywhere. I should also mention that through ‘Al-Awda’ we have been in touch with communities and organizations working on Palestinians’ Right of Return and the rights of Palestinians inside 1948 Occupied Palestine. (Participant, Public meeting, Toronto, Canada)

There are mechanisms for activating various things. Delegations are prevented from visiting each other; although this is the most important communication means between the communities, allowing them to study each other’s work. When the Palestinian organizations are activated, there would be some sort of healthy competition. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

There are many means of communication including the internet. There are also the visits, phone calls and contacts made which is all communication. (Participant, Public meeting, Malma, Sweden)

I don’t think we have the mechanisms that exist for us, to communicate with other Palestinian communities as one community. As an individual I have personally communicated with so many different organizations that come from the Palestinian refugee camps or Palestinian Labour Unions but as a community we don’t have these mechanisms and I think we should think about taking concrete steps or building a mechanism as a Palestinian community in Canada. In Al-Shatat we should have these mechanisms but we don’t. Palestine House should take the lead if they are interested in developing the local community’s communication with the Palestinian community at large. That’s one of our major shortcomings, the absence of these mechanisms. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

Existing relations [between the Palestinian community in Barcelona and those in Palestine] are a result of many years of communication. Everyone knows each other, and the relationship between Palestinians in Barcelona, Spain and Palestinians in Palestine still exists because we all have, one way or another friends in Palestine, whether in Gaza, the West Bank, or the 48 territories. There is communication through individual relationships; relations that are not within political or union structures. Palestinians who went to Spain or the UK to work or study still has friends in Palestine and Palestinians wherever they are establish relationships with each other. Now I think that strengthening these relationships and organizing them within a certain structure is very important, otherwise those who live in Al-Shatat shall remain in Al-Shatat. The frustration that the Palestinians in general feel has affected Palestinians inside and outside Palestine like brother [participant] said. In the past, there were Palestinian organizations in Barcelona. It is very hard for us, as Palestinians, to work without organizations. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

Communication between Palestinian communities can be achieved through direct contact or the internet. Direct contact can be made by enhancing our Palestinian institutions, like the PLO, and contacting the Palestinian gatherings all over the world through indirect meetings. (Participant, Public Meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

For example, I have read in many articles, or on the internet, that in all European countries there are groups who work for the Right of Return. They hold conferences and seminars. But this work is individual, people in different countries work separately from each other; I would also like to stress that you are, through your study of this issue in a better position than us to call for, for example, the uniting of these different efforts between each country. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

In Stockholm we communicate with Palestinians beyond Sweden. We have communication with Finland and London, through Palestinian associations. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

The role of the community should be established and everyone should agree on this. For example, the Palestinian community in Dammam at least communicated with communities in Riyadh, Qatar, Bahrain and even Europe. They achieved this by agreeing on certain mechanisms of communication and on accomplishing certain political goals. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)
Connecting Palestinian Refugee and Exile Communities

1) Individual Connection and Institutional Links

I suggest that there is coordination between the community and the popular federations so as to hold a Palestinian popular conference and organize the Palestinian communities in Italy. A discussion of this is under way in Italy and it is supposed to bear fruit within the coming period. It is necessary to communicate within Italy and contact other areas in Europe and Palestine through the existing institutions, there are some difficulties but we are trying to overcome them. For example, I know that the Palestinian community in England is strong but I don’t think that they have an engineers’ union but there are engineers’ unions in other areas like Germany and I think that unions can exchange experiences. The idea of the Palestinian Popular Conference in Italy and contacting Palestinians across Europe and Palestine is a means of building the community. Through the PLO?

Unfortunately we haven’t reached an understanding with the representatives here, and we hope to overcome this problem because we all recognize the PLO as the only legitimate representative in Italy. There have been a number of popular activities conducted by the federations and based on the Palestinian political situation and perspective; there are political and cultural activities amongst Palestinians in Italy levels. Of course the number of participants differs according to the social and cultural conditions. (Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy).

Channels of communication should be organized. The Refugees Affairs Department, which organizes the PLO in the camps should be activated. There are many shared concerns and problems between the Palestinian camps. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

We need to have representatives in every community across the world, so that we can find out what is happening with Palestinians such as those in Iraq, that’s an incredible situation that nobody is even addressing. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

We need to improve our ability to communicate with the national community. Our representative here is the PLO which comes from the organizations with which we can communicate. Through Fateh and in particular the active students’ office of Fateh, we can communicate with the different organizations in Lebanon. At the local level, we communicate through the popular committees in every camp by holding international and local meetings every two months. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashidieh camp, Lebanon)

We have a big problem, I don’t want to go into details but in short, the process of communication ought to go through the proper channels and the community should communicate through the Palestinian representative in Spain. But unfortunately, Palestinian representatives in Spain and Europe have become negligent and the consulate doesn’t really care about the people and communities living inside Palestine. Sometimes, when we need something from the home country, we are obliged, as individuals and as communities, to call the PA or the PLO, yet this isn’t right. There is no cooperation. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

I suggest forming a general association of Palestinian refugees all over the world based on their locations, through the PLO. Everybody has agreed in this meeting that representation would be to a general association which would elect a higher committee that can define an internal

system with the mission of conducting research on Palestinian refugees throughout the world. Secondly, I suggest that we communicate with the refugees all over the world. Thirdly, by achieving representation of all the Palestinian refugees we can construct a comprehensive vision and platform that everyone is agreed upon. This is the view of Palestinian refugees and we don’t recognize any suggestion that does not entail our return to Palestine. Thank you. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

Concerning the structures within the community and communication through the institutions, there is communication between the General Union of Palestinian Women and the General Union of Palestinian Students across the different camps and this could be furthered through workshops, events on national anniversaries, and exhibitions. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

We should have organizations for Palestinian professors, film makers, musicians, etc so we can build professional networks. This is something we could do over the Internet but it would be really good if the word was spread amongst Palestinian communities. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

An international conference for the Union of Doctors and Pharmacists was held in Cairo, Egypt. They asked us to send two Union members in Germany, the chief and the deputy-chief, to participate in the conference as part of the Palestinian delegation. But six of us went and after some discussion those six were accepted as delegates to the conference. We were the biggest delegation at the conference and so were successful in passing our policies. For example, how to recognize certificates, how to hold scientific conferences and guidelines on how to conduct...
scientific research. This institution is a successful one and its work is prominent here. It has established enough projects in Gaza Strip and the West Bank to prove its value to people and have a strong enough voice to be heard, even its reports are taken into consideration by the legislative council. Its letters to the legislative council are read to the council, and we receive responses from many different organisations.

So if your organisation is successful in the country in which it operates it will be influential both at home and in the Palestinian Authority and PLO. A powerful organisation that is strong at every level can be successful in furthering its aims and demands through the Palestinian National Authority and even the PLO. 

I think student groups have been really vital in communication between Palestinians in my experience. We have the Arab Student Collective and there is an Arab group at [University of] Western [Ontario], just having a student presence is important in itself too.

I think that communication between Palestinian communities can be achieved through reactivating the role of the unions and other civic institutions, which in turn means reactivating the students’ role within certain structures. Students, workers and women should meet amongst themselves so that afterwards general follow up workers and women should meet amongst students’ role within certain structures. Students, institutions, which in turn means reactivating the role of the unions and other civic institutions. I think that communication between Palestinians in my experience. We have the Arab Student Collective and there is an Arab group at [University of] Western [Ontario], just having a student presence is important in itself too.

2) Collective Work

There is nothing to prevent you, while you are living here in Denmark from supporting Palestinian camps in Arab countries and in Palestine. We, in Denmark, must organize so we can help other Palestinian communities in Al-Shatat as much as we can, while also supporting those in Palestine. If our government or any other cannot not help us, why don’t we help each other? This is one aim of the project.

a. Forms of Support

What are needed are structures and mechanisms that would allow us to communicate with each other. These mechanisms and structures should of course be already built on an established political base that expresses our interests, goals, and aspirations. The issue here is to be able to impose our demands on the European Union, or at least to be able to tell Europe and other international institutions that you can’t ignore us, that we exist, and this is our path and our aspirations. That we have a program, that we feel powerful within these frameworks and structures, and that the European Union and European society are both inconsistent in their approach to us. I am focusing on European society simply because neither Egypt nor Jordan or Saudi Arabia are at the centre of political decision-making. The centres of political decision are America and Europe. Now, whether we like it or not, this is the truth. So we ought to become a pressure group in the different nations of Europe in order to influence the decision-makers and in the PLO through insisting upon the fundamentals.

We don’t care about this project; it is a matter of interest to the refugees in the camps. My job is to support them, and we are ready to give support, and we are willing to explain, through the Palestinian Embassy, the difficult conditions in which the refugees live. As for me, if they offered me a villa in Lebanon, I wouldn’t live in it more than one month, also if they offered me a villa in Saudi Arabia, I would refuse it, why? Because I live comfortably in Denmark.

To serve Palestinians in Palestine and the neighbouring countries, those of us in Europe and Canada should, as Palestinians, collect donations and send them to our people in the camps to help them at least with the hardships they face daily.

I am not a member of the administrative body of the Union of Palestinian Physicians and Pharmacists. This institution hasn’t worked with the PA institutions but with Palestinian civic organisations in Bethlehem and Ramallah.
time ago, several organisations in Bethlehem and Beit Sahur warned that the Israelis want to completely destroy Palestinian traditions, and they asked for financial support to face this Israeli attack, and a delegation from this institution went and gave them four thousand euros. Also, the federation has granted another four thousand euro to associations for the disabled. In addition, the medical delegation has conducted about 500 surgical operations for Palestinian patients in these cities, with a complete program for the medical treatment. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany).

The question is how to communicate? You assumed that we have the means to, but what are they? There are organisations working to build links between Palestinians. For example, I am a member of a program called “From Family to Family” whereby families here adopt families in Palestine by donating 100 dollars a month. We can do this as a Palestinian community in Greece. It isn’t really necessary to contact individual people, we can go through institutions. I went to Al-Bireh Association and asked them for some materials in order to organize a bazaar for them. When we form a committee, it will liaise with the Al-Bireh Association. It's difficult to contact individuals, so we should engage with established institutions. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

I think we should have structures here that reflect our different circumstances. As a Palestinian in Canada my main concerns are not economic, but I may want to give financial support to Palestinians in exile. I think a lot of us here would like to provide such support but are discouraged by the lack of transparency. So we demand to have transparency reports issued by the various Palestinian social solidarity organisations. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

The Kind Hearts fundraiser is one means of communication between Palestinians here and Palestinians in Palestine that I’ve noticed. I think it’s a great fundraiser; it was a way for me in the US to donate to Palestinians in refugee camps, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

I can assure you that there are people who donate money. There is a Palestinian family living in Al-Thalia I know of which is very poor. I went to see them personally and they said that they were in need of 8000-10000 Saudi Riyals. The children dropped out of school because their father left them, and they don’t have residency status. We contacted someone who we thought might be able to help them and he said that he would once he was satisfied that this was the amount they really needed. There are people who are willing to donate money but there needs to be trust. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

I think that vigorous advocacy within our community would be the strongest way of supporting Palestine. Giving to charities is also extremely important but supporting things like hospitals and sending food should be the minimum we do because to me, these things are bare essentials for survival. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

2) Collective Work

b. Solidarity Initiatives and Projects

We should encourage Palestinian students to engage in exchange programs, and highlight the importance of establishing connections with Palestinian universities and university students in Palestine. Supporting campaigns like Birzeit’s University’s ‘Right to Education’ campaign is something we can do on campus and a way of supporting people back home. . (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

I don’t know, but there are various ideas on how to connect with Palestinian refugee communities, but work could be done inside Palestine and the camps. Sometimes people in the activist community or the student movement in Canada, sometimes they spend a lot time- which is good-doing leaflets or fact sheets. Maybe we can delegate these tasks to our families back in the refugee camps. People there could design courses for us; they could develop curricula to help teach Arabic here. This could help provide employment in Lebanon’s camps for example. You don’t have to be in Canada to create a curriculum or booklet to help in teaching Arabic or such things. We have to think about this matter in terms of creating jobs inside the camps while developing our capacities. People there are actually help us immensely and we can support them financially. So when we talk about programs in terms of Arabic language or history of Palestine or different other things cultural things whether its tatriz [embroidery] or dabka [Palestinian traditional dancing] or singing or preserving our oral history these things can be done with groups in refugee camps so that we can create something for them. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

We can communicate with migrant Palestinians through the internet. We should establish relations with the Palestinians abroad and write to them.
about the help we need in order to implement our projects. We are living in a very difficult situation and they should help us raise our living standards. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

The Palestinians who live in Europe have a responsibility to organize demonstrations and support Palestinians living in the Arab countries financially and morally in order to help them to return to Palestine. Also, the Palestinians in Europe must support the Palestinian Embassies here so they can effectively represent us. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark).

Before we contact people in Europe, we should first contact our people who are in Palestine who don’t know anything about us. They say that the most miserable camps are in Gaza so we should make contact with refugees there and establish a close relationship with our people, one should go to her brother for help before her neighbour. Of course we know that things aren’t achieved through talking or through a political. We urgently need to seek help from our brothers before we can turn to other people, after that we can address others through satellite channels. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Buj el-Barajneh, Lebanon)

We should create a library of all the martyrs of the Palestinian cause. We don’t actually have our own Palestinian Calendar; we are forced to celebrate all the Canadian martyrs from World War One but we should celebrate our own martyrs and other people who serve the cause. For example when I was in Lebanon we used to celebrate teachers on certain days, maybe we can hold a regular Palestinian Teachers Day which can be celebrated world wide. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

There are millions of problems inside Palestine and we, who are living here in much better conditions than Palestinians inside Palestine can help with our voices by speaking out in support of the Palestinians living there, this is the most important thing. For example, we can sign petitions on the internet for the release of a prisoner. We must participate effectively and seriously and we must be faster. We are too slow to do anything; it takes months for us to hold a conference and days to say anything. We must find the motivation within ourselves and become more effective. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

I think that [participant’s] idea is good as well because we need to have a way of having a constant link as opposed to the casual ones we have now. At the moment, when we want to support something in Palestine it’s usually aid oriented, sort of casual and lacking in direction. For example, the case of the ambulances that were sent from Toronto when the Intifada first broke out which I think are still waiting at the port in ‘Aqaba in Jordan. They never got to Palestine because they were not allowed in by customs, nobody had checked for that possibility. First of all I think we should drop the idea that the only way we can support Palestine is through aid because political support is a very important and necessary thing to do. I felt we made a step in that direction when we supported political prisoners and it would be good if we extended political action to other issues. This needs to be looked into. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

We should discuss compiling a book that lists all the publications from Palestine, which includes a record of where they were printed. There could also be a book of every publishing house in Palestine to encourage people working in this field. We need to create Palestinian trade directories and lists of teachers and martyrs, for example. This creates a buzz in the community and builds communication between people in Al-Shatat and elsewhere. We need to decide how to organise all these things – whether they
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2) Collective Work

b. Solidarity Initiatives and Projects

We can gather old books on World Book Day and send them to a camp in Lebanon for example, and we can do the same with the toys. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

We should compile a really good archive of all the films made about Palestine made by Palestinians. That way we could have a catalogue of the films out there and what they are about which people all around the world can have access to. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

Concerning the Palestinian people in Lebanon, we suggest first that conferences and meetings for the camps’ residents are held. The location of these conferences is not important, the essential point is for Palestinians to come together and obtain information about the camps. The refugee camps in Lebanon have been divided since we came from Palestine. We came from different cities in Palestine; Haifa, Yafa, Tabania, Akka, Lubya, and Frada and we went to Ein el-Hilweh camp but then we had to go to different places. We still have the same mentality. We are supposed to be one nation with one mindset but we all suffered from emigration. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

This is a suggestion. We should call for a European conference in which all Palestinian communities can participate. That project would have to be mobilised for in an active and timely manner. This will ensure communication between communities. For, although individual work can lead to good results, we need to have a large conference so that the Palestinian community would be heard in its entirety and that way the community can interact effectively with the project. (Participant, Public Meeting, Copenhagen, Denmark)

We should engage with the different communities and organisations. They should include the factions and the PLO institutions in Palestine, the labour and doctor federations, conferences that are being held abroad by the International Labour Organization and the Right of Return meetings that are being also held in Europe. We should meet on the basis of trust and cooperation to confront the issues we face and also discuss the problems in Lebanon. Communication between the different communities can be conducted through visits and via the internet. (Participant, Public Meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)

A conference was held two years ago in Brussels about International Women’s Day and they wanted people to speak. But the Israelis prevented the two speakers, Al-Amiry and Ashrawi from attending. Although it was very far away, I was lucky and managed to go. I ran into a woman there I know from Paris and I asked her if she came here in the same way I did and she said that she only knew she could attend at the last minute. We were both sitting alone, while two Israeli women took questions from people representing several Israeli organizations from all over Europe. They led the conference while there were no Palestinians there to represent us, even the Palestinians in Brussels didn’t know about the conference. There is something missing in our communication with each other. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

We should set up an international summer camp for Palestinian children. It would provide an opportunity for children from different Palestinian communities to come together. It could start with at least one in each continent if it’s too difficult for children to travel from one country to another. In North America for example there should be a place for Palestinian children to interact and build relationships and that could be done through coordination between different refugee communities. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

We want to communicate with all of the Palestinian communities in Europe, especially with our community in neighbouring Sweden. We would like to organise exchanges between our children, the generation of the future here and the Palestinian children in Sweden. During this communication process we can exchange our thoughts and benefit from each other’s. If there isn’t a communication procedure and an elected committee in every region, it will be impossible for us to talk about anything. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark)

What about Palestine programs and summer camps that are run annually by many different organizations? Some are even part funded by the EU for Palestinians living in Europe; we should look at establishing programs like these to send Palestinian youth here to experience Palestine and learn more about the struggle by visiting the homeland. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

There should be regular contact with the Arab communities abroad. I mean by that the broad range of Palestinian communities so that our voice is heard by them and so that they know what is happening. Another basic demand is for twinning between Palestinians inside and outside
Palestine in order to solve and study the current issues. For example, there are the elections and reforms which are being conducted in the Palestinian Authority. Sometimes we consider that we can play an important role and we must participate. Other times, we think that we should not participate. We also demand the activation of these institutions so as to convey our opinion and point of view to people inside Palestine and for people there to inform us of what is happening so that we can take on our responsibilities as a Palestinian people. Finally, we demand twinning meetings between communities. These are the issues we are raising and whoever has an opinion which they want to voice is welcome to do that. There is also the involvement of the media which should be big. The media has a role in Beirut camps where it highlights the social and security issues. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

The twinning idea is wonderful but I don’t think that twinning should be between the municipality of the city of Toronto and another refugee population, I think it should be between the Shatat community itself here and other Palestinian exile communities, apart from the government of Canada or the structures of authority that we have here. For example we could have a sort of scholarship fund here that could help other Palestinians from another community and vice versa, or women’s groups here that support women’s groups somewhere else in Al-Shatat. I don’t think that the government of Canada should be involved in any kind of way in solidarity or communication between Palestinian exile communities. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

There is also the issue of establishing communication between Palestinian communities. A study in Britain which categorises the different Palestinian communities in Europe along with their qualifications and academic backgrounds found that the Scandinavian countries had the biggest share of illiterate Palestinian labour; which is reflected in their different forms of employment, their contributions to the Palestinian cause and their degree of awareness. This doesn’t mean that we don’t have educated people. There are educated people and university graduates but not as many as in Britain, for example. There are fewer and they don’t cooperate with each other. I just want to give you an idea of how to build communication between this community in Sweden and the other communities. As you said, this can be done through newspapers and radio channels or both. I consider myself educated but the twinning thing is beyond my capabilities, I don’t have the technical capability to find ways for twinning. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

Sometimes there is twinning between two countries or two cities and they have cultural, social, or sport exchanges. For example, a delegation from here would go there every year to communicate and establish better relations with them. What do you think of this? Is implementing it in a certain city or camp in Palestine or any other area a good thing?

The problem with this is that we can’t do anything without the approval of our parents and they’re always afraid and suggest that we wait until the situation calms down. But when will the situation calm down? We have been living in this situation for 55 years and even if we want to visit another university in Palestine they won’t agree and would feel worried. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Stockholm/ Uppsala, Sweden)

c. Media, Internet, and Databases

The media – well I think things like websites, newspapers in different languages, radio stations, satellites stations and the PLO runs and connects the different communities. There is no reason why we shouldn’t have a Palestinian newspaper that is published all around the world in different languages as a way of connecting us or a website like that, or a satellite TV station that people from all around the world can see could be effective. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

If I want to publish a magazine it shouldn’t be limited to reflecting only opinions but should also enlighten people and educate them for example, about their country: Palestine! If you create a satellite channel for the refugees, Palestinians will constantly watch it. Media has a great role to play in enabling us to be able to communicate with each other. It is also a means of education. With the media we can kill two birds with one stone. In addition, it is a safe way to express our views. The satellite channel can reduce the distance between refugees, however far from each other they are. It can reduce the distance between refugees in Lebanon or Syria and the emigration countries like Europe, America, Canada and Australia. Through this channel we will feel closer to one another. We can also convey our thoughts and suggestions through the “chat room” on the internet or through “Yahoo Messenger”. Why can’t the refugees have a similar global website? As refugees, we are scattered all over the world. Why don’t we establish a meeting place for the youth? Given the opportunity, surely these young men and women would meet with each other every year and make their voices heard. There is freedom abroad. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)
I want to talk about the global satellite channel that has been discussed. This channel would be a means to express the opinions of established institutions. So first we should create such institutions and then we can establish the satellite channel. We haven’t yet agreed whether this channel will be global or local. We want it global, for its aim is to enable communication between the different refugee communities wherever they are. I was wondering whether there is, for example, a Palestinian satellite channel, how many people watch it? No one. There is the Al-Manar channel, how many people watch it? Very few. There is also Al-Jazeera, which shows thousands of programs about the refugees. But this is not primarily a means of communication, bringing people to talk about the refugees. I’m not talking about Al-Manar. We want a channel for the five million refugees! (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We can communicate via the Palestinian Satellite Channel and talk on it about the community’s activities. We can also conduct interviews on the Satellite Channel and we could pay a fee. If this project was also applied to the camps in the Arab countries, it would work. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)

In my first intervention I talked about communicating with our Palestinian brothers before communicating with the media, which I described as a very important tool. Israel is way ahead of us when it comes to the media. It works on improving its use of media, because it considers the media to be a very important tool. Through the media we can enter the houses of our brothers in Palestine whom we haven’t forgotten, and who haven’t forgotten us. Palestinian television can display daily images from the camps in Lebanon and convey the suffering that their residents go through. It can air a special program about camps in Lebanon to illustrate to the whole world what it’s like in Lebanon and its camps. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Burj el-Barajneh, Lebanon)

I suggest that, if possible, a satellite channel be created. It would help to connect the Palestinian communities in exile. I think that there is a loan for you from the English Parliament and the European Union, from the humanitarian organisations in Europe. I know a lot about this. I mean that anything that is not well financed cannot be successful. So if you have a loan, use it to do something international so that we can convey our views to the international public, its politicians and media. (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)

Communication should be at the national level and communicating through the internet is the best way between the different communities in Lebanon and other countries. My first suggestion is that we create a channel of communication through the internet between Palestinian communities and the camps here. That’s at the national level. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)

I want to reiterate some of the activities that have been going on. I think that the web has actually revolutionized the connections between people, individuals and groups. We should mention for instance www.PalestineRemembered.com because I think that sort of thing needs to be a lot more supported and publicized. It’s exactly what we are talking about, it’s a place where people can exchange names, try to find relatives and find out stuff about their village, etc., which I think is important. One of my demands would be to support that sort of effort because they actually rely on individual effort and it’s a lot of work for one person to be doing in their own time and budget. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

We need political literature that could be sent over the internet. People can write on different topics and we can correspond with each other. (Participant, Public Meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

Building on the idea of the newspaper is the idea of having a directory, like a database of current contact information. It would include the email addresses and numbers of all the Palestinian organizations and people who want to be contacted. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

We need to have access to each other; some kind of database even if it’s accessed through a computer, through files, an email system or some kind of newsletter. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

I would love to see an online database in the shape of a world map, where Palestinians can leave their contact information.

Their interests could also be listed. It could be in something like an Art files format, a resource website. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

The role of the media is pivotal today. If there is a war, what is the role of the media? The average person in the camp wants a link with UNRWA and any other organisation. Where is the media? There is a missing link here. The media’s role here is weak when it should play a bigger part in communication; after all, it influences everything in the world. Where is the Palestinian media? Where is the media that feels people’s pain? (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)
Part II

V) Community Structures and Channels

Exactly, every Saturday of every month, that’s how it starts. Look at us, this is the third time we’ve met in this short period of time, although we haven’t been meeting for a very long time. That’s how things begin.

(Participant, Women’s Meeting, Athens, Greece)
Community Structures and Channels

1. Former and Current Civic Structures

a. The Map of the Community

As for the issues raised regarding whether we as a Palestinian community in Denmark have a representative on the local level, or if we have a communication link with our national representative or with the local authorities: well, there isn’t. We really want to form or constitute a national organization to represent us and to be a link of communication between us and the Embassy. We should also begin discussing the issues which concern us as a community on the local level first, then we can discuss the other issues that relate to our national representative and the international institutions which are concerned with our right of return as Palestinian refugees. 

To be honest, what existed was the reason for our desperation - the Embassy was already there, and so was the leadership. We should think in a practical and positive way about the state of education, and what can we do for the community. We can do a lot to help. For example, ten community members can each donate ten thousand dollars, so that the Embassy can assume the rest of the costs to open schools or a medical clinic. You all know that the Embassy does not have funds for such a project. If a group of five or ten people told the Embassy that they would like to support some project, I’m sure they could find the necessary funds for such a project. If a group of five or ten community members can each donate ten thousand dollars, so that the Embassy can assume the rest of the costs to open schools or a medical clinic. You all know that the Embassy does not have funds for such a project. If a group of five or ten people told the Embassy that they would like to support some project, I’m sure they could find the necessary funds for such a project.

Even amongst each other as a community, we don’t help one another; why don’t we help ourselves? Why don’t we form committees in the Za’faraniya neighbourhoods, which can pursue our problems through the Embassy? We have learnt from the Palestinian revolution how to start over again, and not to wait for others to come and push us to work. Everything we do should be self-motivated.

Everyone talked about the community and its institutions, but no one mentioned what to do. They have talked about the existing problems in the community for two years now. Fine, but how are we to solve these problems, and why don’t we devise solutions or means to solve them? We have been members in the community for two years, but no one has talked with us and no one has suggested what to do. How can they help one of the community members? We must highlight the error and get out of the vicious circle that doesn’t seem to have a start or an end. We must highlight the error and get out of the vicious circle that doesn’t seem to have a start or an end.

As a community in Denmark, we can organize ourselves. We don’t need the Embassy. We have done some activities and organized some national festivals, celebrations, and other events. I’m not talking about national activities. I’m speaking as a Palestinian in Denmark.

I want to remind you that we must grab our rights. They will not be given or offered. 

I. Former and Current Civic Structures

a. The Map of the Community

Let me start from the beginning, which is the Palestinian presence in Egypt. There are two kinds of refugees in Egypt, the refugees of 1948 and the refugees of 1967. In between, there were also economic rather than political migrations, but they are also considered political refugees. These two migrations and the small migrations in between created legal conditions related to our dealing with the Egyptian state as a host country. First we were categorized along several categories in our passports. There is category A and category B. Category A represents the refugees who immigrated before the 48 war or during it. The members of this category were granted the Egyptian nationality in the 1960s. Category B represents the Palestinians who came between 48 and 56.
after 48 until before 67. Those who came after 67 are categorized in category D. Categorizing Palestinians into these categories is related to their dealings with the Egyptian authorities on what relates to education, health, and social, economic and legal matters. This categorizing creates discriminations among the Palestinians themselves and their relationship with the host country. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

In fact, the last census gave as a figure the existence of, if I’m not mistaken, 60000 Orthodox individuals in Chile. If one considers this figure, which really terrified me, I think that the five hundred thousand estimate cannot withstand scrutiny. The same goes for the two hundred thousand or the three hundred thousand numbers. These numbers would mean that Homs, Beit Jala, Bethlehem, and Beit Sahur were all emptied out, and it is not enough to reach that figure. In other words, we must insist that the numbers are more than a quantitative issue. I would say, however, that fundamentally I put forward the issue of faith as a central element of identity. In fact, if one revises the foundation of the first institutions of the collective in Chile they have to do precisely with the conservation of faith: the creation of the Orthodox church, not the construction of the temple in 1917 but the generation of a space for prayer; let’s say, since 1912. In fact, we have to look at the Arab press in Chile, which is an absolutely essential source to construct the migration process; there were 24 Arabic newspapers in Chile from 1910 to 1948. The first newspaper was founded by a priest whose intention was precisely to preserve the faith. The issue is in fact transcendental.

I have a few impressions. We are going to finish the migration process; there were 24 Arabic newspapers in Chile and this could be a product of solidarity networks and the existence of parishes, because it was common to travel. This is not as established yet as it was when the Roman space was one united space: back then it was not difficult to travel from Homs to Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Therefore, I think that this is an important issue. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

The Palestinians in Egypt are categorized into different classes. There are the rich people who live in Helipolis, then the lower class that can be found in popular areas like ‘Abdeen, and there are Palestinian gatherings in areas like Sayyida Zainab Square and Dar al-Salaam. Also, there are Palestinians in the rural areas such the eastern area which contains large numbers of Palestinians. The poor class of Palestinians is not very big. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

I don’t have any idea about the number of Palestinians because this number is continuously growing and the country is big, so it is difficult to exactly define the number. But as I hear from the brothers, some people, especially from inside Palestine, lately applied for political asylum. This is a very important remark. Often, the Palestinians who come from inside Palestine are given the right to asylum, but those who come from Syria or Lebanon face more obstacles. This is what I hear; but it is not necessarily true. In fact, the Palestinian presence is a little more or a little less than a few thousands; around 3 thousands. Palestinians have skills; there are dozens of them who hold PhDs and dozens who hold a master’s degree. There are economic powers, i.e., independent economic institutions, and there are at least 12 doctors. I mean to say that there are capabilities, and the Palestinians I know are generally aware of the Palestinian case, and they have a sense of belonging to Palestine, but we are not patient. In addition, we depend on individualism, and we still lack the democratic and cooperative spirit. (Participant, Public meeting, Oslo, Norway)

We differ here in Italy from the other European countries. Also, the Palestinian presence in Europe is different from the Palestinian presence in the other countries of exile. In Italy we are new, although some of us have been living here for a long time either as a community or as individuals. Why did people originally come to Italy? People came here to study in the hope that the Palestinian revolution was going to be victorious, and that they would be able to go back to their homeland and work there in their own areas of

1. Former and Current Civic Structures
   a. The Map of the Community

   Communities Structures and Channels
specialization. Time passed, and the revolution died. Some people got married, others started working, and our reasons for permanently staying here developed organically. In the past we didn’t organize ourselves as a permanent community because we used to think that we would go back home once the revolution was won. (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)

b. Political and Civic History
What is needed from Palestinian institutions now in Germany are a students’ union, a labour union, an engineer’s union, and a doctor’s union. These existed years ago but their work has been frozen for the past ten years. They had political activities, but we also had other institutions which worked as German institutions, such as the women’s union, Al-Karameh Club, and the Palestinian youth federation. They had direct social activities. For example, in Al-Karameh, we have 250 families and direct contact with thirty families, and indirect contacts with others. We have problems within families themselves, and families have problems with German organizations. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany).

After the Oslo agreement Palestinians were damaged all over the world. I can assure you that there wasn’t any political activity here in Sweden from 1993 to 2000. Some may have a different opinion, yet this is the truth. All the organizations that existed such as the Palestinian federations for workers and students were closed. Hence, the associations were de-activated, including the Stockholm association, in which the Right of Return is its most important clause.

Presently the Palestinian Association defines our political work in general. The issue of the Right of Return in particular is its top priority since this is the most important principle we work on. What some people mentioned about not participating is from what we can define as frustration resulting from the situation the Palestinian people have gone through after 1993, especially after the Second Camp David. After the Al-Aqsa Intifada began Palestinian work developed. Now, if you invite people to any political or social meeting, you would be lucky if a hundred people showed up. Here lies the flaw. Therefore, to be able to work these existing associations should be activated. On the Palestinian Association level, the Associations’ Federation has not held a meeting since it was established. Imagine that! Yet its president resides here. Hence we have a problem here. If the Associations’ Federation has not held a meeting since its date of establishment, this flaw should be corrected so that we can get back on the right track. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

So that we could all be on the same page, I would like to start by saying that as Palestinians, we no longer can control any political decision-making of our own. In the past, the Palestinian organizations were effective. There was the PLO and its national institutions along with the Palestinian federations, unions and committees, and there was Arafat. Now all this is lost, so we don’t have a strong political will. Palestinian citizens can be sent to jail without doing anything and without finding any support. Second, our dealings with NGOs and official organizations as members of the Palestinian community became very difficult. Why? Because their perspective on what relates to our problem is definitely different from ours, for we all support the right of return, but most of the NGOs and organizations that travel daily to Palestine don’t recognize the right of return. As a community living in Italy we lack awareness, not because we don’t know our rights, but because we don’t really interact with daily Palestinian suffering. In Italy, we are far from the events. Although we receive news about our people through television, we are distant from the Palestinian political decision-making process and the suffering our nation is going through every day. However, the cultural interaction should be on a daily basis, otherwise we would have a serious crisis. Of course, we don’t have enough people in the community to have enormous experience, and we don’t properly safeguard the principles that we hold onto. (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)

Why do we say that our community failed? If we compare it with the Turkish or Greek or even the Jewish community I can say is that we have a distinctiveness that makes us totally different from other communities. Our problem, which we think of all the time, is the Zionist-Palestinian conflict. If we want to hold a seminar or a festival, we raise the Palestinian flag, and if we do some thinking, we come up with the idea of giving a political lecture about the Zionist-Palestinian conflict. Not once have we thought of arranging a social communal trip to have some fun with each other! Our tragedy, which causes us a lot of pain, is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Greek community doesn’t have such obsessions, nor the Turkish community. But this obsession deprives us from sleep, for all the time we think of the results of this conflict: when will it end, what our people are going through, and the destruction and killings they are suffering from. I think that we shouldn’t have this obsession, and then the Palestinian community would start to think more positively and consider other projects that cement relations between its members. They never invited us to a trip. They only focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and on the “Right of Return”, and of things like: the brother or father of so-and-so was killed, or his house was destroyed, or his brother arrested. All
these problems represent the obsession of the Palestinian community in Germany. I think that this is a common concern which prevents members of the Palestinian community from sleeping. None of us can forget it. I believe that this is the community’s political concern.

But we must add to this another social concern, which is solving the various problems and difficulties the community face. Another point is that we must not oppress ourselves by comparing our community socially with the other communities in this country. We must not forget that we have been living here for a much shorter time than other communities. A third point is that when these communities arrived in this country, they were received as guests. They were granted the opportunity from the first day to study the language and from the beginning they had the “right to work”, not just work. They also had the right to benefit from obligatory education, and their kids went to schools. Therefore, we were deprived from attending schools. Therefore, I can’t compare these generations. But we would have been the best and most active community in Germany were it not for these circumstances. I agree with what [Participant] said. Some people criticize work instead of supporting it. Some people would like to do things but they don’t, lest people criticize them. I think that there is another reason. People have had enough. In the 1980s and 1990s, thousands of Palestinians used to march in demonstrations on Labour Day. Today you would find only two or three people who would march in such demonstrations. Also there was a relationship amongst the previous generation between Uppsala and Stockholm. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Stockholm/ Uppsala, Sweden)

I remember when I was five or six I used to go to protests in downtown Chicago. You know, there used to be activism within the community. There used to be protests, there used to be movement. Now it is done in front of the TV and they used to yell at the TV on Al-Jazeera about what is going on, and that’s the truth. Instead of talking to the TV, nobody writes to congressmen, nobody puts together a movement. I mean if you go downtown and protest, and I don’t mean protesting by yourself, but at least there would be a voice being heard, at least heads will turn. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

In legal and social terms we Palestinians used to have the Holy Land Fund and people used to donate and send money. But they lost trust when there was corruption. It’s sad that people held back...
and stopped sending money. Even the European countries are not helping. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

With all these elections, the unions and the Palestinian club should have been approved. We also had a headquarters for Palestinian women. All the clubs were united in one club, which is the Arab Cultural Club. People did not participate in the union movement, not because they are lazy, but rather as a result of political factors. Since the establishment of the Palestinian Embassy and Consulate in the UAE, it was forbidden to form federations in it. This was not, however, because of its policy; this was because…

Because of the Palestinian Authority.
It is forbidden to form an association for Syrian artists, and the Ministry of Labour refuses to give permission for this, telling you to go to your Embassy in order to get it. When the Palestinian Embassy and the consulate were established, the authorities here started to treat Palestinians in the same way they treated citizens of other Arab states. I hope you understand this very well, because it is a very sensitive issue.

Yes, of course, this is well-known…
Even with our wish to form federations, there are still two issues: communication with the inside and accountability to Palestine and to the Intifada. We were directly contacting our federations without the Consulate and the Embassy. Our unions were in our blood, and we worked with them. They, however, limited our activities to such an extent that they closed all the federations, especially after the Kuwait problem. They feared that we will work politically. When the Kuwait problem was solved, there was the Iraq problem again. These reasons are serious and we should discuss them now. Until this moment, there are good people who seek to organize things in this regard. These people tend not to be from the Palestinian federations, but individual entrepreneurs who created some sort of interconnection between the inside and the outside, which is very good for Palestine. We tried to work jointly on a popular level, but not everyone was willing. With the decision to form the Palestinian community, we tried to conduct elections in the Consulate to represent all areas, but…

The bank would make numerous accusations. No, the bank approved this, but there was no psychological preparation for this, especially that we had had no previous experience in it. I only wish that those from the inside consider and think about us. I mean the Consulate as well. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

Certainly there are some positive points that suit our current capacities. We managed to pave the way, and we have been working on unity now for six years with the aim of forming a unified community organization as well as legal committees. How could we face these problems, especially as the institutions, federations, committees, and clubs that once existed are starting to disappear? We are working very hard to solve our problems, because if we linger and do not do what is needed, all the work we have been doing will be in vain. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

All those who live in Italy, or at least 80% of them, are committed to particular political factions through whom they make their voices heard to the PLO and outside the PLO. Therefore, there is always a channel of communication between the community members and the PLO and Palestine, through the political parties and the Palestinian factions. This channel still exists. Initially, GUPS branches were formed in every city that had a substantial population of Palestinian youth. These branches covered the Italian scene. However, they didn’t reflect a permanent Palestinian presence in Italy. The students were present on a temporary basis—upon graduation, most went back home and did not permanently settle in Italy. More permanent communities were formed later on in cities that had enough Palestinians. With time, the need emerged for these communities to communicate with each other and to form a representative body that could unite them all and create a common framework of action for them. Of course, these associations are still in their infancy, and have not yet been effective as a result. Theoretically, there are meetings between various community officials, but we still don’t have anything like what the communities in Latin America, North America, and other European countries have. Our problems in this country are different from those of the other countries. So what can we do? We are supposed to strengthen every community in every city. This should be one of our tasks in Italy; to strengthen the unity of the communities in the Italian cities and encourage holding meetings and consolidate coordination between them. (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)
90% of this 10% work without spirit. A third point is that you are talking about the old generation. But they are the cause of the problem. We must first get people to understand that they must work for the Palestinian community and the Palestinian cause. The solution is that this elite, who is active and wants to work, must show that it actually cares to work. I don’t want them to say that I’m speaking because I know how to speak Arabic or German so well; I’m speaking in order to show the problems and how to solve them. Let’s put criticisms and disadvantages aside, and start from the beginning. Unfortunately, those who are responsible for certain tasks are not able, until now, to conduct dialogues between themselves in this area! All those who came and studied in this country are supposed to help their people and their communities. The problem we have here is that we have people from the remains of the war; which carries with it its problems. They consider things this way: either to be responsible on the front line, or no institutions or community. Furthermore, they don’t have any skills, and are not qualified for such jobs. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany).

c. Past and Current Organizing

After the fall of Baghdad, were there any attempts to form any organization? Yes there have been several attempts. After the fall of Baghdad and the arrest of two of the Palestinian embassy’s employees, no one was left. There was the president of the Palestinian club who, in the absence of officials, appointed himself as president. There was communication between him and us where we told him to run the club or the community and, one way or another, he did. The current Palestinian situation doesn’t allow more than that. Whether what he said was correct or not, we can’t accuse him, but we heard that the club received big donations. Also, the families which lived in the club were not poor; yet many of them closed their houses and went to camp in the club to receive relief: sugar, flour, mineral water, and other items. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’faraniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq).

I started as a member in the Palestinian Youth Association. To be fair it achieved some goals, and there was cooperation between it and the Palestinian Association. We visited some schools years ago, and told them about a certain project, and the immigrants in general, and about the Palestinian refugees in particular. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

There still isn’t a preparatory committee for the community. But this issue is taken into account: preparatory committee has not been, till now, elected. But there are representatives from Palestinian factions and sectors; and some of them may be in the preparatory committee. The same applies to the engineers, or the doctors, youth or women. They will have representatives in the preliminary committee. The biggest representation will be for independent businessmen. These representatives will be invited to a meeting, to be followed by forming a preliminary committee for the community; in preparation for a general conference in which a council will be elected. The council will consist of these basic social sectors, and it will start work upon its creation. This is one of the best ways to organize the Palestinian community’s affairs in Yemen, in order to ease some burdens and distribute responsibilities, and to create projects and job opportunities for the community members. (Participant, Public meeting, Sana’a, Yemen)

I want to answer the question related to the nature of existing institutions in the camps. As for the bodies, they are divided into three: sport clubs, cultural clubs, and committees to improve the camps. The sport clubs organize sport activities in addition to performing some tasks of the humanitarian committee. In fact, I participated in one of these committees, the orphan’s committee, and they were caring for children and teaching them patriotic Palestinian sentiments. However there are people who think that this humanitarian work is actually political, because we try to preserve our rights, especially our right of return. Regarding the formation of the sports clubs, cultural clubs, and camps’ committees, the appointments are chosen by a discredited procedure, which doesn’t allow educated youth who are directed towards the Palestinian cause to join. We don’t feel that there is any contradiction between our Palestinian identity and our Jordanian citizenship. Rather we feel loyal to Palestine and to Jordan. I left Palestine when I was three years old but I am very loyal to it. Looking at the nature of the relations between these institutions and the camps’ residents, especially the sport and cultural clubs, there is indeed a very good and marked relationship. Yet you wouldn’t find any sign that indicated that these committees exist in the camp! I challenge anyone to go to the camps and see this for themselves. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

You came here and saw the Palestinians after the collapse of the regime. At first we formed a national organization, but this was dismantled. We then formed a Palestinian association or organization, basically a Council of Elders. Every area wants to control the association. We suggested two for Za’faraniya and two for the municipalities and so on. You made a good comment: the problems
of Za’faraniya are different from those of the municipalities or any other place. Every area has its unique status. This Council of Elders meets once a week but there is no social solidarity, otherwise the association would have been a success. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’faraniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq).

A few years ago, we tried to meet with a union in which the Palestinian Ambassador was involved and where we gathered eight people (engineers and teachers) to speak in Danish. Sadly, we met and held elections, and after two weeks communication was lost, and so was the contact. We tried several times to meet and have elections. (Participant, Public Meeting, Copenhagen, Denmark).

Summer camps are good, and experiences are being exchanged. We are weak in this city, We had sent messages so that the community football team can play football matches with Danish teams, only they didn’t reply back. And if we mobilise among the community members, it would not only they didn’t reply back. And if we mobilise (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark).

There used to be the institutions called Shafiq and Ajfan, and there used to be activities… and there were exhibitions. (Participant, Youth meeting, Damman, Saudi Arabia)

To give the historical side regarding ourselves as a community in Sweden, particularly Malmo, in this association we represent a form of organization and mobilization for the community. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

What was the nature of the relationship between you, this committee, the Right of Return committees and the other existing committees? Was there communication and contact? Honestly there wasn’t enough communication between us… How should I say this… we weren’t an independent association, we were affiliated to the Palestinian Association, and when we arrived there were a lot of suggestions and activities, but education was the main thing. When we spoke about giving lessons on the history of Palestine, it was with the aim of learning and knowing ourselves before we got down to business, so that we are able to convey the picture ourselves. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

We are registered as German federations in Berlin. The constitution entitles us to perform social work. There is no regard for communication with Palestine, the PLO, the Palestinian people, or getting in touch with Palestinian history, or the Israeli occupation of Palestine, because these are political activities, and we are supposed to perform social work. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

There are some institutions such as the Palestinian Association. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

As for communication within a single structure or framework, there are periodic meetings. We hold two meetings monthly, where there is freedom of expression and discussions. There is also continual participation in every activity that every structure holds, in addition to taking other people’s opinions into consideration. There must be opposition. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashideh camp, Lebanon)

I should take my kids to activities, like in the old days, when we used to visit Palestinians’ exhibitions and fairs to let them see Palestinian traditions like the Dabka. There have been big developments on the scene, but we want to perform these activities. We want people to mobilize. (Participant, Youth meeting, Damman, Saudi Arabia)

In Shatila Camp, we elected a committee for Shatila residents in a democratic way. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

The services committees in the camps belong to more than one body. Firstly there is UNRWA, the institutions of the civil society, nursery centres, centres for the handicapped, and women’s centres. There are also the clubs and the Camps’ Committees. The clubs are under the authority of the Higher Council for Youth, while the Camps’ Committees are under the authority of the Department for Palestinian Affairs, and this a representative department under the authority of the host country. I don’t think that these committees are totally politicized as they are always present. It is true that the incumbents stay in their offices for more than 20 years, and I am with the push for renewal to have young blood. There is indeed young blood in the Camps’ Committees. Those young men are working hard. We have doctors, engineers, and intellectuals who work on a volunteer basis. However, these committees are limited by administrative directives. They don’t have responsibilities that connect them to the relevant authorities. They are an arm for the official institutions of the Department of the Palestinian Affairs and the Jordanian Foreign Ministry. They merely convey the picture and implement certain things. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

For example, we have here civic associations or social activities that have representatives who are elected, so one can be a mechanism of communication with the project or with the next representative. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)
“Al-Dar” is a German institution, with a basic difference in that it is the only [Palestinian] federation recognized by the Berlin government. Hence it can take care of the family, based on the German children and youth care, so handling issues is based upon this law on family unions. This implies that it should have a way to handle the German institution and to coexist with people, and to face problems and solve them; this is especially the case when a big group of specialists hold periodic meetings in which they discuss these problems and try to solve them within their capacities. Therefore, this federation is a communication and contact point within the institutions in general. There is the Palestinian Women’s Union which works with women, and there is Al-Karameh club which works with German youth and with youth empowerment. The essential meetings for the community must create frameworks and foundations to confront people’s problems and concerns, and try to solve them. Maybe there aren’t any problems, but we must check this first. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

I remember when we issued a magazine and a cultural digest in the name of several Palestinian journalists in Saudi Arabia. The beginning was with the 1987 Intifada, and these issues were a success until Oslo. After that, no one could support the project and the printing, so we stopped work. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

There is a webpage called “The Palestinian Net” which helps the Palestinian community. We have been developing it for a year and a half. It contains valuable information. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark).

Concerning the questions that were raised here in Al-Jali camp, we have a Popular Committee which was the first to be formed in 1970 in the Lebanese camps. This Popular Committee played a big role in serving as an example and role model for the other Popular Committees that were established in Lebanon. These Popular Committees used to transmit the camps’ problems, but unfortunately they were divided. Hence there are Popular Committees in every camp. No connection existed with the Popular Committees about general matters, especially concerning the reduction of UNRWA services, and the problems our people suffer as a result of this reduction. We also have established associations in this camp. Because of the small size of this camp, there is constant communication with these institutions to transmit the camp’s problems, whether at the level of UNRWA, or on the level of daily work. (Participant, Public Meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon).

I want to say in the first place that I feel very glad to be amongst a group of Palestinians who are mostly young people. I belong to – and dare I say it – I am a fourth generation Palestinian; I am a member of the Palestinian National Council; I am a very active member of the Palestinian Club and also take part in the Palestinian political cause, the fight for peace in Palestine. At this moment we are dealing with an issue that is evidently important to tackle due to 100 years of Arab immigration to Chile. This is only one aspect of the Palestinian issue, however. In other words we are undermining the other aspect. I don’t want to deal with that aspect. As a member of the Palestinian National Council I have had the chance, through the Palestinian Club, to mobilise myself and other colleagues in the Palestinian and Arab community in general so that the voice and struggle of the Palestinian people is heard. This is also due to the thankful presence of our president. In other words we have a space where we can state our problems. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile).

2. Challenges and Obstacles

a. External Pressures

Were there attempts by the society in Za’faraniya to form a social committee or something of the sort to run the local affairs of the community? Yes there were attempts to form a committee, but the [Ba’ath] party came and threatened it. It stood in our way and threatened us several times, so the committee members withdrew. We even did a survey counting the refugees in Za’faraniya. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’faraniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq).

Regarding obstacles facing the community, I think there are two issues that we need to talk about more, and find ways of tackling…First is the issue of security and the climate of discussion surrounding it. Some people in the community sought to work with the police and the government and decided to inform on other people in the community. I think this is absolutely critical at this point because I am sure this will mean that activists working on Palestine or Iraq or other issues will increasingly be reported to the police by members of the community. Someone mentioned today that this is already happening in Toronto. Hence I think this forum is a way of discussing and making it really clear that there should be no activities of that sort, be it collaboration with the police or setting up surveillance within our community. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).
At some point, there was elitism distinguishing the poor from the rich. We should love and know each other regardless of religion or profession. I congratulate you and everyone abroad who took this step. This is my first time to meet with Arab women and with Arabs in general. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

The problem is that we did not know until this moment that there are problems that affect our community. This is obviously of major interest to our young generation. I know this because I have observed it a lot. One problem is the lack of facilities for so many Palestinian professionals so they might work in this country. I have observed on more than one occasion over the past fifty years how Palestinians were directly attacked, with the Palestinian Sports Club being a case in point. I dared to talk about that event publicly in a book, about how they tried to eliminate the Palestinian Sports Club. People do not know this, but that’s the way it is. Deep down there has always been persecution. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

The Islamic Association for Palestine, which is a national organization, was hit with a lawsuit to convey the message of “just so you know”. Zionists are hitting us with a lawsuit that is costing us over 100 thousand dollars already. Because we are a weaker community as a whole, as Palestinians, we couldn’t hire lawyers as they could hire them. They hire the best law firms in Chicago that occupy two floors. They want us to stop talking and organizing people because of all the activities we did. We did a lot of conventions, a lot of talks, mahrajanat [festivals], workshops, and so forth. We also tried to publish newspapers and so on, and that really is an ongoing cost. That really did get what we want, which is the problem that she is talking about. We asked the community but they just forget it, closedown, and go home. This is a solution we tried. We tried to make a shortcut, but it’s not a resolution and this is not my personal view. I am talking from the view that I am the head of that organization. It’s not the way to do it that whenever somebody slams the door you just run. It has come to you, and we have to fight back. And whether we win or not that’s God Almighty’s choice, but at the end we need the support of the community that she was talking about. Because of the cost we could not maintain an office and we could not maintain the utilities. That is a problem as you know you couldnt do any workshops, and so on, and that’s what she is talking about. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

At present, the committees dedicated to improving the camps are not the institutions that represent the Palestinian people. At the Parliamentary Palestine Committee, we asked the Ministry of External Affairs to define the principles for selecting the members of these committees, but we didn’t achieve anything in this area. The Ministry totally ignored us, though we demanded this since the first since last September. This is because there are no principles or standards to select these members. Selection instead happens in a variety of different ways, such as friendship or nepotism. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

Talking about “civic needs” for the refugees leads us to talk about building civic institutions and structures. I would like to mention again that 80% of the refugees live outside the camps. When we want to talk about civic institutions and structures for refugees, we should realize that this is something that will not be allowed easily by the authorities. Also, we know that any civil society institution needs to obtain permission from the official authorities in order to be allowed to work. Therefore it is not possible to establish civic institutions that care about the refugees’ problems unless they are to follow the institutions of civil society, which are research institutions. Here lies the problem. How can we build real institutions that represent the refugee communities? According to the political reality in the country, it is very difficult for such institutions to be allowed. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

Now regarding the possibility to work here I can freely say that politics is the key. If there were Palestinian political forces working on a large scale here on the level of the unions, political authorities, universities, and social and scientific centres for twenty or twenty five years; if there were Palestinian forces which really wanted to work, I personally think that there would be great possibilities to do something or perform an activity. However, as I told you earlier, our work is seasonal and depends on individuals. It depends on one or two individuals. If they work, the work gets done. We don’t have the institution mentality. I think this is the problem that we all have inherited, and I don’t know how to get rid of it. (Participant, Public meeting, Oslo, Norway)
Despite the presence of our legitimate representative, which is the PLO, there is no proper body set up to discuss the refugees’ conditions with the Lebanese government and international bodies and NGOs. Second, concerning organizing institutions, there are no productive and scientific institutions that are capable of solving people’s problems. Also, some of the PLO’s institutions became private institutions that work for the interest of certain individuals.

There are also popular committees in the camps which live inside the reality of the camp. Thus they are unable to solve the long-standing problems such as the security problem, the miserable social situation, and the infrastructure. In addition there is corruption of the members of the popular committees, which manifests itself in terms of prostitution houses, gambling, and theft. (Participant, Workers’ meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

In view of the absence of the institutions we just talked about, which are the PLO and the unions, we were saying that every Palestinian society in this compulsory exile has to be a creative one. This is so that they can invent a way to communicate with this community and to express themselves, whether in the local community, with English people, or others, or to communicate with Palestinian people here. Now the problem we discuss year after year and deemed that failure, in creating this structure and this institution that expresses the Palestinian effort or existence. As a result this is our current situation as a Palestinian community. We have two choices: either to be dispersed or to become a creative one. This is so that they can invent a way to communicate with this community and to express themselves, whether in the local community, with English people, or others, or to communicate with Palestinian people here.

In order to reach our goals and be able to see our social issues, school, the Eid [Islamic holiday], or to serve our political issues like demonstrations, or even to send delegations to the Occupied Territories to better know our cause. This is a very important issue. We failed years ago, and deserved that failure, in creating this structure and this institution that expresses the Palestinian

I honestly don’t know anything called popular committees. There is the organization committee. Here, every popular committee is associated with the organization in their own way. Besides that, the committee doesn’t offer anything that can help people. It is only looking after its own interests. Everyone in the organization knows exactly what he wants. In short, it is not fulfilling its duties in offering services, making people happy, or building infrastructure. For example, we in Shatila camp haven’t had electricity for 18 months, because the popular committee is selling Shatila electricity outside the western neighbourhood. They are earning money which is wasted. What is my suggestion? It is that I want the popular committee to treat the people as one family and fulfill its duties. I want the people to elect the popular committee. What happens at the moment is that the organization would appoint anyone it chooses to replace someone who had died. This is not appropriate. People should choose who should join and who shouldn’t. The money that comes, which the state says is a few million, is not received by the camp. Where does the money that they are gathering go to? (Participant, Public Meeting for Disabled Persons, Beirut, Lebanon)

We need many things in this country. What can you offer us? We are dispersed and we don’t have a union. The unions you mentioned don’t exist. We don’t have a workers union or a teacher’s union, nothing. What can you do for us to help? We need associations to be established in this country so that they can offer services to the Arab community. How can you help me? As an individual you can’t do anything, but as an association from abroad surely you can. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)
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I think that the Palestinian community supports us and provides everything to us, but there aren’t enough people who work. People have many priorities like sitting in a coffee shop or even watching a Palestinian movie. Also we don’t have a common goal agreed to by everyone. It is true that it is difficult to gather people, but we should also have stronger organization and be better organized to know where we should start. … we are not an institution. By that I mean we can implement any idea that we have. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Stockholm/Uppsala, Sweden)

The PLO and [The PLO representative in Lebanon] in particular should study the camp’s conditions and the corners and narrow streets of Shatila camp where people have suffered and still suffer; what was suffered during the Sabra and Shatila massacre is enough. We tried to communicate our problems to Lebanese society so that they can be transmitted from there to the world. For example, we wrote in Al-Safir newspaper more than once about our problems with water, electricity and the thefts which the popular committees were responsible for. (Participant, Workers’ meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

The office of the popular committee gets benefits without giving anything. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

The situation relating to electricity and water was different. In Nahr El-Bared camp, they were not taking electricity receipts from us. They do now, however; and anyone who doesn’t have money faces problems. There is money in relation to water; they are providing sewer lines, yet they don’t provide water or electricity. They are not doing anything. I mean to say that the popular committee does not have any role; it is only stealing, not working. What do you suggest for such a committee which steals? How do you think it will work? It should build hospitals and do something for the Palestinian people; it should play its role in providing services to the Palestinian people; building a hospital since UNRWA is not doing anything. (Participant, Public Meeting for Disabled Persons, Beirut, Lebanon)

There must be representation in the unions. There are no independents. If someone doesn’t belong to any faction but still wants to help socially, he is not allowed to join these committees and unions. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Burj el-Shemali camp, Lebanon)

For a year or two now, the youth in the popular committees are being totally ignored. The popular committees became monopolistic, and those who are responsible for them stay in their posts without changing. We went abroad and studied in various countries, and hence we have a different mentality. We have many things we want to discuss and we also have activities we want to perform, and these activities should have a basis which is represented by the popular committees. Therefore I demand activating those popular committees in order to solve all our problems and so that we can convey them to the PLO, whether by establishing electronic connections or creating periodic activities through the activation of these committees. Thank you. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

The officials are not responsible. The security organizations in charge sometimes don’t preserve security. They don’t look after the issue of the theft of our electricity and the organization of the electricity. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

The committees for improving the camps are not effective. With all my respect to any member in these committees, most of their members are illiterate or have problems with the security services, and they perform roles that only serve their own interests. They haven’t offered anything useful for the refugees. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

It is true that we have a popular committee, but it is not effective. We don’t have a popular committee which is elected by the organizations, the institutions and the local society in the camp. The popular committee is not doing its job, and we demand that it should do it. We want the popular committee to include all the factions in the local society, and that every organization has its representative in it. This is absent here. That is what we demand. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

Even the committee that was formed by the Haifa club here was, regrettably, irresponsible. And it didn’t offer solutions for the community. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)
The popular committees in the camps don’t legitimately represent the majority of the Palestinian people. It is supposed to include the northern regions in these committees. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

The misery on the local level in Lebanon is not as important as the suffering of individuals who live the Palestinian reality and who suffer more. The camps in Al-Shatat suffer from the political reality that our people live, especially the factions. This suffering is represented by not having a Popular Committee in which all the Palestinian factions can participate, including doctors and teachers from all the social and civil issues that articulate and achieve the camp’s goals. This means that the Popular Committee is not constituted from all these factions: from doctors, teachers, engineers, and women. These obstacles stand in the way of offering services to the camp. We will achieve the success through our unity when these popular committees are formed from all the factions and draw on the capacities of our people in the refugee camps. I think that all these issues can be solved. But as long as the Popular Committee is detached and depends on political reality, our social, legal and civil conditions will remain undone. Our suffering on the Palestinian level exceeds our suffering on the local level. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

The point is about existing social institutions in the camp, such as Najdeh and Sumud institutions. First the task of these institutions is not clear for all the camp’s residents. We hear that there is an institution which is called Najdeh or Sumud institution or other institutions, but when we try to discuss this with their delegations, they just give us short notes rather than a comprehensive description of their work. Another thing which relates to the popular committee is that there is no communication between it and the camp’s residents. Even if there was communication, it would be basic. This means that if someone needs anything he would go to the popular committee. Therefore, we hope that the popular committee would circulate voluntary bulletins for the camp about electricity and water; and about the conditions and formation of the popular committee. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Nahr El-Bared camp, Lebanon)

Just for the record, as Al-Awda we have asked for official participation in the official community organization every year, and every year we have been denied. Also for the record, we have requested formal membership in Palestine House, but we were also denied both as an organization and on an individual basis. If this is part of this exercise maybe it should be recorded. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

First we want to talk about civic structures. Concerning the existing popular committee in the Palestinian camps which represents us, or the organizations inside it, we can notice that some (but not all) of the organizations are not present as a result of favouritism in the popular committees. So if we seek to assign a representative for a certain neighbourhood, his organization will affect his decisions, and this is what has led to the failure of the popular committees. Another thing which relates to the popular committee is that there is no communication between it and the camp’s residents. If there was communication, it would be basic. This means that if someone needs anything he would go to the popular committee. Therefore, we hope that the popular committee would circulate voluntary bulletins for the camp about electricity and water; and about the conditions and formation of the popular committee. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Nahr El-Bared camp, Lebanon)

I want to raise the issue of the lack of financial support and I guess support groups such as Al-Awda and the community. I feel like there is a huge disconnect between the community and these organizations that are trying to do a lot of great work on volunteer basis on a very low budgets. I think our community here needs to support these efforts a little bit more financially and in other ways so that it would be within my community here. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

Concerning legitimate authority in the camps, we have the popular committees. At some stage, the popular committee in Nahr El-Bared was formed. Of course the circumstances that accompanied its formation are well known. At
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If we want to get to those structures we must activate our links from the inside, but not through standing outside cursing them, but through going in and working. Force me to do the tasks you want, don’t just alienate yourself from the meetings saying “they don’t do anything”. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

The implementation would be easy if we could create committees. We have been always saying that we want to create committees and associations, but eventually people disagree with each other and we end up doing nothing. We always focus on creating committees and association but eventually we discover that we didn’t achieve the main goal. I wish we had an active group. Take this meeting for example, and we know that there is a second and a third meeting. For example, we started our association with fifteen people in the administration, but now we are two or three. We should accompany actions with words because the issue is very important. No one knows how our hearts bleed because we are forced out of our country, and because we want to return to Palestine. It’s our right to exercise our rights like any other nation and any other country. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Malmö, Sweden)

I want to give an opinion. I think that as students of the Arab school here we have developed a really important task. First, I established the Dabka group here in the school. I danced for the president Mahmud Abbas, and he felt very happy to see that young people here remembered traditions that happened in Palestine. We saw him cry, we saw him get excited, and truthfully, many times we have experienced this when we go to dance in different areas. Grandparents or older people tell us how by dancing young people are recovering the roots. They get excited and their eyes fill up with tears. They become very happy by witnessing that the youth are recovering these traditions in some way.

I think there are many young people in elite schools here. What they are called I am not sure but they are schools with gringo names. I don’t know what reason they enrol their kids there instead of enrolling them into the Arab School. It might be due to the stereotypes they have, but somehow one must know and get into this school. One should enquire and see students that have graduated from here and one will realise what the students are like and the education they receive. This is not to say something without meaning. This is because that is how you hurt them and somehow at this minute they regard the school as something that is not. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

I want to speak about an important issue for the Palestinian community here. They all have the same concerns, albeit differing from one person to another. Our life has become bills to be paid: the house rent, the school fees, phone bills and money for our children. I have to take care of my children, and I am willing to work until 10:00 PM to provide for them. But what about those who have 20 year old daughters who are yet to meet someone willing to marry them, because they forget their social life and instead work day and night and have no support? For example Egyptians come here to work and save in order to buy a piece of land that is equivalent to about seven thousand Saudi Riyals, a sum that you can spend in two months. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

As Palestinian people the really sad part is that now we cannot actually talk about the occupation. The occupation has become the correct thing and this is the first time where somebody that is occupying has support for them. They think occupation is ok for Palestinians. Occupation is the way of terrorism. We use the phrase occupation is terrorism. They call us terrorist, we call them occupiers. Occupation is the start of all terrorism. This is what we cannot talk about. This is because our lack of political involvement. Our community is busy with itself. Everybody has a place to go, nobody really cares about the situation, and nobody talks about the refugees. “Nafsi Nafsi” [Me, me] is the only thing cared for. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

We lack community activity and cohesion. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

Sadly, before we look at channels and structures, one should ask himself as a Palestinian or a participant in the Palestinian activities in Sweden about what did he do and how did he interact
in the current situation. Democracy comes from inside and can’t be imposed on people. If the popular base did not interact, there will never be democracy, and the decision will be in the hands of a small group. All the brothers here participated in one way or another. I am talking only about the Palestinian Association in Stockholm, because we speak in the name of the Palestinian Association in Stockholm. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

When the blockade was imposed on Iraq, I organized an exhibition by myself, and you know that we can’t enter Baghdad and this is written in our passports because of the Syrian-Iraqi relationship. So I organized an exposition that contains only my work—more than 40 pieces—and we raised 20 or 25 thousand dollars from them, and we bought milk and medicines. But each of us was working separately. For ten years, I have been asking them to organize a fair, telling them that I would donate everything, for my grandfather accompanying his brother was expelled by the Jordanian government for being in the Palestinian Communist party in the army and that is clearly a life experience that my grandfather keeps along with my family. The other thing I want to say is that I study political science and we are pushed to go to empirical issues a lot. I do not know if what I am going to say is very empirical but I think that we keep giving excuses for the Palestinians that aren’t here, more and more excuses. I think that there is no better motivation to organise, no better motivation to be able to learn, than the fact that there is an Arabic Studies Centre at the University of Chile where what is happening with the Palestinian people is known. At the moment, we are a people who are being massacred, a people whose rights have all been violated. Yet, and for all our talk about the youth, Jewish students are more interested in the matter than our own youth. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

This means that activity here is merely comprised of individual efforts. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

The social problems the community face in Sweden are part of the general trend of desertion that has affected our national work. This is a very important matter that we should take into consideration. The other matter is that no one is in the mood to listen to the representatives of the associations or an organization, for every assembly turns into a mêlée. This is also one of the reasons that keep people away from such meetings. We have been repeating the same discussions for 25 years. Basically, individualized work became more appropriate for people. People are searching for channels and coordinating through satellite channels which are performing the role of the media, because there is no capacity to fund these through institutions, and there is no support for projects, and there is no way to issue a newspaper. And if there is a newspaper, it only represents the community not the national position as a whole, and it is usually very weak. The other issue I wanted to talk about is the alternatives. We live in a democratic country where there is pluralism, and everyone should find the style he likes and work according to it. There are a lot of academics who can play an important role instead of us neglecting their opinion in the discussion. There should be unions other than the labour union whose goal has always been political and factional representation. Let’s be technocrats and produce more and divide these fields instead of mingling things and feeling lost. Everyone wants to do something, but isn’t satisfied by any of the available frameworks which they do not find representative. Third, the experiences of our civil society should differ from those prevailing in the Arab world. Let us come up with a framework of ours that we can agree upon. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)
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I can guarantee you this is something happening community here, we are a divided community, and structures for the Palestinian refugees, we are not a empowering ourselves and taking control of the on Palestinian feet, we are stopping ourselves from We are stumbling on our feet, we are stumbling here.

I would like to congratulate the group that carried out this exercise and has arrived at very interesting results. I have worked for more than 40 years in institutions of the Arab community and unfortunately I have arrived at many of the conclusions that this group has contributed to: there is a lack of identity amongst the descendants of our community. The points you have indicated show that there is a need for us to renovate the concepts that we have of the Arab community. We should first support our professionals. There is a great number of young people that we read about on the front pages and newspaper headlines descended from our community. We have no way of getting near them. I think that we should have them in our community, be interested in them, and appeal to them, so that they could serve as an engine, making the rest of us proud of being Palestinian, Syrian or Lebanese descendants. It is important because this feeling is being lost, unfortunately for our grandchildren (I speak for my grandchildren really) if we stagnate we will gradually disappear, which is why I congratulate you for the effort that you are making.

You should ask me, because I am directly touched by this issue. You can’t talk about the right of return before talking about the notion of refugees. But I think that, unlike people who live in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, or any other country; we are not citizens in refugee camps that can be easily counted.

The situation here is that we have 20 or 21 different Palestinian bodies which call themselves associations or federations or unions. These associations are united in a general federation for the Palestinian associations and communities in Sweden, which is good. Unfortunately, each framework has its own problems and characteristics. As to the communities in the cities, these communities acquired a representative status exclusive to the Palestinian associations and were not inclusive of everyone. For example, the Stockholm association includes 10, 70, 100, 200 people out of 5000 people; Uppsala association has the same number. The communities were not able, until now, to set a program to unite the Palestinians under defined and clear goals. The same applies to the general federation and the associations, which don’t have a defined program that unites these communities and motivates them to progress with their work. This organization has existed, as the brother said, for many years, yet it is an ineffective organization whose president is often abroad. He speaks in the name of the community and the federation while all activity is absent. Now let’s discuss the other issue concerning the official Palestinian delegation to Sweden or the Palestinian representatives who are here. The delegation faces the same problems as the federation, and this means that there is no permanent and constant relationship with the Palestinian community unless there is a certain issue to discuss at that time in the delegation in which case the communication is initiated, and vice versa. If a certain federation wishes to discuss some points, it makes the necessary connections to do so.
Yes we have so many organizations, we have Haq Al-Awda [Right of Return], we have another website called Palestine…

You are talking about the organizations we have in Chicago?
And they are not talking to each other; only sometimes, and even when do talk they start arguing with each other. They don’t have one goal, one hadaf, I don’t think we have networking amongst ourselves. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

I’m speaking of the Return Centre or the committees which they call the Right of Return Committees. Let’s talk about our experience in Lebanon. When you join a new organization you will have friction with those who are already on the scene. You should instead coordinate with those who have been active from the beginning and develop work and join in a bigger association. I mean to say that correcting what actually exists is better than destroying it and starting all over again. (Participant, Public Meeting, Copenhagen, Denmark)

There are some of these structures in the Palestinian neighbourhoods, but they are fragmented. This means that there is the union of so-and-so, and the union of such-and-such. But they are the same unions from the inside. So is there any effective tie or is there any effective communication between the residents of this country, and is there an effective contact between these fragmented bodies? Unfortunately, no. There is no effective communication as we can clearly see at present. Communication is achieved individually; I meet with my friends and family to talk about our concerns, but these conversations are individual and unorganized. Frankly, there aren’t any effective or organized communications between members of the Palestinian people and their populations. What is more regrettable is that even the clubs have turned into hangouts or spaces that harbour things we don’t approve of, and their role is contrary to the one they should assume. As members of broader society we must improve and develop and add. But, alas. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

Listen, there are more organizations than there is coordination; there are too many organizations. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

In Lebanon, the PLO ignored humanitarian institutions that were supposed to be activated. The humanitarian and charitable institutions, in addition to the federations that were created in Lebanon by the PLO – I will not name these federations because they are numerous – are well-known to everyone, such as the Palestinian Red Crescent Association, and the General Union of Palestinian Women and all the federations. There should be coordination between these institutions and the humanitarian and charitable associations on the local level before we address the associations outside their framework. We should coordinate with each other and present a clear picture about how we can integrate with each other and participate within the group leaving individuality aside. There should be communal participation, and I think we can figure out a solution without forming too many institutions like those created by the PLO. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Burj el-Barajneh, Lebanon)

We know that there are many different associations here be they Palestinian or Islamic ones. There are many of them in this country and in many European countries. But I feel that the activity of the existing associations here is not up to the standard. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

As for our local representative in Norway, unfortunately we don’t have a Palestinian community body to represent us. There are no serious efforts, just activities with the aim of getting to know each other as community members. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

I think we need to ask ourselves what we can do and have to do. I think we need to define it at different levels, starting with a wish list. The sister was talking about the way we could disseminate information. We need a TV station to begin with. We have excellent communities and organizations, but they are separated, and we have to link them forcefully. We have the Islamic foundation and many other groups but they are not working in harmony. We could elect a council representing all these organizations in Chicago…we don’t have that though. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

We must begin to understand why we want committees and federations and unions to talk in our name. We, the Palestinian community, must know what we want. Are we gathered now in order to have the voice which we were deprived of all our lives, or to discuss politics and international resolutions, which no one has been able to implement? Did we come to this meeting to in order to reach clear conclusions, as a Palestinian community that lives in Denmark, or was the aim to discuss the politics that were implemented so many years ago with which they swallowed us? Let’s lay down foundations and priorities for discussion. (Participant, Public Meeting, Koge, Denmark)
3. Organizational Approaches and Goals

Through the existing institutions in the community, and through the doctors union, the engineers union, labour unions, and students union. These institutions should be activated, for the situation has become unbearable. (Participant, Public meetings, Athens, Greece)

Our unity in Denmark and the strengthening of our community is very important in order to make our voice heard to all international institutions that look after us as refugees. Therefore we should form federations or associations, and form an organization for everyone. (Participant, Public Meeting, Aarhus, Denmark).

Another issue is the way we think. We always think about how to solve our problems and what we want to do, and that we live a tragedy and we think of some solution. Maybe this has something to do with our nature as Palestinians, and that we always celebrate tragedies, and the catastrophe, and the massacres and victims, like Sabra and Shatila massacres for example. We generally celebrate such problems and tragedies, but we never think of devising solutions, and what proper acts we can do, and how to shelve problems. We don’t think of these issues which are seriously complicated and which can’t be solved overnight. This is something that has to do with our upbringing; the way of thinking and the culture are different. That’s why we must reproduce a new culture which will qualify us to solve our problems and to form committees and communicate whether with the host country or the PLO or even with other international institutions and foreign communities in this country, like the Islamic and Arabic communities. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany).

We should create this local representative body if it’s not already present. Call it a confederation, a community, a public conference, or any other name, but we need to create this organizational structure that would defend our legitimate rights, especially our right as refugees to return to our land, country and properties and to make our voice heard on the local Norwegian level. It is true that we have obligations, but we have rights too. Who would defend these rights? Who would demand these rights? You can call it a community committee, a conference committee, or whatever you like, but if we lack such a thing, we should create it. Therefore, on this occasion and from this place, we call our brothers in Norway and wherever there is a Palestinian presence to create this thing that would express their opinions, convey their voices and defend their rights. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

We want to form a committee, and devise a method and a program to connect people. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

I think you should read it closely; examine it in detail. Because you are taking us back to the past. But we want to look to the future. I’m telling you that we want to organize ourselves as a community here. (Participant, Public Meeting, Helsingor, Denmark).

Anyway, there are a lot of frameworks and priorities for us as a community in the United States. The journey of a thousand miles starts with one step. This step was, one way or another; the Islamic Association for Palestine which we were honoured to work with for about seven years. This is the revolution, but now the arena is nearly empty, and now we want the first step. And although the numbers are small, we shouldn’t conclude this good meeting without understanding that we must take the first step towards education, political work, and media involvement. These issues are very important. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

How are we to organize ourselves so that our right will not be lost through these political and international mazes? We want to work on this basis. I don’t want to talk about the past and why didn’t we vote or something; we want to work in order to be able to vote; we want to organize ourselves as communities. As for the PLO, I think that the PLO is the only representative of all Palestinian people, and it exists until now; no one can deny that, because this is established by Arab and international resolutions which can’t be cancelled. We don’t want to talk about what happened in Palestine as result of the Oslo agreements. But generally speaking, the PLO is the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. We want now to concentrate on how to organize ourselves so that our political and social rights will not be lost, so we don’t want to talk about the past and why we didn’t vote, we want to discuss in details how to organize ourselves and contact others from Sweden, or at least those who live within a 25 kilometre radius. (Participant, Public Meeting, Helsingor, Denmark)

It’s true that work problems paralyze the work of the Palestinian institutions in Berlin, whether unions or federations or sport or social clubs. But why? Because when I establish a company without knowing what I really want from this company, it will certainly fail. And this is what is happening in the community on what relates to Palestinian institutions and unions. For they don’t know, until now, what they want to do, and whether they want to work as a social or political institution. Another flaw is related to the
level of cooperation and coordination between these institutions. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany).

a. Approaches in Organizing
The PLO should be activated, for it suffers from a lot of problems. Refugees also live in extreme poverty and they want to return to their country. The refugees’ role should be mobilised. People are losing their connections and belongings, and these should be strengthened. Mahmud Abbas does not guarantee our right, while Resolution 194 does guarantee our Right to Return. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

I agree with those who said that there should be general committees. These can be elected at present, but they should be within the frame of the state, in coordination with the PLO whose role in the camps is totally neglected. I would like to say to [representative] that our political thinking in the camps is declining. We cannot hear anything any longer. And as brother [Participant] said previously, we used to hear about the Right of Return and about compensation that can reach 30 or 40 thousand dollars, but now we hear sums like ten dollars. This indicates that the political angle is absent. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

In identifying our needs as Palestinians, we should realize that we, living in Australia, are among the most privileged Palestinians in the world. We should not be talking about “needs” as such, but about our duty to represent and be active. Talking about needs is selfish. What is our role and what is our duty? This is the question we should be asking. We have a platform, how are we to still serve the cause. With the opportunities that we have available, we should be thinking in these terms first. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

I came to Greece three years ago to finish my higher education. I got a Master’s degree, and now I am preparing for the PhD. I am from Bethlehem. For me, it is very nice to be with Palestinian people. It is true that I am from Bethlehem and didn’t live there for long, only two or three years. Most of the time I lived outside of Palestine due to family circumstances. We were in Kuwait and also in Jordan. During my time abroad, I met other Palestinians, and I was really living in a Palestinian atmosphere. When I was studying for my Master’s degree, I hung out with Palestinians and we used to sit together and chat. As for the Palestinian cause, it is a comprehensive cause, and it is wrong to separate the right of return issue or the refugees issue from the other problems. I think that if we could solve a certain problem that the community faces, we can solve another problem. Things are deeply inter-related. If we could achieve a certain degree of coherence, we then can preserve the cause, and gradually chase desperation and fear away. Sometimes we may wish to be presidents and leaders and we should renounce that. Instead, we should be usual participants embodying the spirit of modesty and learning to love and appreciate the values of humanity. We shouldn’t be afraid of desperation or abandon those who have problems; we should help them. Merely trying is an honour in itself. I am not among those who like to talk very much and I don’t like to enter discussions. Maybe [the moderator] doesn’t know that I am very busy in this period, for I have exams, but she asked me to be here and I said ok because I like to sit with people, but I don’t like to waste time on just vain talk. I like to work and I am against traditional ideas. For example, one may suggest that we go to a demonstration, so we do it once or twice, but then what? (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

In attempting to answer the question of whom we are communicating with, I stress the three most important roles in our communication in Australia and working together as active youth: a) raising money to alleviate the suffering b) community work, building a strong base and strengthening the Palestinian community here and c) communication with the general public in Australia, whether in the government sphere or elsewhere. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

The exercise we are conducting now affords us, Palestinians and Arabs, an excellent opportunity to reach a common foundation. Our community members should help each other and live together on the basis of respect and harmony; this should be the future of our community. Our professionals are the product of the efforts exerted by the Arab community over the course of the past 100 years. In other words, the Palestinian Arab professional community in general strives to be prominent and productive in this country and not to be discriminated against. I think I could be wrong but it is an impression that I point out honestly and I have lived through it one way or another during the course of my membership in the Palestinian National Council, (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

Don’t think about issues which would lead us to doing things that do not correspond to reality. It’s about suggestions for the Palestinian presence in general in this country. It’s not beyond the community, but rather with the cooperation of the community and all the formal institutions in the country which represent the Palestinian people, whether as a community or an authority, or unions, in any form and any colour. The aim is to arrange the Palestinian presence under
Community Structures and Channels

3. Organizational Approaches and Goals

b. Coordination and Collective Effort

We should acknowledge the traditional owners of this land and it is important for us especially as dispossessed indigenous people to proceed with this acknowledgement. [Spoken together] I acknowledge the Eora nation of the Gadagul people. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

We will not work alone, and we don’t want every member to be active alone. We demand collective work for all the community members. And we demand to elect a body or committee, or whatever you want to call it, to organize the community’s activities and be its representative, and serve as a communication link between the community and the other organizations be they the PLO, the host countries, or the international institutions which are concerned with our case, or other Palestinian communities in the countries of Al-Shatat. (Participant, Public Meeting, Thessaloniki, Greece)

As for my representative on the local level, you can see that there is a great deficiency that I don’t want to talk about. As you see, this needs common effort and joint work so that we can stand up and form a committee or an institution elected by all the community members in Rogland to represent us. Our joint work must be on the same level of our Palestinian people’s fight who sacrificed everything to become free. That’s why we want a committee or an organization which can live up to these sacrifices. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

I suggest the election of a follow-up committee from the camps as a whole, and to form a popular committee to supervise the procedures of work inside the camps and to educate and enlighten people. Our role is to inform people about our cause, especially the exile issue, and to let them know that the struggle that is taking place in Palestine is basically about solving the refugees issue and enabling them to return. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We can promote belonging, cooperation, voluntary services and love through the social solidarity that we use in our organizing. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

We should develop, not cancel, the old frameworks. Europe has developed because it has always looked forward. Is it a revolt against the old guard or the people who are constantly present? Is a Fateh-affiliated person permanently branded due to his factional belonging? Does everyone acquire a permanent label? It is constantly said that this person is a “Fateh” person, and that this one is from the Democratic Front, and the other is an Islamist. Is there a revolt against the old and existing frameworks, and an attempt to creating new structures for Palestinian coordination? Moreover, there’s nothing problematic in collecting statistics. Why not? Because if I want to make my work successful, I should know how people think, and what they think about, and then to work on that basis, in the aim of not proposing a project that people don’t think of or that does not express their wishes. And that’s what we have been trying to say to you, for those who are active know best. You are now working in the Islamic Endowment, and the Endowment here is owned by the Islamic community. (Participant, Public Meeting, Copenhagen, Denmark)

We should form committees to contact the leadership, which will devise methods to contact the community.

On the contrary, we should start from the base and form committees from here because there are two kinds of communication: higher level communication, which is to convey the message to the leaders and lower level communication, which is to convey instructions or information or contacting companies through their employees. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

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We ask the popular committees to consider the national interests as the common interest and the special interests. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashideh camp, Lebanon)

We haven’t made any exhibitions here, and that’s a problem. We are just wondering why they didn’t come, and we did everything. Some fear that such meetings and activities would be connected to political issues. We should work together even if each of us belongs to a different party, and we should convince the Swedes to help us, and we shouldn’t feel afraid. And I think that we can convince other Palestinians to work with us, for they should assume some responsibility and help us and we should work together. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Stockholm/ Uppsala, Sweden)

There is quasi-consensus that the federation represents the organizations or the associations in general. I am not claiming that the federation represents the community, using the community word is wrong; we’re saying that it is a federation of Palestinian associations or organizations in Sweden, therefore the administrative body for this federation represents everyone who participates in this federation and in these organizations and associations. Of course extending these associations is necessary and everyone should participate in them. I don’t consider it wrong to have three or four associations in Uppsala. Pluralism is a positive thing and we have experienced it before on the Palestinian scene. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

All these unions and institutions should integrate work with each other and should agree upon one target. This target should not be personal or just to build people around themselves. (Participant, Public meeting, Buay el-Barajneh, Lebanon)

Then, what we are saying is that we want a wide framework which isn’t marked by an x, or a black point on so-and-so person or a certain trend. We want a framework that can absorb all the Palestinian community, taking into consideration the specifics of the issue. (Participant, Public Meeting, Copenhagen, Denmark)

The mark of activists and the work that is being done by them is that they are similar people, they’re educated, middle class and the work is similar in many ways. Our work should be inclusive and we should reach out to the disillusioned Palestinians, in every sense of the word disillusion, especially troubled school kids who find it difficult to get through school, the disadvantaged Palestinians here. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

c. The Role of Organizers

Our symbol is the camp. Those who live in the camps in Jordan constitute only 18%, we have 80% who live outside the camps, but they are not less patriotic than those in the camps, and they have established 860 charities and more than 400 existing Palestinian associations. But what is their relationship with the camps? What is their role in supporting the camps politically, socially, and culturally? These associations have halls where they can hold joint meetings and seminars with the camps’ residents to identify their needs and demands. Associations serve social development in the local society, but they should also participate in offering services for the camps’ residents. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

I think “Right of Return” committees must be formed in every region and from all factions, not just one faction. Also the national committee must be dissolved, which is already non-existent in all neighbouring countries. This organization is monopolized by so-and-so and such-and-such. No one goes there, for it is the realm of this or that tribe. As for the “Right of Return” committees, they are part of the PLO, and it was formed for the Palestinians for the purpose of serving the refugees from all factions and in every region and every neighbourhood: in Za’faraniya, in Hay Al-Salam and all regions. These committees must watch over the refugees and survey their nutritional and educational needs and set this before the higher committees and before the Palestinian leadership. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq)

We are all seeking to create a framework for the community with the aim of uniting it. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

We are talking about the effectiveness of the community, and about a Palestinian presence; in other words, empowerment. (Participant, Activist meeting, Athens, Greece)

We discussed the issues which our brother [participant] talked about; the reconstructing of the popular committee will certainly solve all these problems. But when we say that the popular committee must make the necessary contacts we mean that it should discuss all the problems which were pointed out. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

I accept the PLO which has been representing us for 40 to 50 years. However, there has been a decline and we now see people like Nusseibah
and others who are well-known. But the insistence of the Palestinian people to regain their rights shut these people up, and silence these institutions or centres supported by the World Bank, like those of Al-Shikaki and Nusseibah and Salad el-Din Ibrahim in Egypt. They create these centres so as to change people’s mindset. I think we must form a committee here to communicate in a more direct manner. We read on the internet about the communities all over the world who are making decisions or talking about the Right of Return, and about our right in general, and the perseverance of the resistance, except here in Sweden and the Scandinavian countries. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

4. Procedural Steps

a. Existing Procedures and Steps

It is true that there isn’t a preliminary committee, but I’m considering meeting up with the sectors that can be formed. The members of these sectors are all representatives in the students or women committees. There remains the other part of the work, which are those who belong to other sectors. By God’s will, we will soon prepare for the conference and elect a new council for the community which consists of real representatives for these existing segments, in addition to five or six other people. As soon as possible, the community council will continue its activity. I am slowing down a little, for I want the leadership to spring up from the foundation, for this is one of the ways to represent the foundation and to ease the burdens and distribute responsibilities between people. (Participant, Public meeting, Sana’a, Yemen)

I am a member in the committee. We are making efforts, and we are proud that we are trying to form a committee from nothing, for we have no alternative. We managed to hold some meetings for some community members. We are trying to form an elected committee which every Palestinian in Rogland can join in the future. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

The community council will be decided within one month from now. The council will create a solidarity fund, and of course, it will be based in the Embassy. It will handle and solve the economic and social problems of the community. Committees will be formed, and folkloric bands will be created, in addition to the Palestinian folkloric arts. There are preparations to be made. The ideas and the papers to be presented at the conference are very good, and soon they will be announced and implemented. Direct individual responsibility will be reduced, and institutions will be formed that can tackle problems independently. This will help us a lot in solving our problems. (Participant, Public meeting, Sana’a, Yemen)

In the Palestinian association here, some work is happening. We are active members of the anti-war alliance, and the Palestinian community which participates in these structures should be able to assert its point of view concerning the right of return, the issue of the Palestinian State, and the need for supporting the right of the Palestinian people to return to their land and country. We have a presence in the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) and are represented in it. The headquarters of the Palestinian association is the meeting place for all these organizations including the anti-war alliance, and the Israel boycott alliance. These committees aim to activate this right, and there should be frameworks for the sake of all these people. We should participate within the Swedish framework here so that we can exercise pressures on these governments to support our Palestinian people in gaining back its rights including the Right of Return. We should achieve all this, such as activating the youth federation. In Stockholm association, a Palestinian youth federation was founded. As for the issue of committees, a big group raised in the second and third conferences raised the issue of forming committees. Any committee should be totally free to do anything without the interference of the association, and you were there (participant). This means the possibility to form any committee, including the right of return committee or any other committee. This problem can be solved and the associations, at least the Stockholm association which has opened this issue for discussion and which welcomes people, don’t have any problem in people participating in this issue. At least we in the administrative body are ready to open doors, and this door is open to all Palestinians. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

This is the spirit that should prevail in the Palestinian institutions. We should work to strengthen it, because this will improve the community’s conditions. I’m not responsible for those who have deep psychological problems; this is not my problem. I can confront and fight, that’s the regard in which one should be ashamed of their laziness. I know a lot of people who are known for their political affiliation. We have committees, but they just need activating, and this is what we are doing now. I think we have overcome the obstacles. (Participant, Public meeting, Sana’a, Yemen)
b. Recommended Procedures and Steps

There is another thing. What do we, as a Palestinian community in Al-Shatat, and in Denmark in particular, really want as refugees who live in that country? Let’s be objective here about what we really want. We want to form a Higher Representative Committee for the Palestinian refugees in Denmark. What are the mechanisms of forming such a committee, and the mechanisms of its activities, and what do we exactly need from it? (Participant, Public Meeting, Aarhus, Denmark)

We shall hopefully have this Council within one month. The Council will be responsible for the community’s solidarity fund. Cultural, folkloric, and sport committees will be launched in addition to a traditional band. This will enable the Council to solve the economic and social problems of the community. Some committees already started training like folkloric and art groups. Currently, we are pursuing the vision and preparation work in order to create the necessary conditions for success. I think these achievements will soon be visible, and many individual responsibilities will be collectivised. Therefore there should be some restructuring, and this is already in process now, and as a result there are a lot of positive points concerning the level of interaction of these people. In the past, only ten or fifteen people were responsible for all the activities, and in a limited way. Today, more than 500 people have attended and prepare for these activities. This reflects an improvement in the community’s conditions. And this is where the sense of responsibility towards the community members starts. After all, the citizen who pursues their own interests first is not a good citizen. The good citizen should feel a responsibility towards the community members first before pursuing personal interests. (Participant, Public meeting, Sana’a, Yemen)

I am the President of the Community. What I want is for all the members of the General Assembly to come and say in front of all present that the community is ineffective. And if you ask anyone of them about what he offered the community, you will find that he did not offer anything at all. And I am one of these people. So I wonder if we can register the names of all here present with their contact information in order to invite them after a month or two to have a meeting. We won’t possibly reach 100% consensus in the meeting, but if we even achieve 50% that would be excellent. After another month or two we can hold the first meeting, then the second. If this area is far from the meeting places, we can hold meetings in another area, and set a date for the next meeting. But we should elect a body and form a modest committee of three people or more and define the committee’s goals. We should also present a simple work paper about the committee’s goals and methods. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

We need to form a committee from the community, and also communications frameworks. Do you suggest establishing popular institutions or the like? Activating the frameworks and institutions, they say that the institutions don’t exist, but they do exist, yet they are not effective. What is needed then is to activate them.

The main problem is not communicating with each other. Why do I say the names available? How would I know, for example, that elections are to be held if no one informs me? How would I know that there is a community if no one calls for a meeting? And no one asked for such thing, or sent a message asking for a subscription.
The solution is to communicate via emails, but not everyone has access to e-mail, so we can use the ordinary mail. This means that the community’s secretary must send notes to all the names they have, asking them to come and pay subscriptions. But it is important that the formal institution of the community reaches out to the people in the community.

When the community is effective, and when there are meetings and debates held on a regular basis, then the one who heads the committee or the community can take people’s opinions, and form a general idea about it.

I know a way to do that: the administrative body accompanied by its head must be present there monthly every Saturday, and the news can be spread that if you have any problems, the community is open to listen.

I have another opinion that I have mentioned already in the first meeting. All the bosses from the Ambassador to the community leader, and also the chief doctor and the students, must meet on a monthly basis to discuss and solve problems.

This is the best solution to settle all the problems we face, to meet and discuss every month.

How would we make sure that the people know what is going on? The community leader can meet the members to know whether they know or not.

Exactly, every Saturday of every month, that’s how it starts. Look at us, this is the third time we’ve met in this short period of time, although we haven’t been meeting for a very long time. That’s how things begin.
Also, everyone should attend the meetings, and someone should take notes on the problems raised in the meetings. Then at the next meeting, the listed problems would be read in order to track whether they were solved or not. There must be someone to follow up on the issue.

A committee consisting of notable figures who have citizenship must be formed.

There are Greek people who have Palestinian citizenship; they were born and raised in Palestine. And even if they didn't have Palestinian citizenship they have close relations with Palestinians. This means that we must have Greek names in the committee.

I think that the Palestinian woman does not play an active role in Greece. This means that I don't have anything to do with the institutions of the Greek Women's Union. As was said, we can't assume this role alone; this is the role of this committee. We can do something for the Palestinian woman, by working together, and contacting the Palestinian Women's Union inside Palestine, so that our voice can be heard through us. We want to work together because there isn't any role for the Palestinian woman.

We can, for example, create a simple union for Palestinian or Arabic women.

A participant objects by saying: a Palestinian, not Arabic, women's union. Since we have our own problems, you can’t impose our problems on others and that does matter; because we shouldn't overwhelm Syrians or Iraqis with our problems. Aren't the problems we face different than theirs? I told you and I still do that I am very happy because this is the first time we meet in this way. We must have activities, and if we want to hold a meeting or organize a bazaar, we should call a woman to give us a lecture, in which we get acquainted with each other and listen to each others' problems. Another participant says:
we said all this in the past meeting, and I think we all agree with that. You can create a union for the Palestinian women in Greece, and it will help the community as well as the Embassy, but the most important thing is for us to unite, and then the name does not matter much. Also, there is an important issue: most women here do not work.

Now this committee is the core, and if we extend our activities, we can form an association.

We can vote each according to her opinion. The reason I stress upon creating a union for women is that women are very effective, and they have a lot to offer. Also, we have nothing to do unlike students and doctors, since most of us don’t work.

I suggest that we establish an Arab club so that our children can learn Arabic.

The issue of the study should be based on a good foundation by which we can build a positive thing for everyone. We need to be safe, we need a normal family-oriented community, and we can’t do without that. No one can maintain a sense of community alone. I teach Arabic to my kids, but with great difficulty. If we combine our efforts, the odds of success would increase.

It is very easy to contact the Palestinian community in Europe. As a doctors union, we can easily know the president of the doctors union in every country. You can take their e-mails and write to them. A lot of federations have developed from our federation. You can form committees, as the sister here said, which will have e-mails through which they can communicate.

(Discussion amongst Participants, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)
I don’t know how to talk to you about other institutions and the way they work, or their activities and whether they are effective or not, for I don’t know much about them. But we could go to them to see what positive and favourable activities the young men are doing so that we could learn from them. There are commonalities between our community and the Spanish and Greek and Turkish communities, why don’t we benefit from them and learn from their activities? We should see how these communities communicate with each other and with their countries and embassies, and what is the communication link between them and the host country? We should take whatever benefits our community and what suits us and the Palestinian case. Why don’t we watch and see or even mingle with such communities and their institutions, especially with regards to the issues of children, women and youth, and workers. Why don’t we establish similar institutions? Look, for example, at the Muslim community, to see how they handle the communication issue with the German authorities, and how do they solve their problems, especially the gender and education matters, and to see the way they are handling this issue, and try to do the same! The Turks came to Germany, and they are conservative people who don’t have problems like these we face as a Palestinian community. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

I wish that you would approach the matter methodologically, as if you were treating a patient. People say that the Women’s Union is successful in all fields in Lebanon. Why don’t we ask ourselves, as the sister here said, about the reason why the rest of the federations are not successful, the labour, doctors, engineers, and journalists’ federations? But we always blame others for our failures, and these federations think that they will not be effective because the Women’s Union is already successful. The Women’s Union did not take any steps on the level of government because it has no powers, but they used transparency in dealing with people. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

Why don’t we study the other Arab communities and their successful institutions? There are Egyptian, Lebanese, and Turkish communities. We should examine what they do, so that we can do the same. And we should learn from them the correct issues, and enhance the social and economic areas in our communities. We notice when there are protests or demonstrations a lot of people participate although some of them are forced later to leave the country by the German authorities. And they and their families face social and economic problems that need to be solved and prioritised. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

With all due respect to everyone, but we don’t care about each other. We, as a Palestinian community in Denmark, would love to organize ourselves in the same way the Syrian community did in Argentina, which united its ranks and gathered its people, to give birth to the Argentinean president, Carlos Menem. Therefore, we must be united. And if we are truly united, we can get a deputy into the Parliament, and eventually he could become a head of government. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark)

As the brothers here said, statistics in Europe should be made so that we get to know each other and our numbers. It is true that you said that the PLO should supervise this project, but the PLO can’t send people to every country to count the Palestinians who live there. If we didn’t make such statistics in Barcelona in Madrid, they won’t know how many Palestinians live in Barcelona. After gathering individuals, we can form a community which can then become several communities. (Participant, Public Meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

The Palestinian presence in this country is dispersed. What is hidden exceeds what is visible. This means that whoever exists in the community are registered under names which differ from those existing in the Jordanian embassy. Maybe no one knows them. 40% of the Palestinian presence is hidden. Do they legally exist; are they in need; are they workers? That’s why the need to make statistics for the Palestinian presence was emphasised in our previous meetings. (Participant, Activist Meeting, Athens, Greece)

Up till now, there is no representative on the local level. We are still trying to know each other as the brothers here. For example, I don’t know 90% of the Palestinians in this area. It is very important that I get to know everyone, so that I know who to elect in case any elections for the community members are conducted. So far, things are good, but we should achieve more progress. (Participant, Public Meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

In this context, we are not at all organized. I don’t even know the number of the Palestinians who live here. And if I asked any of the participants here to tell me the number, no one would be able to answer; although the community here is not that big. Certainly there are some people who undertake important efforts on what relates to the community, but I do think that if you cooperate you will be stronger. (Participant, Public Meeting, Vlaardingen, Netherlands)
I stress the importance of ‘knowing’ our community well; in this case, we need a census, some statistics to establish the numbers, the demographics, the make-up and the locations of Palestinians in Australia. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

The most important thing for me is to have a statistical study compiled either by the community or by the embassy about the number of the Palestinians in this country. This is the first step. The second thing that people should do is to inform others; everyone should inform their friends. For example, I have a friend from Syria and she would like to join us as an Arab community living abroad. A community centre does exist and you pay the rent, so we at least meet once a month whether with our children or alone in order to start doing activities. These activities could be beneficial for us: we will be able to enjoy our time together. We can organize parties and sell tickets. We can use the earnings to help others find jobs or feed their families. I think this should be our first step. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

There should be a database for the community in Dammam at least that contains the names of the community members with their phone numbers, and this database should be regularly updated. They could also create such a database in Riyadh and Jeddah. Another one says that there should be an international bulletin and another one says that this should be achieved through committees. Then he continues saying that we should discuss civil issues. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

The goals are secondary tasks, like a field study of the Palestinian presence in this country. This is a huge ambition. Yesterday, the moderator and I called the Jordanian Embassy; they know me personally of course, and asked them if they had statistics for the Palestinians who have Jordanian passports. First he asked me why and I explained my reasons. He said that they have the statistics, but the number is big, and that they have no authority to give them to someone outside the embassy; we should go there to discuss the issue, because there are as many as 500 Palestinians with Jordanian passports in this country, and no one knows about this. So this is one of the big goals: to know the number of the Palestinians, their jobs, their economic and legal relations in this country and their problems.

How would these statistics help us?

It can help us become one body and be united.

How would the statistics help us to become one body?

Through getting a registry of Palestinian names. We can then search by organizing ourselves into groups of two or three to get better results in this fieldwork. Then we can get acquainted with them to discuss the issue of the Palestinians here. The question is how would you ask someone to take on a certain responsibility or work, or participate in a field or activity? We can build an economic foundation for the Palestinian presence one way or another. We can have big ideas. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

There are no accurate statistics about the number of the community members. But we will soon gather such statistics. The youth organizations can gather such statistics through filling a certain form. We will work on this, and save these statistics in the computer along with all the information about the Palestinian community in Yemen, with their contact information so that we can directly identify their problems and efficiently communicate with the community members by phone or internet, etc. We have already started uploading information on the computer. We will count the community members, and define their conditions and problems with all the available information, so that we can get to know every member in this community. For example, we should get emergency contacts for all the members so that we could inform their families in case anything happens to them. We hope to be able, within a short time, to gather all this information. We gathered the information about those who are connected to the embassy, and we will try to find others who are not connected. (Participant, Public meeting, Sana’a, Yemen)

Some of us can return home, and some can’t. I’ve been here for 6 months, and I can see that communication is totally absent. We don’t hold regular meetings to discuss our issues. We assume the task of communicating with any country in this world alone, whether Jordan or Lebanon. We should at least communicate socially. Two weeks ago, we held a meeting in Scala; there was a Palestinian dinner party and meetings with [participants] who have difficult circumstances and we excused them. Basically we don’t have mechanisms or activities. They raised the Palestinian flag alongside five European flags, and they want to twin with Bethlehem to give us a centre because we don’t have one. We are wasting a lot of time without meeting. We could, for example, work towards naming a square after Arafat here. If we don’t meet we can’t achieve anything in this country. (Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)
Part II: Findings

Community Structures and Channels

4. Procedural Steps
b. Recommended Procedures and Steps

I think first of all from the perspective of those who have been living in Canada for a while now, I think the first step is to reconnect with our community, to reconnect with housewives and children, to reconnect with our students, to reconnect with our workers, the people who don’t have homes when they first came here, and people looking for jobs, and those are the people in our community. If we keep talking to them and speaking pompously, it will be difficult for them to listen to us in the activist community. As somebody who is very concerned about my community and its representation in the Canadian system, I think we should listen to each other before we start to demand the Canadian government to listen to us...

(Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

We want to form elected committees in the camps, because we can express our own cause and concerns best. Therefore I hope such meetings could be held again so that we can have a broader chance to present our cause and problems. I don’t pretend to represent the Palestinian people, but I represent the camps. The fighters in Lebanon and Syria were from the camps, and the fighters in Jordan are from the camps, and they are the people who fight and defend because they are living in a tragic situation that is heart-breaking. A lot of people who live in fancy neighbourhoods, like Shmeisani, don’t even know where Al-Baq’a Camp is, and if you put one of them in one of the houses we live in, he would run away saying that he doesn’t want anything.

(Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

No, this is the issue. If we are to organize ourselves, we must have an institution. We tried associations and institutions, but alas, they failed. And since Europe as a whole agrees, the best project is to form a committee from outside the existing community organization; after all, life is about giving as well as receiving.

(Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

In general, we demand the brothers at the community’s administrative body to call for meetings, even if they were limited ones.

(Participant, Public meeting, Oslo, Norway)

The community should arrange its periodic meetings, and we can start from there to search and agree upon a shape and a structure beyond this search, in order to make our voice heard to the people who we think should hear; and who owe it to us to hear our voice. It’s not about preferential treatment, it’s all about rights; my right as a Palestinian to positively participate in forming the frame through which I can make my voice heard; the voice of right, and no one is willing to renounce his right.

(Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

I hope at least from this meeting that we will start to attract people and hold bigger meetings. It’s very important to make a new organization work hard.

(Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

My son studies in a religious school, and all the parents want to make the necessary calculations for the university study, so they sent a deputy from the first year, about a week ago, to see how many would like to join the parents council and they agreed to hold a meeting the next day. We should form a certain council and agree on a certain date. There is a committee, and whoever likes to participate with us can write his name in order to elect an extended specialized committee.

(Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

We fail and we fail again. One of the things that we understand is that we always work from a defensive position; we always have to fight against someone. We need to change, and we don’t always have to look for problems. We all know we have problems, we need to look for solutions, we should start from the base. This is an important point. I don’t really attend many meeting because I think they are a waste of time, but it would be nice to see us meeting constructively once every two or three months to talk about a specific problem, to see where we get to.

(Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

A solid social foundation, social work, is essential in order for us to create some sort of communication between people, so that they can, if they organize themselves, improve this model and extend it further. The idea of the associations union is a great one, on the grounds that it will be a channel of connection.

(Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

A general meeting is a factor that enhances the Palestinian community. To meet with them here or anywhere else, on the basis of finding a working mechanism in order to establish a Palestinian community association after a year or two or even three years. The essential point is to achieve our goal on the basis that everyone says his opinion about a certain candidate. We should also hold a conference to establish locals for the General Union for Palestinian Workers and the General Union of Palestinian Students. Through these unions, a constitution and internal regulations should be set up to strengthen the Palestinian community in Greece.

(Participant, Public Meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

I encourage all the Palestinians to return immediately to their country and to leave this country. We have the right to enter Palestine and stay there. We live here as orphans without any one to ask about us. We only visit the cemeteries. That’s how we spend our Eid [Islamic holiday]. Even the Palestinians themselves, and because of the sadness they live in, do not congratulate each other in Eid. I haven’t seen my next-door neighbour for three months. This is a tragedy.

(Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

As a Palestinian Lebanese who lives here, I think that the most urgent needs for us are moral and social ones. We need to feel that we exist. We can get acquainted with each other in the Eid holidays. There are a lot of Arabs here who don’t know us, and it will be nice if they did. For me, my needs...
are 90% moral, psychological and social. Therefore, we should get to know each other, regardless of nationality. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

We don’t even meet each other, even in the Eid for instance. We must meet each other on such occasions as families, as part of this society. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

The union used to facilitate everything for students as long as they remained active in the union and participated in its activities. The union empowered the students as long as they empowered it and fulfilled their obligations towards it. Now however, we are suffering from the inactivity of all Palestinian institutions. I can’t say to someone that he is not assuming his responsibilities towards the union or the community while he hasn’t been given support or offered any services. When I have my own institutions I turn to them to get help, but in return, the community should offer its services to its members first. And when the member receives support, then I can ask him to participate in the community’s activities. (Participant, Public Meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

We face difficulty in the integration issue. And we mustn’t complicate matters further: It is very important for people to raise their living standards. We must create something that would push towards improving living standards for community members. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

I am not proud at all when I say that two or three weeks ago the press in Uppsala revealed a house of prostitution supervised by Palestinian women and men. This is the reality; I am not exaggerating or underestimating things. I think one of the main reasons behind this is that we are overwhelmed by political work in the institutions and associations at the expense of social work. Therefore, we hope that all institutions and associations would give more attention to the social side. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

I would like all Arabs here to get acquainted with each other; regardless of their religion, inclination, or opinion. We are all Arabs. Also I would like it if we offer material and moral support. I am one of those who like to meet with the students and poor Palestinian families. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

If you form a club here to benefit five people, then it became helpful for fifty people, you will become an effective group which performs civil work that benefits people, children, and the future of Arab Muslim Palestinians who live in this country. (Participant, Public Meeting, Helsingor, Denmark)

I just want to comment about the two words, fun and seriousness. Fine, there are three words that we should think about around our talk, and these are: interesting, fun, and serious. We have to do it in organized way and if people feel that it’s interesting and it’s fun and it’s serious then we can get to them. We won’t be able to keep them all in any organization some members withdraw and others stay. But I think that effective and organized work whereby everyone knows what they should do will lead into the organization of constant activities. These are the incentives that maintain members. As to how these activities would look like, there are many ideas. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Stockholm/Uppsala, Sweden)

I suggest going to the Union of Palestinian Students, considering that the students are probably vulnerable. I mean I remember the days when I and (participant) were students. I can go and give them my phone number and get to know them. They are probably going to be 17 or 18 years old. I will ask them to contact me if they need anything. Along with the suggested committees, we can form a committee for the students. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

ii. Job Creation and Fundraising
There is also a need to implement projects, if only simple ones. For example, small factories and shops inside the camp. This project can be operated, fostering local production and easing some of the suffering. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)
This problem you are talking about is more or less a general problem with all foreigners. I want to say to Palestinians that we can form a committee, not a union, but a committee which we can call the students and labour committees. The Palestinian student who can’t find a job can contact this committee and tell it that he tried the municipality, but it didn’t help him, or that nobody helped him, and ask for the committee’s help. If members of this committee have contacts or agreements with people who want to employ Palestinians, for example, it could help you son to find a job. (Participant, Public Meeting, Helsingør, Denmark).

Charities have big budgets: the smallest ones have a budget of 250,000 Jordanian dinars or more. But the question posed here is what are the services these associations provide, and how do they support the camps? Nothing! Only some people support them by giving some clothes and meals in Ramadan and raising 20-50 dinars for a poor family, and this is not a solution! Rich Palestinians live in the finest suburbs, like Shmeisani, Abdoun and Deir il-Ghbar and they have millions! We have capitalists, but no one gives his Zakat [Islamic alms] to the camps. There are nearly 20,000 Palestinians from Lefta village who live in Jordan, 13,000 of them live in the capital, Amman. Their capital amounts to more than 100 million dinars. But when you collect the Zakat from them, you would raise only 4-5 thousand dinars! (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

The problem is in the municipality which used to give 25% of its support to the association. Now it doesn’t offer anything. Our financial situation was very good at the time. We started that in 1998, but now everything has changed in the municipality. (Participant, Public Meeting, Slagelse, Denmark).

There is another issue that I want to talk about concerning the popular committees and the reality of public work. For example if we told our brother here that we like you to work with us in the Popular Committee because you are an active and skilled person and everyone loves you, can he leave his work and join the Popular Committee? He can’t. What happens is that the people who are elected to be members in the Popular Committee can’t do this job because they can’t leave their work, and there’s no option but to keep them. This is a problem that we’ve been having for a long time. If we, for example, elected this brother here, he will not be able to quit his job because he has children to feed. Therefore, people who are elected to public positions must be financially supported in order to be able to work. However, if we continue to elect members who will spend most of their time at their jobs to feed their children and give the committee 5% of their time, this will never do. This is a very important subject; if the reconstruction of the Popular Committees is to succeed, they must be financially supported so that they can do their task in an active and responsible manner. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

There are the factions, and the federations. There’s the Women’s Union which represents all the factions in the camp already. However, financial resources are necessary in order to enable this union to operate. When I say that the Women’s Union needs to develop and advance, I do not mean that it should follow just Abu Ammar’s line. It should be representative of everyone including those who don’t belong to any faction and independent women in the camps as well as civil society organs who have a right to join the Union. The same goes for the Students’ Union. There is a Students’ Union in the university, but we don’t have a representative in it. There are several offices for Abu Ammar students and several other offices, but there is nothing to group us like the old days. I remember the days when the General Union of Palestinian Students used to give scholarships. Where are these scholarships today? We, as students, need a General Union of Students in which we will all be represented, even if certain students do not belong to any faction. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

There is a huge need for us to have financial support; we can’t do anything without money. We should have a fund to be able to do any activity. If we had specialised committees, we would be able to know the number of Palestinians and there would be a real program. At that point you can discuss the details. For example, I suggest that we repeat this meeting every month and every woman can bring something to eat, and everyone pays according to their means. As I said before, we can initially raise money by organizing a bazaar or a dinner. These things can be easily done and they’re popular. Second, each one of us should pay at least three or four euros every time we come to the community gathering, be it weekly or biweekly.
We should set the sum to avoid embarrassing anyone. We are now twenty women, and we can bring others each time. And after that the sum will be enough to organize a bazaar. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

I think that the suggestion to donate three of four euros every time we come to the community is not practical. Maybe I can pay, and so can you, but there are poor people who can’t afford to pay such a sum, and by forcing them to pay, we risk stopping them from attending the community events. Instead, and as was said earlier, we can make things and sell them. For example, instead of going to the restaurant and paying 50 or 60 euros, you can buy some of the Kobbbeh I made or Falafel that [participant] made. This way we can raise money, but paying a tax of three euros when I badly need them is very difficult. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

That’s why I said at the beginning of the meeting that every Palestinian who likes or can must pay subscription fees, then this money will grow and we will have money for the channel, or for any other activity. This means that we don’t have to do everything in the same time. We can discuss immediately the procedures step by step, the first step is the meeting, the second is subscription, and so on. We proceed step by step until we reach the third step; the radio channel for example. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

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has been holding mass for Palestinian martyrs. Masses are held normally in Orthodox churches. Experiencing these well known masses has led me to the absolute conviction that the Orthodox Church is the foremost Palestinian institution. For most of us, our feelings are deeply rooted there, our traditions well maintained. The Palestinian Club is another place, with some reservations, but there is a concentration there also. Other places include certain neighbourhoods, Patronato and others, in which most traditions are preserved. I wanted to stress though that the church is a meeting place that is fundamental to Palestinian identity. From our point of view, it is the place where our presence is the strongest, to such a degree that the Federation would be interested in the growth of the Orthodox church, because through it, Palestinian identity comes together in a place of reunion that really does not exist elsewhere, except in the Palestinian Club. Therefore, these places of reunion are necessary to maintain our native feeling. The church has not been developed enough. In fact, a great percentage of Palestinians, who were originally Orthodox, are today, for practical reasons Catholic, Apostolic and Roman. It is true that both churches are in process of unification, it is true that one can go to another and even take communion and that is allowed, but there is a lack of the strong effect that this church is ours and that it offers a meeting place for Palestinians. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

I also suggest we establish a centre, because you know that we suffer from the lack of communication with each other even on the local level. Everyone is living in a certain area and has his work, so we should benefit from modern technology to facilitate the communications. And if there was a communication centre which connects us with each other, it would be a very important channel.

We're still stuck in the old mentality and we don't interact with the modern age. Why is that? The Palestinian people wherever they are should know each other and benefit from each other. How can we do that? Through the information centre, if I knew that there is a Palestinian in Sweden who manufactures a certain good, we could deal with each other. This is an issue which concerns all the countries. If there were such centres, the communication would be much easier. So I think that we should exploit also the modern means. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

I just want to comment on one thing: we had a space, and it was always open – but no one used to come. (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

We can frame all these energies and operations along with the other Arab and Muslim communities. But we should have an institutional body as Palestinians. It is important for the community to have an institutional body to represent the priorities of the Palestinian people and implement them on the ground. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

I am working towards a masters in history and humanities at the Adolfo Ibañes University. Regarding the points raised in the discussion, I was very interested in the moderator's presentation in the sense that regardless of its course, the Palestinian Club was always mentioned as a meeting point. I think that it is obvious that for us, the true Palestinians are the people that feel not only Palestinian-ness regarding history, regarding migration, but feel what is happening today in Palestine. The Palestinian Club is what I call the small homeland and for various reasons we have pushed the people away from their homeland at the Palestinian Club. If we observe and we are honest we can see today that the Club has very few members, zero cultural activities and that it has been afraid of facing the political. On the other hand there is a tremendous contradiction because when the indisputable leader of the Palestinian mother country dies we pay homage to him at the Palestinian Club, when Abu Mazen arrives we receive him at the Palestinian Club and when there is a crisis at the Palestinian Sports Centre we solve it at the same night at the Palestinian Club. We have no other place to meet where people can express themselves. Many past well intentioned administrations just did not understand this. Thank God, since the Bethlehem 2000 campaign which coincided with the atrocious aggression towards the Palestinian people, individuals with a vision of the future started to generate a cultural dynamic that the young people have known how to claim and this is why today people say we have a different board of directors. I refer to the Club because that board somehow feels the pressure of individuals, of common people; hence the merit of that board that has finally understood that fees had to be reduced because just as the world changes so our communities have changed in the economic and social realms. I won't go on any longer because what I am saying is obvious. I appreciate and congratulate everyone for understanding that, in one way or another, the Palestinian Club is the mother country. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

We probably have a dozen people in the whole country who lobby on our behalf, and that is just not enough people. We need to put more resources into making people professional activists, it's too much to have a full time job and activism on the side, or be students, we need to professionalize these activities. The important thing is that we need not just one or two organizations;
we need a number of organizations to represent people in different levels, in sports, and various sectors. There are all kinds of differences, you can pay someone to be an organizer of the students, a lot of groups do that, and as a result their activities start earlier. We can have broader reach within the Arab and the wider Canadian community. So I am not just talking about people who do things behind closed doors, I’m talking about people who would help organize the community, but those need to be supported with resources. All of us know that it can get exhausting to do it alongside of your other real work; it needs to become our full time work. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

Although I am a member in this committee, I wish that the committee would develop itself and I hope that all the others would help it to do that; lighting a candle is better than cursing the darkness. Everyone can help this committee and offer something, and if they have any suggestions I beg them to present them. We are guests in this country. And instead of cursing or criticizing or hurt each other, we can meet through this committee and freely talk and present some suggestions to develop it. Mr. [Participant] said that this is a voluntary work which can’t be done by elections. I can’t just say to someone that I would elect him to perform voluntary work. If someone wanted to volunteer, I can’t question his intentions, unless it is an organized administrative work.

I wish that anyone, especially the youth, would help as much as they can. The door is open for everyone. If you know someone who works in this committee, please help him. (Participant, Public Meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

5. Structural and Procedural Issues

All the things you mentioned express our struggles in the community. Therefore we should meet more often and define the problems. We should answer all the legal and social issues, and confront all the issues that face us. There is mistrust between the community and the institution. The trust must be regained between them.

In the community elections, we vote for names, but they remove the names and register others without referring to anyone but themselves. I used to make a fuss over such issues. The last time a block ran for the elections, and whoever wants can run for it.

Twelve people had registered my name, but I told them that my name was not there now, along with another doctor’s name, and when they went to vote, they found that my name was eliminated, and no one knew that my name and the doctor’s name were registered. This was two years ago, and since then I concluded that the elections are for certain people. I don’t just say that, that’s what really happens. I am talking about an occurrence, not about a point of view.

As for the administrative body, my name was clearly registered among their names, and the whole list was published, and we were elected. What matters is that we want democratic elections, this is the answer.

There must be a secretary for the community, because this would be their job. I shouldn’t depend on an individual to contact such or such person, these contacts should be formal. They must work hard to get to people. For example, when there is a lecture to be held, we know only on the last day, and we’re not able to participate in any activity as a result. Everyone must know about these activities.

All of the community members are volunteers, perhaps someone should be employed for a short while.

I am now a member of two community organisations, and this is the second community that has an administrative body. They used to prevent us from discussing anything relating to politics, or what is happening inside Palestine. And we didn’t know about the decisions they took on our behalf. But we used to wonder why don’t we hold a meeting to discuss what’s happening. They tell us that the community has nothing to do with politics. What do they mean by politics? This is our destiny! This may well be the first time we are allowed to speak freely and openly to express our thoughts and ideas. We don’t speak on politics on the pretense that we are a social committee.

It is written here that we can be a Palestinian community organisation provided that we stay away from politics. Implicitly it exists; we speak about politics informally between us. But you are not allowed to invite people for a discussion. [She] is not allowed, for example, to invite people to a discussion about the Right of Return, or about what Abu Mazen doing in the West Bank or in Gaza.

We also have a language problem. How can we improve the language situation? Maybe we should make a deal with one of those Greek schools to teach Arabic in exchange of sending our children to attend it, why not? Why just the Armenians? I don’t mean to single out Armenians.

I want to further discuss the issue that she brought up. We can advertise or put an ad in the newspaper; because I think that it is not possible to go to the Jordanian embassies or elsewhere to ask them to give us the names of the Palestinians in their files, for they don’t have these statistics, this is not their cause. We can put an ad asking everyone who would like to register himself as a Palestinian or to express his Palestinian attachment.
to go to the community and fill some papers. The goal would be to survey every person with Palestinian roots. This means that the Embassy should formally ask the Jordanian embassy. Is there anything else other than the statistics issue that you would like to discuss?

First of all, we should, as a community, have a database on our numbers. For, at the moment we don’t know whether we are one hundred or ten thousand. (Participants, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

**a. Types of Organization Needed**

In Denmark, there are already structures, and we have activists in this area. We also have associations and clubs for the community. But the problem lies in finding a structure in every region that represents the Palestinian people or the community in Denmark. But first we must create mutual understanding and harmony among the members of the Palestinian community in every region. Here, we have two structures, the club and the association. And regardless whether the club holds sport activities or not, it should be the case that all the community members agree that there is one representative whether it is an association or a club that combines all of the community activities in every region. The supposed “lord” must hold an extensive meeting for the Palestinian community that shall elect a responsible committee to defend the community and speak in its name. If a committee succeeds in this region, it should be imitated in all regions. This could be followed by the establishment of a general committee for all the community to express its views. This committee would be composed of members who represent every region and would thus be able to talk to the embassy. Likewise the embassy can talk to the community’s representatives, and look into their claims and needs. We have structures, yet they are too vulnerable to represent the Palestinian community in Denmark, or to speak on its behalf with the municipalities. At the moment, they can only speak in the name of a particular club and its members. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)

I wish that there was just one link in every camp in the name of the Palestinian people, not regional links like Haifa link, Yafo link, or Safad link. (Participant, Public meeting, Beirut al-Banqineh, Lebanon)

In general improving the social, economic, civil, and legal conditions of the refugees, and also establishing a reference body inside the camp. This means improving the popular committees. We also want a follow-up committee to be improved and better developed. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

It turned out that we have a cultural or academic office, and also a youth federation, and other centres. Uniting all these centres will allow for the emergence of a central authority for the people, and this is the point. How would people work with each other without an authority to refer to? This is an association which has goals and defined social tasks. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

There is the problem of authority. For example, I have problems, not as a student here, but as a Palestinian, and I don’t have an authority to refer and resort to.

I came here alone, and I didn’t find a certain gathering to introduce me to the other Palestinians. I met the Palestinian community by chance, and I told the community’s president. Even my presence at this meeting was by chance, no one told me about it. (Participant, Public meeting, Oslo, Norway)

As for our situation inside Denmark, there is one thing before forming these committees. We must have a powerful community organization to speak in our name on the internal level. (Participant, Public Meeting, Koge, Denmark)

We must recommend that we gather and form the community, then establish a body to serve as a communication link for the community with the other parties. This is what will be done from now on. (Participant, Public Meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

Don’t we in Denmark need, for example, a women’s, a workers’, or a student union? Before forming a women or workers union, it’s better to form a union for the Palestinian students in this country. Just leave the workers and women to work; this would be their form of participation in the institutions of civil society. (Participant, Public Meeting, Slagelse, Denmark)

We have to agree upon one path, and we should choose one representative to address the civil organizations; the work shouldn’t be based on individual efforts! Moreover, there shouldn’t be several federations because this is called the Union of Palestinian students, the General Union of Palestinian Students. (Participant, Public meeting, Khartoum, Sudan)

I advise everyone to establish committees that seek to improve the services offered. Committees already exist, yet those who are responsible for them are not effective. So why don’t we activate these committees by handing it over to competent and righteous people? Why don’t we also devise a plan in which all existing committees in the camp can participate, like the Palestinian affairs’ department, the committees aimed to improve services, and UNRWA? (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)
I hope there will be specialized committees, and a permanent mobilizing committee to pursue such huge activities that unite the opinions of the intellectuals and the Palestinian elite everywhere. (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

I am aware of a part of the community’s activity, other than the legal problems. But if we don’t have a higher committee for the community, which informs us about the activities and celebrations of the community, no one will know about this activity or this celebration. Everyone keeps saying that the community does not perform and does not organize activities, and they are right. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany).

Since most of the community members are doctors, we should concentrate on this, and try to form a doctors’ union. This is a very important issue. Consequently I think that the scene in Rome needs some action on these issues. Of course the issue of the need for an organized Palestinian community can be taken for granted, and we shouldn’t talk about it all the time; communities should be organized wherever they may be. (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy).

The role of women is important and should be emphasized. In every organization here there is a women’s committee, and UNRWA has a committee, but they organize workshops which have no relation to the realities we face. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

To arrive at creating a community (which is what we want to achieve first) there has to be a more general designation of this community. Not to mean, for example groups such as Palestinians, Syrian groups, Lebanese groups. I find more than anything that we have to locate everything and generate a designation more than anything as Arabs and more than anything for it to be an intellectual growth of people that would lead afterwards to generate all this advancement. For example, identifying what we are and devising different ways of seeing Arab life. As the other participant correctly pointed out, there are people who are from Patronato and people who live outside of that who are outside of the community and we have to bring them into that world, integrate them and make them part of it. Not leave them out. The same could be done with religion and in an infinite amount of things that could generate unity in this community. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

Through this meeting, we raise our voices to say that we demand to convey our voice, or create means of communication, then to convey our voice and form committees that will be political and voluntary. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

Why don’t we form an association for the Palestinian community? (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

As a group of youth, we would like to enjoy our own distinctive position in Jeddah for the Palestinian community. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

The student activities office plays a prominent role in most social, cultural, and health fields, which fill up some gaps left by UNRWA in the camps. There are a lot of examples of these services, such as the library which is very helpful for students, although we are aware of shortages, some books are not available. Also lacking is financial assistance, a clinic, and a pharmacy to serve the camp members who are not affiliated to the Agency or the PLO. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

The aim of the project is hear from the Palestinian refugees. Why don’t we create a meeting place for the Palestinian refugees, or whatever we want to call it; the name counts after all. We can organize youth gatherings to examine the problems of the refugee youth. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

I call for a committee so that we can work. (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

I wanted to refer firstly to the title ‘Palestinian identity forum.’ There were many interesting things that were discussed and I don’t want to tangle the issue much. Nonetheless, being a Chilean of Palestinian origin, I wanted to refer to an issue that is the phenomenon of or the group that arrived to Chile around 1948 who were Palestinians. There is a generation in Chile that are Chiles due to the fact that they were born in Chile basically despite the fact that their fathers and mothers were of Palestinian origin. The emphasis in those days was evidently on education and religion. These went hand in hand, so that those who were born in that context are very clear on their identity. They also have a very clear notion of memory, which I think is an important matter considering the fact that memory is one of the most significant aspects of identity. We should accordingly consider how to maintain memory so as to avoid marginalising Palestinian-ness. I think that it is important to observe what is happening in the environment we are living in, which is undergoing the process of globalization. I get the impression that much is lamented in this context: this or that tradition being lost. We lament the loss of traditions continuously, but it turns out that globalization is
taking us all regardless of nationality and origin towards sameness. One takes this phone and it is the same as those in many parts of the world. But difference and identity preceded all of this, people used to go out of Chile and bring interesting things that were not seen here or vice versa. So I think that this issue of globalization has to be considered and towards where can one take this issue of the community in Chile. The process has many stages and suddenly one sees that what is missing is a complimentary web of elements that is essential for Palestinian memory. There were references to the Palestinian state, the Palestinian Sports Club, the Arab school, the Palestinian federation, the Orthodox Church and I say all those resources there will be no possibility of bringing them together at some moment in a sort of congress and look at this identity from all those angles and coordinate the creation and maintenance of memory. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

I suppose that one of the basic needs and priorities for the Palestinian community here is to have something to rely upon; a single body that will make the Palestinians feel that they socially, politically, culturally and psychologically belong to something. Life has more than one aspect and belonging has more than one interpretation. This is what we basically need in my opinion. Now this is an important vision, how can it be clarified and translated on the ground? In my estimation, we can form specialised committees to organize structures, and committees with particular mandates so that every committee can present a project for a certain program. I mean we shouldn’t just talk about our goals and what we intend to do. Instead, we should define matters and take practical steps. Let’s abandon the broad goals and the big slogans, because if we don’t take any steps, we will not be able to achieve anything. I guess we should take matters step by step. After that there will be specialised committees, and each in turn will have its own branches to work and present a program for the higher committee which can approve, refuse, change or revise it. By these means we will have developed a specific goal in a defined period of time. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

We can start by simple projects that we can implement with the help of some of the communities in this country, like doctors, lawyers, and teachers, who can start with a small project, like building a small clinic, or a house for elderly people, or a small school which can be elementary at the initial stage. We previously had a school, but it failed because there was no communication between the community members. There are a lot of projects to be done. In this country, we have, for instance, teachers from different Arab countries, whether Palestinians or not, who possess good skills, and who can communicate with each other and when they form a union, they can force the state to receive assistance from these countries, to build a small clinic, houses for elderly people, or national unions for engineers, teachers, or workers. They also can assume this task themselves. Here, we lack people who can take this first step. If you can, as an institution, help us in implementing these small projects which can be widened in a later stage, then we can communicate with you. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

Before moving to part two; then we agree to form a council for the Palestinian community, secondary and specialized committees should arise from this council. For example, a doctors’ committee headed by a respected doctor, and an engineers’ committee, or one for the teachers or professionals. This is very important. Also, having someone responsible for collecting donations will be important role. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

b. Representation and Participation
Can I just say one thing. I really enjoyed this conversation, I would really like to meet regularly. We can have different views and [Participants] can talk about their views on how and what we feel about Palestine and why we are convinced about our positions and sort of have a conversation between generations and between party lines. If they feel like this discussion was fruitful, people can sign up their name and contact information. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

How would these political committees become effective and patriotic, and how could the cooperation between us be achieved, people want to work, but how are we supposed to create jobs for them and for others? We need skills and we need other people to work. So, on the national level, the association does not represent the Palestinians. On the national level, and as was mentioned earlier, there are 200 people in the association out of 5000 people in Stockholm and there are 30000 Palestinians in Sweden. Hence, there should be a broader formula for participation in this decision-making process. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

We will not renounce the “Right of Return,” and the community must first endorse anything under discussion or any decision to be made. For example, if we want to know the opinions of the Danish over a certain issue, the community must meet to know their answer to any issue that concerns us as a community, or is related to our case as Palestinian people. This issue can be discussed through the community, then
5. Structural and Procedural Issues

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c. Procedures for Creating and Maintaining Structures

The main problem we have is the inefficiency of the Popular Committee. This means that the Popular Committee and the PLO’s regulations are not effective. The Popular Committee is not effective nor is the Higher Central Committee which runs the Popular Committees, and which links the Popular Committees that exist in the camps. Therefore, we should all agree to reconstruct the Popular Committee so that it would be more representative and so that it would reflect all opinions in the camp. Everyone should be represented, be they writers, workers or doctors. We also agreed that the Popular Committee should have two roles, a service-oriented role which is to take care of the camp’s affairs, and a political role by which it participates in the political decision with the factions of the PLO. Factions sometimes take decisions without referring to independent people in the camps. This means that some people did not join certain organizations, so the Popular Committee must include elected people to participate in the political decision that will be applied in the camp.

(Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

I want to talk about the negatives in the Popular Committee not the positives, because we are interested in improvement. We really need to replace unqualified committee members. There is no specialization and the suggestions which the people pass over to the Popular Committee are not implemented. The Popular Committees are not representative for all organizations and political organizations. Most of the members of the popular committee are not from the PLO. In sum, what is needed is change within the popular committees through elections, and everyone should be represented in it whether clubs or women, students, or engineers federations. This includes all sectors of Palestinian society. In order to gain legitimacy, I think the elections are the best way to do this.

(Participant, Women’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

There is no relationship between the Popular Committees and the organizations, and I suggest that the Popular Committee should understand the current situation, and that it should be elected by the people.

(Participant, Women’s meeting, Ein el-Hilweh camp, Lebanon)

Elections must be conducted by their due dates; this has to be firmly insisted upon.

(Participant, Activist meeting, Athens, Greece)

There is a need to increase the relations and associations which the brothers talked about. It is true that some of them represent certain families, but there are associations, such as Nablus or Al-Lid associations which represent various families. It is important to at least hear their voices for they may have some ideas that could benefit the civic needs of the Palestinian people. It is also necessary to visit the camps and the refugees in their houses to directly hear from them about their problems; these people can express their suffering and pain directly.

(Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

The role of the popular and security committees is not effective and almost nonexistent. These people should be replaced with people who have skills and whose top priority is to work in the interest of the camp residents. Committee elections must be conducted regularly on schedule, and the members of these committees should be responsible, skilled, and educated.

(Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

We shouldn’t allow anyone to impose their opinion on us. I won’t elect any candidate that I don’t like.

(Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

In Saudi Arabia, the issue of organizing elections crosses the red lines.

(Participant, Youth meeting, Dammar, Saudi Arabia)

The community structures are not completely representative, involving only a few hundred people out of the overall 30000 living here. We should attract as many of the community members as
possible by involving them in broad activities that don’t have anything to do with politics. I suggest that those who are responsible for Palestinian activities should take the first step and form a coordination committee. This committee should for example, discuss the mechanisms that we have been talking about, drafting a written program and implementing it more actively and freely. This will allow the Palestinian community to achieve the two goals I mentioned: increased integration in Swedish society and greater preservation of Palestinian identity. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

People should elect the popular committees to represent all the refugees in the camps without the interference of the organizations and the factions. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

What is needed from us in order to respond to such suggestions? We need another six months during which we can meet and discuss our achievements. Have we done anything? We should form a committee of 5-7 people that could oversee the process of activating the existing unions and federations, holding periodic meetings while activating their frameworks, activating the communication process with the centre. We should gather statistics for the community members in Greece, registering their names and giving them only to the Palestinian Embassy and the other communities with the news of the refugees in Palestine. This will allow us to make contacts through the internet. We can issue an e-magazine and create a net for the community which will enable us to make contacts through the internet. How can we further provide the community and the other communities with the news of the Palestinian community in Greece? (Participant, Public Meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

Can the popular committees be our hope? This is our situation and we can’t change it.

They should be official and authorized in every area so that anyone can come to the Saudi committees to present his demand which they, in turn, can convey it to the PLO. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

Four or five people are not capable of organizing our communities; people should work on this in general. Solutions and ideas which could help to activate communication channels between communities should be suggested in such meetings. Secondly, what is the problem that we face, is it financial or what? And why don’t we try to get the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to help us? Help us in forming or defining mechanisms to establish communication and links. Also, structures should be introduced so as to develop mechanisms and guidelines within the community.

We should, for example, issue a magazine through which we can communicate with each other. The important thing is not taking the decision, but devising the needed mechanisms to develop and preserve it, and to administratively manage it, while providing it with the community’s news along with the news of the other communities and the news of the refugees in Palestine. This will enable all the community members to recognize their concerns and those of the Palestinian people wherever they are. We can issue an e-magazine and create a net for the community which will enable us to make contacts through the internet.

How can we further provide the community and the other communities with the news of the Palestinian community in Greece? (Participant, Public Meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

I think that because the right person is not in the right place, people will not know anything no matter how hard you worked. And I assume that many people don’t even know that the community has an educational council which includes 200 people. A week ago, they distributed the certificates to the students who learned the Arabic, English, German, and French languages, as well as those who developed computer skills. A celebration, which no one knew anything about, was held. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

We mention first the Popular Committee which is one of the communication channels, although we don’t want the one that already exists in our camp. We don’t want it to consist of three organizations which impose their opinions; we want popular committees from all over the camp. This includes the institutions and the organizations in the camp, because every camp has its activities, and its elders, and the popular committee should include them all, and it should be free from pressures from the organizations. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

I also demand the creation of channels of communication between the members of the community itself to build stable relations. This can allow for numerous activities, including marking national occasions, issuing magazines and bulletins, and communicating via e-mails with the aim of disseminating information and events throughout the Palestinian arena. Of course, every member of the community is a messenger of his people to the Italians, and we should pay attention to all the points we discuss with them. This is what gives us incentives to participate in the community and to form its leadership. (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)

Part II: Findings
As for social issues, there should be genuine Popular Committees which consist of the camp’s mass organisations including engineers and doctors and lawyers, and representative members from the PLO. The popular committees could consist of specialist members and representatives from the factions who can be politicians and who can convey what we want to the concerned organisations. (Participant, Workers’ meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

I am disappointed when some of those speaking on our behalf fail to properly express Palestinian issues in the German language. If we can’t reach out to people due to language barriers, others can. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

When freedom and democracy are absent, there are no representative bodies or institutions that can speak in the name of the refugees. Consequently, I think that the associations which bear the name of the Palestinian cities and villages, and also the political parties, are appropriately positioned to speak in the name of the refugees. But the popular committees dedicated to offer services for the camps have to alter the mechanism by which they are formed, because the current formation mechanism doesn’t lead to real representation. I even think that the formation of the services committees should be achieved in accordance with the activities performed in the camps that we previously talked about, and with elected, not appointed, national figures. The administrative system of the services committees is to implement the policy of the state on what relates to the refugees. I don’t want this; I want their voice to be heard. There should be broad participation in all these things. (Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We have here two points: the problems that emerge from basic needs and which differ from one society to another, and the common goal which is communication with the PLO, considering that it is our only legitimate representative. The two points complement each other. Concerning the community and the problem which relates to its failure, there are responsible members in the community who are supposed to communicate with us. I am a member in the community; but I don’t receive any e-mails from the community in order to attend its activities or meeting, whereas some members get such e-mails regularly. If the community leadership thinks that it could decide on behalf of the community, and to decide who to invite or not, then we have a problem which should be solved. I want an answer on this question: what is the attitude towards the working institutions in this country, which neglect the community and don’t properly serve it? I don’t want to accuse all the institutions of negligence, but most of them are. Therefore, I demand we study these problems, and work on reviving these institutions so that they can better serve the community. This is very important to me because I don’t have any doubts that the PLO is our only legitimate representative. But when I have a problem with the PLO’s office, this is another thing. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

On the local level in the camp we should have an organization to connect us with the local society in the host country we live in on the one hand and connections between us on the other: This latter role involves connections between the people and the existing institutions; between the various camps; and between the camps and the institutions that represent them. We want effective Popular Committees. The first step would be to activate elected neighbourhood councils who would send representatives to the Committee. This means that deputies would be elected as opposed to so-and-so person being appointed or this or that faction being represented. This is one step. The other step would be to have deputies sent to the Popular Committees from all the Palestinian organisations, federations and unions, so that their constituencies would be represented. This way, the Committees will become more inclusive, expressing the needs of all those who live in the camp and recognising their ambitions and wishes, conveying them to the PLO. Neighbourhood councils are needed in order to run the services in all fields. The Popular Committee will then become the main authority in the camp, jointly of course, with the Security Committee. The popular and security committees would then together form a united authority in the camp which would oversee services and secure the camp. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

Based on the introduction presented by the brother here, in which he talked about taking note of the age range here and the absence of the youth. The absence of the women as well, although the sister and some other sisters are still here. I mean the Palestinian woman is far more involved in the refugee camps and in our occupied territories. We should definitely focus on this matter and on the issue of the youth. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)
Community Structures and Channels

5. Structural and Procedural Issues
e. Communication and tools

Unfortunately, we don’t even have channels of communication between us as Palestinian people here. Every group works on its own. Why can’t we work together to mark Palestinian occasions for instance or contact other areas in Sweden or in the world? These are very important things that we should seek to achieve. I hope every one of you would think of a new idea or a new channel to provide information to the people and to communicate with them. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

There is communication, but the issue is not about having a delegation from here or there. Whenever there is an occasion, there should be invitations or letters sent and phone calls made to institutions and active individuals. Unfortunately, many people don’t receive invitations or phone calls. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

I suggest that the Palestinian community appoint people in every area and every neighbourhood in London, or even outside London, in order to contact people around them. This country is large and populous, and the Palestinians are dispersed and this is the best way to reach them and gather more information. Moreover, it will be a good thing for us as a Palestinian community to publish a magazine and hold parties; but there is no political orientation in the Palestinian community; there used to be, but alas not any more. And we thank the community’s president, but we prefer to have a political and social activity alongside the parties and the magazine. The magazine is not as important as contacting the members. (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

At the local level, this channel of communication could be through monthly meetings or even through the internet if they don’t want to hold meetings. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon).

Before announcing the formation of communication channels, we need to ensure that they are safe and protected channels. If we create, for example, “an internet website” to serve as a communication channel, this will be good, because the internet is widely used. However, we should ensure that these channels are safe, considering that people have fears. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

This channel idea is excellent, but the names of the Palestinian refugees must be included, and if we could find a name for the association, a newspaper can be published, or a satellite channel. But first we must form the community association in this country, and give it a name, and find a headquarters for it. Following these steps, the media tools can be created. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

Elected a skilled representative on the local level from amongst the ranks of educated young men. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

There used to be committees, but also vested interests which we don’t want. We are talking openly; any man who has vested interests should not be responsible for us, and such people are usually connected to the state. We suggest the creation of independent structures, whose members would be prominent, respected people who have weight in the Palestinian community and whose opinions are heard and honoured. Social status has a role, and the issue should also evolve on the economic level. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’faraniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

It is true that we spoke, but we have not spoken in details, and we are saying that the popular committees should not just include men; women should participate in them too. They should include engineers, doctors, and teachers from both sexes. The positions should not only be given to men. Women should also play a role. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

The Popular Committees are the genuine representative bodies for the Palestinian people. But what is their role? They should be accountable and capable of leadership. We have a lot of demands such as covering the costs of educational and health services, creating job opportunities, and developing the institutions for the Palestinian people. Also convincing the world, through dialogue, of our opinion and our right as a Palestinian people. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

That’s why we must fix matters. We must meet with each other; I need to know why do you speak on my behalf in the Right of Return committees despite the fact that you never take my opinions into account even after I meet with you. Why? We are invited only when conferences are held, and we sit in the conference just to listen to the budget, and to the disputes over it. I’m not willing to take the trouble and travel on my own expense, paying 100 krones, and walking 50 km. With all due respect to the people participating in these conferences, I’m not honoured to meet with them so long as I’m excluded from the decision-making process. There are many mistakes. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark)

Work is what gives you legitimacy, not the seat. (Participant, Public meeting London, United Kingdom)

There is communication, but the issue is not about having a delegation from here or there. Whenever there is an occasion, there should be invitations or letters sent and phone calls made to institutions and active individuals. Unfortunately, many people don’t receive invitations or phone calls. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

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Community Structures and Channels

6. Forms of Engagement

a. Lobbying and Advocacy

A webpage must be designed in which we provide everything needed like news, as well as cultural and political articles and everything that concerns us as Palestinians. (Participant, Public Meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

A very important step we can start with, which is to create a website for the community. This suggestion of gathering data and creating a website is very important; its implementation will allow us to activate communication channels and announce activities. (Participant, Activist meeting, Athens, Greece)

For example, we don’t have a notice board so that anyone could write an article and put it up in the space that belongs to us. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

We should create an official website for us as a Palestinian community in Saudi Arabia where we can express our opinions, concerns and problems and where we can have a forum for dialogue. This would be great. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

But who will cover the website here in Saudi Arabia? Me or you or the official entity? Our sites belong to them anyway. I only wanted to highlight that if you want to do anything, the effort should be collective, but don’t tell me that the PLO has more than 20 sites. All I know is that the PLO is our only representative but you are telling us to work…

No, no, this is on the community level here. I am just asking for a site. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

You asked if we have any magazines, newspapers or a website. There aren’t any Arabic magazines in Italy, and I don’t know if having one would be a good thing. There is no magazine speaking on behalf of the community. They do not discuss the Right of Return or any of the issues that are particular to me. I am speaking as a Palestinian of course. I don’t want an Algerian man, for example, to issue a bulletin. The Right of Return is an issue that concerns me more than other Arabs. I don’t even have a website that explains the Palestinian cause. It is possible that one of the brothers has a website to discuss issues like cooking and Jerusalem, but there aren’t any systematic websites dedicated to Palestinian issues. (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)

6. Forms of Engagement

I think that the task of the Palestinian association, wherever it is, is to offer projects to people. The Palestinian association should have a project to work on and should bring people to participate. Providing an income for the association is one project, another one would be political representation among the Swedish parties. I believe that projects for the Palestinian associations, as a thought, are not impossible to implement. Why don’t we have, for example, a Palestinian cultural centre in Sweden. We can get the funds from anywhere. In Ramallah, they have activities every week, why don’t we dedicate just one week in Sweden for all the Palestinian association to work during it. An academic project would be to open a university for example. We will convey our voice if we maintain our dignity in our work. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

It would be good if there was a central decision to gather important people to contribute towards opening a university for example. We will convey our voice! (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We do have something called the Canadian Arab Federation which is supposed to lobby the government on behalf of all the Arab community. We also have Palestine House which is also supposed to represent the Palestinian voice to the Canadian government, but both have had many shortcomings which many of you know of. I am just going to speak on the issue of lobbying tactics from the Canadian Arab Federation perspective because they have received some support from the Arab community in Canada. From what I understand they found themselves very weak when they tried to lobby the Canadian government, and they basically can’t work together to arrange for meetings when they want meetings with the government. They simply don’t have power; what I would like to suggest is...
to launch an attempt to consolidate the different organizations and groups that do exist. The focus would be the popular demands of Palestinians and Arabs in general, agitating and advocating for them with the Canadian government. (Participant, Public meeting, Toronto, Canada).

I am a Palestinian, I want a Palestinian party. I don’t intend to be planted in this country forever. I want to ask one thing: is the news we hear ever correct? Frankly I don’t know anything about Palestine except when I hear the Ajial radio channel from the Occupied Territories, or going to the Dead Sea to catch the signal. There is no honest Arabic media. I am a refugee, and I am a Palestinian, I want a Palestinian party, I want a Palestinian youth assembly. (Participant, Women’s Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

Something that we really need to do is be in touch with the Palestinians in every State. With all these calamities happening we have to be in touch we should all be together and all be more active on writing letters to our congressmen, we are really not taking action on some of the things done to us; we are being very passive. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

We have a political problem with the Canadian government. This government still hates us and favours Israel in a very obvious manner. I don’t have to talk in detail but this is clear to everyone. As Palestinians, we should have methods to exercise pressure on the Canadians and the Canadian government to make them recognize our national rights as Palestinians, and to supervise the performance of the Canadian government on what relates to our rights as Palestinians. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

There is always this problem of all these different groups going around representing the Arabs or Palestinians to the government without any coordination whatsoever; I have stories of the Prime Minister’s office settling requests from different groups at the same time. Obviously, there needs to be coordination between these groups, and the groups need to be accountable to us, and I agree with the point that was brought up around the need to professionalize these groups. However, they should at the same time be accountable and organically tied to the community, as opposed to being left to speak from their own position as bureaucrats. From my experience so far, these groups get grants from the government so they adopt and they repeat the government’s line, and obviously the government’s line isn’t satisfactory to the Palestinians in this country. (Participant, Public meeting, Toronto, Canada).

This issue in particular is one that we don’t know what we want from it, nor do the Germans! The Germans and the community don’t know what they want from integration. We have a real problem in this area. With regards to this issue, no one was able to define what they want from integration. When you talk to the Germans, they say something, and when you talk to Arabs, they say another thing. And even the German officials have not reached any agreement on what they want from the community. In any case, what concerns us here is not what Germans want, but what we want as a Palestinian community in this country. On the part of the old generation, we have attempted to push the educated members of the community who speak German, the doctors and engineers—these are many as has been mentioned earlier—to join the German parties. It was suggested that each one could choose the party that suits their political inclinations, and they could then work within this country on issues pertaining to German society while also working on our issues as a community. Those involved would then help address our issues and defend us before the German authorities, and we would then be able to form a “lobby” outside the parties and meet with each other. Unfortunately, this has not happened. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany).

I would say maybe focusing strategically on certain key issues, key areas, or key aspects. What these key issues or areas or aspects would be I am not really sure. Nevertheless pooling the manpower and focusing on certain things instead of spreading ourselves thin would be a start. Like a jack hammer, we should try to break through one area and keep focusing. Another thing I would say is that we need to increase the frequency of the meetings. You know, if you meet once a month, then you think about it the day before and you think about it on the day of the meeting and you would have it on your calendar. As such, increasing the frequency of the meetings would be good, and getting first generation American Palestinians like me more involved is very important. I think that our political involvement is key, because we are the people that vote and in the USA you can only speak with money or voting. Demonstrations do also catch some attention, but you have to be able to influence your representative who would then attempt to sway the House (of Representatives), you know that’s what a I believe. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

I demand that we take advantage of all the elections, not just the municipality elections, but also the parliamentary elections. We should present our demands to the parties, and affirm, in return, that we will give our votes to the party which fulfils...
6. Forms of Engagement

a. Lobbying and Advocacy

Our demands and support the Palestinian cause. (Participant, Public Meeting, Slagelse, Denmark).

We are the victims, with enough political involvement we can convey to the media the need for the occupation to go down, to end. Let’s continue, let’s not lose the light at the end of the tunnel. We believe we are going to go back, maybe not us but the generation after us. It’s very important, so how can we do it? First, we have to be involved in parties, it’s a must. Some people say “oh, let’s not get involved.” For instance, a brother here is now part of the board of education in the district. Did you know that? How many people know that? 1, 2, 3, 4? Everybody should know, stand up, it’s not promoting anybody but this is promoting the next generation and us. We are, and should be, part of the system. Yesterday I went for this function, at the SouthWest Youth Collaborative with the sister here. It was very good, most of them are Palestinians but also there are Americans and Latinos, we have built these coalitions, we cannot be by ourselves. Now in Congress we supported a Senator and this is also important because we need to reach out to Senators. So get involved in politics, stand up, make sure that you vote. It is basic things that we are not doing and I think they don’t happen because we, although we really love Palestine and we care, but we have this attitude of ‘yeah, let somebody else do it.’ (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

It is in our interest to participate in the elections and to give our voices to the parties who are willing to respond to our demands. We must understand with which party our interests lie. (Participant, Public Meeting, Slagelse, Denmark).

You should form a committee, as you said earlier. It is not necessary to choose from 50 or 60 people while we count one million people. We should find a qualified person who has charisma and the ability to achieve things and to understand people. We should vote as a block. Eventually they will hear our Palestinian voices and stop talking against us. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

It’s really bizarre for me that we feel we have to put all our efforts to just being involved in power politics. I find that disempowering. It might seem strange but I don’t think we should aim to be in a process that is corrupt. I know many people might disagree here, but this is a process that has historically oppressed minority people. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

As Palestinians who live in Canada and Europe, we should play a symbolic role. Let me explain. Jews in America collect money and donations to offer Israel diplomatic and political support. We should do this in Canada and the European countries. The Jewish people have their own organizations, and they are well organized in offering Israel diplomatic and political support. Likewise, we should organize ourselves to perform the same role in the service of the PLO, the Palestinian Authority, and our nation in Palestine and in Al-Shatat camps in the Arab countries. The question is how to organize ourselves in order to perform this role. The Palestinians in America achieved great progress in this area. And the Palestinians in America organized themselves to serve their country as the Italians do. The Italian community supports the Italians and so do the Irish and French and other communities. We, as Palestinians who suffer from greater injustice and whose rights are usurped should work harder to form at least a political lobby to support and defend our Palestinian cause in an effective way. If we had a political lobby in Canada, our situation would have been less dire. The Canadian government would have lessened its favouritism to Israel, and we would have at least attracted some politicians and gained some support from within the Canadian government for our cause. We would have at least balanced the Zionist lobby whose influence is ever reflected in the Canadian government’s egregiously pro-Israeli policies. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

There is no other solution. If you want to be involved in politics in the country, and be effective, and do something for your case, you must create a lobby in order to be effective. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark)

We should think of ourselves as Canadians first to be able to influence the decisions of the Canadian government, because if it perceived us as an effective group that participates in building the Canadian society and in the policies of this country, it would respect us and at least have a balanced attitude towards our cause as Palestinian refugees in this country, and as productive people. Therefore we should join the Canadian parties to get to the chief posts in order to influence the parties’ policies to reflect a positive attitude towards our cause and our right to return to our country. We know the political and social course in this Canadian society. So if we don’t have an influence, why would we demand the Canadian government to change its attitudes towards our cause and our right to return to our country. We know the political and social course in this Canadian society. So if we don’t have an influence, why would we demand the Canadian government to change its attitudes towards our cause and our right to return to our country. We know the political and social course in this Canadian society. So if we don’t have an influence, why would we demand the Canadian government to change its attitudes towards our cause and our right to return to our country. We know the political and social course in this Canadian society. So if we don’t have an influence, why would we demand the Canadian government to change its attitudes towards our cause and our right to return to our country. We know the political and social course in this Canadian society. So if we don’t have an influence, why would we demand the Canadian government to change its attitudes towards our cause and our right to return to our country. We know the political and social course in this Canadian society. So if we don’t have an influence, why would we demand the Canadian government to change its attitudes towards our cause and our right to return to our country. We know the political and social course in this Canadian society. So if we don’t have an influence, why would we demand the Canadian government to change its attitudes towards our cause and our right to return to our country. We know the political and social course in this Canadian society. So if we don’t have an influence, why would we demand the Canadian government to change its attitudes towards our cause and our right to return to our country. We know the political and social course in this Canadian society. So if we don’t have an influence, why would we demand the Canadian government to change its attitudes towards our cause and our right to return to our country. We know the political and social course in this Canadian society. So if we don’t have an influence, why would we demand the Canadian government to change its attitudes towards our cause and our right to return to our country. We know the political and social course in this Canadian society. So if we don’t have an influence, why would we demand the Canadian government to change its attitudes towards our cause and our right to return to our country. We know the political and social course in this Canadian society. So if we don’t have an influence, why would we demand the Canadian government to change its attitudes towards our cause and our right to return to our country.
b. Community Mobilization

The other thing is the explanation of suicide bombing. The matter has to be explained. You know that common Americans, because they perceive it as terrorism instead of understanding that the real problem is the Israeli government and occupation. I know that my own friends don’t really know and that is my closest American friends, my closest American friends don’t know about Palestine and they don’t know what is happening. I try to educate them but unfortunately what they see in the media and what is projected for them while growing up, all they see is the suicide bomber. So for instance, even with regards to an organization like Hamas what they don’t understand is that there is the military wing but there is also the social and civic wing that does social work within the community. They don’t see the social civic work, they see the military. I just don’t think that we speak up enough, we don’t organize. I mean when was the last time that you saw a conference on Palestinian issues on a large scale other than tonight’s meeting and Kind Hearts?.

We want a lot of things, but what are the methods to achieve them? We are living in Europe, and if we want to convey our voice to the Swedish people we should have a method to do this. Yet we lack such a method. People are hearing our news casually, as if they were normal. I have only been living here for a little while, but in my opinion the easy way to reach the hearts of the foreigners in general and the Swedes or Europeans in particular is art. We want people to support Palestinian folklore and heritage. We may be able to convey our cause through that medium. I would like you to take this idea to heart because it is a powerful tool with which we can defend our cause. Even our children are watching the killing as if it was a casual thing. I think that we should present our message in a way that is accessible to other people, through Palestinian theatre, art, and folklore. We shouldn’t also disregard our children, who are beginning to forget their traditions. This sort of thing needs a lot of support. I hope that this idea, the idea of supporting Palestinian art, would be taken into consideration.

The centre of our work and activism as Palestinians should be 1948, and the Right of Return. At times we can get caught up with speaking about the Wall and the occupation. I am not trying to downplay their importance, but we should concurrently speak about the issue of Palestine, and that is 1948. It is easy to put the story to people about Israeli colonialism and Zionist expansionism, the occupation and the meaning of the apartheid wall when we relate the story of 1948 and the right of return.

We can exhibit photographs. There are many photographs of massacres that happened during the Nakba and Land Day that are still preserved by some journalists. We can get a permit and exhibit photographs of the massacres.

The Swedes are working and are helping us Palestinians; they are doing far more than they do for themselves. There are many Swedes who go to Palestine and endanger their own lives for us. It also matters to us when someone comes out of the university and talks about the cause of Palestine. Its good when a Swede comes and speaks out, that influences other Swedes. It’s not only us that talk; we should cooperate with each other.

When we target the wider community, we should link the historical narratives of the colonization of Australia with the colonization of Palestine.

Activists can fall into a routine, for example by writing letters to the media and lobbying the government, but that has no real creativity and no innovation. We need creative, artistic, innovative ways to relate the issue to Palestine.

We need to start our own newspaper or as he said, TV station, something that is going to get out to the general public.

We can arrange an exhibition and invite everyone. The goal of the exhibition would be to benefit the cause with certain paintings and drawings. It seems to me that folklore is being lost bit by bit. Therefore this suggestion is a strong one, as it can deliver the message in an alternative way. People are bored of listening to news or lectures.
6. Forms of Engagement

b. Community Mobilization

I am from Nablus. My mother is from Nablus and my father is from Lid. I lived in Nablus, and then I moved to Amman and studied in Amman for 19 years. After the June war in 1967, I secretly worked in the camps housing the people who took refuge in Amman from the West Bank. Ten years ago, I came to Greece. First I felt that I am a stranger, and I lived here for 6 months without knowing anyone. Then I met some women through one of the morning visits, and I started to search for a group to work with. I will talk frankly because I can’t afford to waste my time. We agreed to read a book and discuss it and to prepare a subject so that one of us can present it to the rest. We formed groups for our children so that they can learn the Arabic language and Islamic religion. Then I discovered that we can be active in another way. Each one of us brought food to sell and we created a fund for Palestine out of the returns. We then found out that we can further our capacities. It was suggested that we organize an exhibition and we went ahead with the idea. So far, we have organized five exhibitions, and the fifth was in my house. Through this project which started as a small one and which is now a big one, we contributed to the education of three Palestinians, and we care for orphans. Along with my group, I used to be isolated, but I learned that this is wrong, and I found many people who encouraged me from other communities. Greek women are very pleased with my work. I made them a map of Palestine because they asked us for maps. I have an artist with us, and we have [Participant]. I specialize in cakes and olives. I am very happy to meet you although I was originally hesitant about coming to the community. I thought that it will just be pointless talk without results or decisions. I also noticed that last Saturday that all what they were doing was criticizing each other. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

I am from Haifa, Palestine. The idea I have is that the Palestinian refugees here in Europe, the Arabs or the Muslims in general, should be convinced that they are ambassadors that represent their nation’s suffering in Palestine. They are waiting for us to do a lot of things, but unfortunately we don’t. We should be ambassadors of our people’s suffering in Palestine, by presenting it through the Swedish media for example. We have a lot of humanitarian causes but we always have the feeling that we are begging the European society to help us. When we want to convey this suffering to the Europeans, we should be convinced that this is their duty because they are the cause of this suffering. We all know that Jews suffered a lot in Europe and were forced out of it and that the Europeans helped them immigrate to Palestine. We should address the Swedish society through the media and tell them about the suffering of the Palestinian people and about their humanitarian needs.

I can summarize her idea by saying that we need a qualified team to convey this suffering. We would not be able to convey it if we don’t have committees that agree with each other about the methods of doing this. Your idea is excellent; I mean to find good teams, not only one, that cooperate with each other and assume this task so as to illustrate this suffering and tell people about it. We should also help those who live in the occupied territories and those who live in the camps, who can’t feed themselves. There are mechanisms to make us achieve this. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

I think that the communities are a good framework to form these structures which must have a political and social program through forming right of return committees along with them. The right of return committees exist in Sweden, Denmark, and Germany; they exist internationally. And there are frameworks that unite these committees through the European Confederation, and through holding international annual conferences of these committees. This implies that they reinforce themselves by joining the Confederation and working under its banner. It is socially very important to try to integrate within the societies they live in, in order to be more effective in better participating in the struggle of our Palestinian people. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

I agree with everybody else here, and I am the oldest one here and I have witnessed much through my late husband’s community work with the Holy Land Fund and the Palestinian Congress. It was all to no avail, and alas he finally collapsed. This is my fear; it becomes very disappointing and you feel very emotional. It becomes like, it’s painful. I think that we have to start thinking progressively and move forward and teach the American community. They don’t hear our voice, they say the Palestinians are terrorists, that’s the
image they have about us, that’s how the media shows us, always with a bomb, everyone knows about it, so I hope we do something constructive.  

(Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

Refugees should be part of Palestinian society; but they should also have their own organisation that would carry their rights as Palestinians, refugees, and human beings. I would also like to say another thing, that we, in this country, are able to sleep safe and sound knowing that if we get old and retire we won’t be hungry; and if we are sick, we will find medical care. In contrast, there are others that need support. How can we form cooperative and humanitarian associations to support others in the world? How are we to encourage them to help our people in the Occupied Territories? I know at least two associations that offer projects to camps in Lebanon, Gaza, and the West Bank. For example, they dug a waterwell in the Nahr el-Bared, and opened a nursery, covering all expenses. I think that if we supported these associations, they would have an even bigger role. The third issue is about the way we could contact official organizations. Here I would remind you of what we said about exerting every possible pressure on European governmental institutions through non-governmental institutions, that’s why I mentioned the relations with associations, institutions, clubs, parties, and the social forces that advocate the rights of our people, which are numerous here in Sweden, and which are doing a lot of activities to support the Palestinian people without our participation and effort. We can find such institutions and help them to support our case, and ask them to highlight our issues.  

(Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

Our cause in Sweden is public opinion, if we want to fight the public opinion battle in Sweden, we should be strong and if we want to be stronger and bigger; we should know how to unite people. The other problem is to learn how to organize administrative organizations. Every one should know his duty and what is needed from him and what he can do when the members come. I think that this is important.  

(Participant, Students’ meeting, Stockholm/Uppsala, Sweden)

The mobilization process can take place when people are convinced that the Palestinian Cause is not only a Palestinian one, but a cause for the Arab and Islamic nations. Masses should be educated that it’s not a cause confined only to the Palestinian people but also involves the sacred places of the Islamic nation, for Jerusalem is not only mine or yours, it’s for everyone. This is one level of activation. The second level of activation can happen through the education process through which we can convince people that this cause is not limited to the Palestinian people.  

(Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

c. Engaging the Media

What everybody agreed to is that we need a structure, but most importantly we need responsible media, we need to have a television program like every week just like the Zogby show. Everybody has email nowadays, and if everybody gets connected, everybody will be active in the more indifferent areas, when you vote for your senator you are contributing. In the morning shows there are speakers, we should respond to them, we have them here in Michigan.  

(Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

I suggest creating a radio channel while broadcasting material in several foreign languages to introduce the “right of the Palestinian refugees to return” to the Arab and international public opinion. This will be one of the tools that should support the refugees cause. This program, which can be supported with cultural plans, can start from Jerusalem Centre or Amman Centre, or even from the institutions of the civil society, in order to introduce their cause, because even if we spent millions of years talking about the Palestinian Cause, we will still have to figure how to get to Palestine.  

(Participant, Preparatory Meeting, Amman, Jordan)

As for the communication with others within a country, there is a need for having developed media tools, and the presence of Palestinian media specialists who can express the Palestinian points of view. The status of the popular committees should be enhanced and they should be joined by independent members and formed through clean democratic elections. Does anybody want to add anything?  

(Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashidieh camp, Lebanon)

Tell me your idea so that we can help you to implement it. Is there a problem in inviting the officials to a cultural centre? It doesn’t have to be local; you can direct the media to the Swedes to invite certain people. I mean that this centre would be dedicated to the Palestinian media in order to demand the right of return to connect the people here with those in our country.  

(Participant, Women’s meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

I also have another point. As people who live in Europe, and we are proud of that, we should be able, like journalists, to make political and special programs. The role of organizations is to enable each of us to make their own activity
6. Forms of Engagement

c. Engaging the Media

and coordinate with them. One journalist can, for example, write about the tragedies of the Palestinian people, while another one can write about the scandals of the Israelis. People should know what they are doing, whether on the personal or municipalities levels. The important thing is to develop it. Our goal should be to get the embassy to work on the political level in tune with the media here, and to broadcast programs about Palestine. For the Palestinian people to be happy with the Authority, it should mobilize the people through small steps that would strengthen it. (Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)

The Embassy can work with one of the existing newspapers published here. Some of these papers have fifty or sixty pages, and they can provide daily coverage and information about Palestinian status and hardship in Iraq from 1948 up till now. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

The most important thing is the media which can transmit the true picture abroad. (Participant, Public Meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon).

Instead of talking to each other as members of different organizations, we can try to unify ourselves in order to try to affect world opinion. One of the structures that I see answering all of these concerns is the largest media campaign we can imagine, something that we are not yet capable of doing, and don’t tell me there isn’t enough money in the Arab community to do this. Tell me the opposition will knock it – but we need to try to affect world opinion and all of this research will start taking action, instead of just lying there. People will start seeing what our words mean and it will influence our policy makers. It will influence our president Mahmud Abbas, instead of him coming to Washington he would come to us as a community and talk to us and become part of a media campaign and we would be present in the newspapers, stressing our needs. Only a large media campaign would answer our needs. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

The media should cover our misery and the Right of Return and anything related to the Palestinian people. First and last, the media is of paramount importance. Art, activities, humanitarian and financial support are all less important. We want the media to tell the truth and to reveal what is happening in Palestine, and to convey what we want. We have a lot of hardship and tragedies. All the Arab countries see what is happening in Palestine, and even the Europeans understand what is happening, but they all blame the Palestinians. If they silence you though, someone else will raise their voice. Dealing with the media is the most important suggestion out of all of them. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Malmo, Sweden)
We discussed the problems and all of you have heard them, but we also need solutions. Every discussion raises a problem. The aim of the discussion is to reach solutions. Yet solutions can be pursued on different levels... Let us delineate the various tangled problems faced by the Palestinians, so that we can have a solution-based approach to each.

(Participant, Students' meeting, Rashiden camp, Lebanon)
I. Ensuring Representation at Every Level

After all these discussions and workshops, I wonder if the findings will be conveyed to the concerned entities. We always go around in a vicious circle. These findings should be acted upon, and directed to the right place, especially if they concern the PLO and activating its institutions or its role, because unorganized communication channels directly affect the Palestinians. Also, the Department of Refugee Affairs, which used to be a very important department in the PLO, should be activated. This re-direction will help to order the camps and solve the problem of reorganizing the popular committees. The Palestinians, as individuals and as a people, need to see a real solution that will ease their problems and suffering. We need to see a translation of words into deeds addressing the concerns of refugees. So, in order to implement the findings of these workshops, I suggest that they be laid before the concerned entities and as a people, need to see a real solution that will ease their problems and suffering. We need to see a translation of words into deeds addressing the concerns of refugees. So, in order to implement the findings of these workshops, I suggest that they be laid before the concerned entities.

The Palestinian leadership emphasizes the Right of Return, and the world knows that we insist upon Resolution 194. The political struggle of the Palestinian people is a legitimate one. Therefore the PLO is trying to turn international public opinion against Israel. Hence, we emphasize that the PLO is our only representative, and that the struggle is legitimate work through which we can express our opinions. This project is a chance for us to freely express our opinions since we are an educated democratic nation:

- We demand that pressure be exercised on UNRWA to increase its services.
- We want to build a new relationship with the Lebanese state.
- We want Palestinians in Lebanon to be granted their civil and political rights. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

I wish that our voice can be heard by the leaders and the officials, and then by other countries, so that they can all feel with us as Palestinians living in the Diaspora and so that they can fulfill our needs and convey our opinion to all people. I also wish we had the right to freely express ourselves, and that we can gain our civil and national rights, and that everyone would know about the problems the Palestinian people suffer from. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

There is no doubt that our people suffer in the different Al-Shatot countries, whether in the Arab world or in the rest of the world. Their conditions in the Arab world might be worse in terms of residency and getting in and out of the country or obtaining the visa to travel for receiving medical treatment or to study. But this doesn’t prevent our conditions from getting better, so that we do not stay poor and miserable and confined in every move we make. That is not right! We should always seek to improve our conditions, but no one should think that these efforts aimed to improve our conditions will make us forget our cause and its fundamentals, and that shouldn’t encourage us while continuing these efforts to fall into despair. No! There is nothing called despair in life, and we are an optimistic and religious people, and we have a right that will not be lost, and we demand today to have this right because we are convinced of it and because it is our fate and history which we earned in blood, so it is impossible to renounce it. We want to emphasize that the right of return is a basic right. But before Palestinians can speak of their current needs, have they formed a union? A federation? A community? For teachers, engineers, doctors, etc? Have they published a newspaper or created a website to discuss their issues? All this work would be good, especially with the developed technological devices, yes, it is true! But this doesn’t mean that we have to be squeezed in our life and our work and education. Doors should be open to us in the Arab world; they are already open for thousands of Anglo-Saxons and Africans, but when it comes to Palestinians, everyone tracks them and tries to make it harder for them to live, why? The Palestinians did not go to the Arab world to cause destruction, on the contrary; they helped build and teach everywhere in the Arab world, north and south, east and west, so this demand is legitimate, but it should not make us forget the basic right which is the right of return. (Participant, Public meeting, Khartoum, Sudan)

It is enough that we demand to preserve UNRWA, and they seek to cancel it because it was formed under Resolution 194. We are looking towards the future, brother. I’m telling you that the purpose of these civic and practical structures is to facilitate the participation of the Palestinian refugees and their communities in the immigrant countries, with the main issues that concern them. This project can devise the needed steps to include the refugees’ voices in the decision making process according to the democratic models of participation. We have a problem in the Arab countries, which is the lack of democracy. We want to try to work in them. We are in a democratic country here in which I can speak, and I think what is demanded from the community here is to design its civic structures and its own mechanisms and operations. We want to send the Authority our demands, and also the United Nations. We need to organize ourselves. At present, we are effective at the municipality level. We want political foundations. We are entering schools, and nurseries, and
we are entering the municipality itself, but it is needed from every region. (Participant, Public Meeting, Helsingør, Denmark).

I am from the town of Baqa al-Gharbiyah in the triangle area in 1948 territories and of course I am a Palestinian, living in Norway. I have always been trying to find a way to create an association for the Palestinian community in Norway, so that the Palestinians can meet on the Islamic and national holidays and occasions. There were attempts in the past to create such an association, but unfortunately they failed. There was an attempt to organise the Palestinian community four years ago, yet it didn’t achieve anything.

If we don’t, as Palestinians, and I am addressing everyone here, create a Palestinian association, through which we can meet and get acquainted with each other as Palestinians on special occasions, we will not succeed in anything, nor will our voice reach the embassy, any local Norwegian authority, any international institution or authority, or our national representative which is the PLO. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

The PLO should be activated internally and externally. The national concern, which is our right to return to our lands, should be connected with the social concern. There are civic organizations that are active in the field of defending the Right of Return. We won’t allow anyone to renounce the right of establishing a Palestinian state, and we will not accept the settling of Palestinian refugees. We demand that our opinion be taken into consideration on the international scene.

The enemy took my house and my brother’s house. If my brother regains his house, I will be happy for him, but I don’t accept that my house continues to be occupied. I am a 48 Palestinian refugee, and I have the right to return to my land. I will not allow the Palestinian Authority; the United Nations, or anyone to take this right away from me. I want my voice to be heard, and my papers to be recognized through the Palestinian Embassy in Denmark, which speaks in the name of the Palestinian community. I want this issue to be brought into the discussion in any negotiations, and not to be abolished or neglected. A message should also be sent on behalf of the community to the United Nations, demanding that the organisation respect itself and implement its own resolutions concerning the right of return. There are resolutions calling for our right of return, and we demand that pressure be exercised in order to implement these resolutions. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark).

The problem is that we are not only forgotten by the Palestinian Authority, but also by the European and Arab countries. What are the results of all the agreements that were reached? All the ‘48 Palestinians don’t have anyone to speak in their name. They say to us that we are “Israeli Arabs,” which implies that we are forgotten, so they mean to say: solve your problems alone, live wherever you want, there is no one to defend you. And the Europeans agree with this. We should not be led astray by whatever is said by some MP in some country; we want something that is tangible. We no longer believe that there is anyone who wants to do anything; it has been 50 years and we have been in the same situation. This is causing us psychological anxiety; we have no civil rights, no political rights, nothing. The economic situation of the Palestinians who live in Europe is not a problem, but the civil rights, and the psychological situation are more important. As a Palestinian individual, you must feel that you really exist. The young immigrant Palestinians, unlike those from other communities which are united, are disunited, and we don’t have any rights, and this is our fault. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark)

[The Right of Return] is a sacred right that should not be manipulated by anyone. This is a right which we decide and, whether we return or not, the right must be implemented. That is one thing. The second thing is that we must have civic structures in the countries we live in. These structures should provide us with protection and assistance. I’m referring to the camps, so if we ever face any obstacle, like what happened in Lebanon, where those who live in the camps aren’t allowed to work outside. Who defends us when it comes to such matters? Even UNRWA doesn’t discuss them. That’s why we should organize ourselves without external help, and that’s why we should have entities that could organize us. (Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Sonderborg, Denmark)

I want to say that we have an institution called the Union of Palestinian Doctors and Pharmacists, and I can say that it is more active than any other Palestinian union. In the last six months, it has managed to send three medical delegations to Palestine. But we faced a lot of problems there, we periodically meet, and we sent several letters to the chief of the supervision committee in the Legislative Council about the problems we face. We have addressed letters to the Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas, and to the Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmad Qurei’ in which we described all the problems that faced the medical teams during their work in the West Bank and Gaza. These letters did not
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The camp does not only house 1948 refugees; it is also inhabited by those who were displaced in 1967 and people from Gaza who don’t have a national number and are deprived of many services. I am talking about Madaba camp in which I live. Twenty thousand people live in this camp, and it is not officially recognized, so it is deprived from services and privileges given to the other camps. This camp houses refugees, displaced people, and people from Gaza. And I wonder, what are the responsibilities of the Department of Palestinian Affairs, and which category among these is it responsible for? And the same question is posed to UNRWA. The Gazan is lost between them! Once, a woman who has a document from Gaza came to me in the centre; her document was not accepted by the Department of Palestinian Affairs or by UNRWA. So where should she go? Where are her rights? When the displaced, who suffer from unemployment and financial crisis, go to request help from the existing structures in the camps, or from the service committee, they can’t find anyone to help them. They are referred to the Ministry of the Social Affairs, and they are consequently lost between the three parties and can’t get their rights from any of them. (Participant, Pilot meeting, Amman, Jordan)

When I think of myself as a member of a group, I wonder about my place within the group, and I feel like I’m sitting in a locked room watching people outside who don’t see me, while I eagerly search among them for my family. I am talking about my internal feelings from an individual, as opposed to a wider cultural, perspective. I feel alone, we can be six people, but still we will feel alone. I don’t even know the family next door. And I have no relation whatsoever with the neighbours. I feel that I am ignored even by the authority. Therefore I am convinced deep inside that I am nothing, and that I have no rights in this life, I don’t even have a land. I was born in Libya, and I heard that those who are born in Libya can’t enter Palestine. I wish to visit Palestine, why can’t I do that? If I can’t enter Palestine to visit it, how would I dare enter it to vote? Did you know that they requested international supervisors, and I applied, not intending to vote, but just to observe? This is a great honour for me. I just wanted to observe as I did in the Egyptian elections. But the security service refused because I am a Palestinian, and therefore I don’t have the right to vote or to observe! Can you see the duality in standards? I don’t even have the right to observe and in the same time I can’t vote. I want to know: who exactly am I? (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

Jordan did its best with us and we have Jordanian passports, but in the end what is the identity of the camps? We want to talk about our right as human beings to live decently and to learn and receive health care. If I want to work they always ask about the original country I came from, and they ask me to apply and they will call me only to be surprised that less skilled people have been appointed instead of me. Why? Is it because we are refugees? What is the difference between the refugee and the displaced person, or between the Palestinian and the Jordanian? If my right is stolen, to whom should I resort? UNRWA tells us, we who work in a centre for women’s services, that they have no services to offer, so to whom should we resort? (Participant, Pilot meeting, Amman, Jordan)
I was a young girl when we left Yafa. We immigrated to Khan Younis and we stayed there for some time. They gave us tents, and then we went to Al-Bureij and stayed there for several years. After that we moved to Gaza and I got married there. My son in Libya got into trouble with some guy. I think he was a Palestinian, and they took him to prison, and he is still there. I went to the Libyan embassy but they wouldn't give me a visa. I went there several times, and every time I go there they say to me that we have no place amongst them. I told them that I might die because I am 76 years old and implored them to let me see him, but they refused. I don’t know anything about my son.

(Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

What about the Palestinian institutions? There are no Palestinian institutions left after Oslo. The Oslo agreements paralyzed the PLO and the Palestinian National Council; accordingly, these agreements diminished half of the Palestinian people.

(Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany)

The Palestinian people in Iraq are almost forgotten, and no Palestinian community outside really knows what is happening to the community members in Iraq. The communities outside have their rights, and their civic organizations that are connected with the state. There are the Right of Return organizations which track Palestinian communities’ conditions with host countries. We lack these organizations in Iraq. We have a Palestinian Embassy in Iraq, but we have been neglected by it from the very beginning. Some people used to receive a share of the donations given to the Haifa Club, but these shares were not evenly distributed.

(Participant, Syndicate Meeting the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tobaji), Baghdad, Iraq)

We are linked to something called the Union of Palestinian Associations in Sweden. Regrettably, these associations don’t work as institutions, but rather as effective individuals that activate Palestinian work on the right of return and other issues in Sweden and elsewhere. Consequently, we lack communication with the Union of Palestinian Associations in Sweden, because it is not very decisive about this issue. Also, we miss the presence of a representative, or a communication process between the Palestinian associations and other countries like Denmark or Germany. There isn’t a body that represents the Palestinian unions in every country. This means that there are Palestinian unions in Denmark, Germany, and Sweden, but they don’t have any common ground upon which they could coordinate their work and represent the Palestinian work on the European level. In addition, there is no communication with the PLO or other organizations, because there isn’t any activity whatsoever from people who are supposed to be mandated from the PLO to interact with the Palestinian community in this country.

(Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

We are forgotten, and the country of Denmark in which we live is increasingly trying to keep us marginalised.

(Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)

If you are a Palestinian student you are not even acknowledged as an international student and if things go bad you don’t even know where to go, except maybe to go back from where you came or something. I think there are some demands and a need to communicate. This is mainly about channels of communication — to reconfigure these with the PLO. We should also unite.

(Participant, Public Meeting for Disabled Persons, Beirut, Lebanon)

The elections will soon be held. I am a part of the Palestinian people, don’t I have an opinion that I wish to relay? We should be able to participate and express our opinions in the Palestinian elections. We also reemphasize that the right of return is a political demand; it is part of politics, whereas the real social issue is that everyone is looking for jobs to pay for the daily expenses for the family. Upon his request, a patient should be able to go the Palestinian Red Crescent, which is an institution with a mandate to care for the Palestinian people, and which must help to find a job for the blind Palestinian; we have a substantial number of unemployed blind Palestinians and they can certainly work in the Red Crescent hospitals.

We, the handicapped and people with special needs, know best about our needs. We only demand that someone hears us and to get our rights, at least on the health care level. We don’t have health security, and the situation is the same in terms of education. We are facing problems in finishing our studies particularly because we are Palestinians. In the universities, we can’t find anyone to help us with tasks such as registering our books, which we find difficult as blind people. The idea of having a counselling centre for mental health is an important one for the handicapped. As for the vocational centres, the handicapped finishes from x institution and he just stays home, or goes out into the street where kids run after him to make fun of him. We demand follow-up and to be given the right to speak, because we know best what we want and what we need. Also the handicapped should be able to work and learn and to be directed and educated, not to be left out, because he is a handicapped.

(Participant, Public Meeting for Disabled Persons, Beirut, Lebanon)
2. Importance of Connecting Issues

a. Palestinian Unity

I personally think that this is something really needed by Palestinian society, and I thank you for this project, because I think that it goes deep into the Palestinian cause and existence in exile. We have differences and we were hoping something like this would be achieved on the basis of cultural and political communication, and to be, at the same time, an incentive for the Palestinians in exile to unite, for we face a difficulty here in uniting the Palestinians. The reason for this is that there is no deep feeling to produce the stimulants to unite us. Most Palestinians were students who graduated and married here; they only hear about Palestine on Al-Jazeera. This has happened because there is no broad framework uniting the Palestinians and keeping them in touch. There is a community here, but it is limited. (Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)

The problem we have is the Palestinians from 1948 areas. I am afraid that the current Palestinian political situation does not include the 1948 Palestinians. We keep forgetting that there are a million 1948 Palestinians, and we should perceive the PLO as their representative. They have a special status and we should find a formula to include them. The problem of the Right of Return. All Palestinian national rights, from the Right of Return to the Right of Self-determination, must be affirmed. How should I work? How can my children be raised in the village and have a connection with their homeland? (Participant, Public Meeting, Sharjah, UAE)

I think that the aim of a popular conference is to connect the Palestinians, there are the Palestinians of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza and those of ’48. And there are the Palestinians of Europe. A popular conference is meant to represent the Palestinians. There should be an organization to represent the Palestinians in Lebanon because they have more problems than the Palestinians in Gaza and Jordan. The Palestinians in the two areas, especially those of ’48 who have special circumstances, should be represented by an organization or by any other means. I don’t have the vocabulary to express this, but it all goes back to the official representative of the Palestinian people, which is now the PLO, to hold an inclusive meeting in which everyone can accurately talk about their problems. I think that officials in any organization can’t accurately express their problems, because fights always happen and deviate us from the proper course. There is nothing wrong in special representation from any area for the Palestinian people to the only legitimate representative for the Palestinian people. There is another thing, I think that we still categorize the Palestinian people into groups. (Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)

We should be connected with Palestinians everywhere, and we should have a program that is shared with Palestinians everywhere so that our rights can be demanded. It is our right to solve the problems of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and I’m not only talking about the right of return. All Palestinian national rights, from the right of return to the right of self-determination, must be affirmed. How should I work? How can my children be raised in the village and have a connection with their homeland? (Participant, Public Meeting, Sharjah, UAE)

I am one hundred percent aware that the main points of discussion are common to everyone. We should not reach the point of fragmentation. Some have spoken about how the Palestinians in Lebanon are different from, and could be separated from, the Palestinians in Syria and in other countries. In practice, the main points of discussion have been put in place so as to be sensitive to these differences between communities, but to deal with them. In principle, everyone should encourage communicating with the PLO. (Participant, Public Meeting, Sharjah, UAE)
At the beginning of my talk, I focused on the unity of the Palestinian refugees’ cause wherever they exist, and that the solution to the refugee problem is supposed to be a comprehensive one. This means that it should be based upon the internationally legitimate Resolution 194 which guaranteed the return of the refugees and their right to have compensation for losing their properties from ’48 until today. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

Palestinian refugees in the camps of the West Bank and Gaza are part of the Palestinian refugee whole. This means they shouldn’t be integrated within the social framework or the political processes that took place after Oslo; a process that was full of error and that contradicted legitimate international resolutions. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

In European society, perhaps because the Palestinian case is causing them harm now, they want to know what Palestinian people want. Is it political asylum, or a financial aid? Or what exactly? They know that we won’t renounce this land. There are millions, not just one or two, or a group or party; all the Palestinian people won’t renounce this land. (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

b. The Need for Unity in Organizing
We discussed the problems and all of you heard them, but we also need solutions. Every discussion raises a problem. The aim of the discussion is to reach solutions. Yet solutions can be pursued on different levels. There are solutions that can’t be pursued except through countries; so we will be wrong if we said that we want to implement the Resolution 194, because this can’t be achieved except through states. And there are solutions which can be implemented through the national representative of the Palestinian leadership, and others through the local representative to the Fateh leadership. Also, there are solutions which can be implemented through the Red Crescent and others, and solutions at home. Let us delineate the various tangled problems faced by the Palestinians, so that we can have a solution-based approach to each. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashidieh camp, Lebanon)

3. Local, Regional, and International Representation

What are the most pressing needs and the political and social priorities you need as Palestinian refugees in this country?
I need someone to represent me on the national and local levels, and on the level of institutions. This is my point of view. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

We want an international conference so that our voice could be heard by everyone. (Participant, Public Meeting, Koge, Denmark)

The most important thing is employment and the struggle through all institutions and structures to improve the conditions of the Palestinians in Lebanon and create job opportunities. (Participant, Workers’ meeting, El-Buss camp, Lebanon)

As Palestinians, we have political, social and economic rights, meaning that as Palestinian we face the most important thing is employment and the struggle through all institutions and structures to improve the conditions of the Palestinians in Lebanon and create job opportunities. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Rashidieh camp, Lebanon)

As for the right of return, we will not discuss or put this right into question. And as we drank from Palestine’s water; we should bring the nation to our children. We have no options in this regard. We want all of Palestine, not only the West Bank and Gaza. The right of return belongs to everyone, and the refugees are the concerned people in all Palestine more than in the West Bank and Gaza, although they are an inseparable part of us. Palestine is not only for the Palestinians, it is the land of all Muslims. What we really need from the PLO is to care for Palestinian communities abroad, and the Palestinian authority should do that too, and it should represent them abroad. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

That’s the story, the problem lies in us being dispersed and not united. There must be certain common issues to unite us as Palestinians. When a demonstration takes place, you find thousands of Palestinians participating in it, but if support or demand for the right of return is needed, you can’t find anyone who would say that they represent this group. We tried to have representatives on the local level, but we failed. Therefore, there must exist an institution which can contact the whole world. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

Why should we as Palestinian pillars in this world define a process for ourselves- as mentioned by the doctor- to substantiate this issue at the technical level? In fact, we should additionally address the world through popular and official organizations and try hard to make progress on this issue. There are many initiatives, and many of those who are here today launched numerous and wonderful projects, but they didn’t really meet the necessary standards. Now it is time to direct this on the academic level, but you shouldn’t address the Palestinian people to accept or not
accept the right of return, rather you should address the international organizations and the existing powers in the world to clarify the issues to them. And if we want, as communities, to clarify the situation, there should be an institution to unite us, and we should have a functioning process of work. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

As far as the Resolution 194, what does it mean? Are we seeking the implementation of this resolution or are we just talking about it? The right of return is well-known and has been discussed for 50 or 54 years. Does it really require discussion? It has been already discussed by leading political intellectuals. Let us know your opinion!

Is it just about giving an opinion or is it a programmed process for the masses; a mass movement, because I’m sure that the politicians and the government led by our brother Abu Mazen and the Arab countries and leaderships have forgotten the Right of Return. Don’t tell me America or others; there is no one but these four parliament members in Britain or you or us. There are a lot of concerned people, and our voice is starting to be heard. And as the late Naji Al-Ali said, “it just needs a spirit.” Is their talk the crux of the matter; or is it what we do, how we move to form a real base to implement Resolution 194? (Participant, Public Meeting, Helsinor, Denmark)

What we do care about is to form an institutional body for the community before proposing this project. This means that we should have an institutional body for the community, and afterwards the issue of the representatives for every city can be proposed. And we all agree that we may or may not achieve this project, but what really matters to us is to have an institutional body for the community. (Participant, Public Meeting, Koge, Denmark)

Here in this camp, we have a popular committee which includes all the other camps, but does this popular committee have relations with other committees, or are there no relations between it and all the camps? Another point was raised, which is that there is negligence in establishing relations, if there are any, because they are not based on a democratic foundation. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon).

You said that you’ve contacted eleven cities. In order to really achieve something, can we select eleven persons from these eleven cities to serve as coordinating brothers for a transitional period so that we can start? Then, this eleven-member committee can call for a conference in every city with the representatives. After that we can form an organization which represents the whole community and establish coordination and cooperation processes, so that we eventually can reach our original representative, the PLO, which for 13 years, has not visited any of the Danish cities that have Palestinian communities. The goal is to devise means to work on uniting the Palestinian community in Denmark and to encourage everyone to join the work. (Participant, Public Meeting, Arhus, Denmark).

The question asked by [participant] has not been answered yet. The question is how to contact the Palestinian community in this town or in Athens. In the future, we can form from these two communities a jointly administered association that will be responsible for the two communities. This body will give weight and importance to the community at the Greek level. And this joint administrative body will be in touch with the Palestinian Embassy and periodically contact it, perhaps every month. That’s how the communication between the existing institutions in Greece and these committees can be achieved. There may be coordination between them to raise all the problems which this Palestinian community is suffering from, and pursue its needs through the existing embassy which can then contact the top officials in the PLO. (Participant, Public Meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

We have a community and we contact the different Palestinian communities in all regions. The work is under way to unite them in one Palestinian community in Italy or in a federation of communities, but it is better to unite them in one community. (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)

A committee which represents the community on the Danish level should be formed. (Participant, Public Meeting, Slagelse, Denmark).

I think we need to be more connected all across Canada. For instance, perhaps all the Arab student groups and Palestinian activist groups could have an annual conference. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

I don’t know how feasible this is but it’s a very important idea to incorporate everything we talked about so far, such as being issued Palestinian identity cards. For the past year, I’ve been thinking about the idea of having a Canadian conference on Palestine, a Canadian Palestinian conference, that incorporates all the Palestinians living in different cities and different communities in Canada to meet somewhere in Canada and discuss important matters. We should demand identity cards for Palestinians and demand from our representative a legal definition of what a
Palestinian is and to demand that any solution is to be reached through negotiations to be referred to refugees to have their own say in a solution. I find it very unsettling to solve the Palestinian refugee problem without asking the refugees what they think, and I find that very disturbing. Accordingly, one of the ideas of this conference is to reaffirm UN Resolution 194 and the right of Palestinians to return as a national and individual right, and to emphasise that nobody has the right to mess with it. We could also demand a national identity card for Palestinian everywhere, so that we can speak as a nation and not as divided communities. Through this meeting we could reach our communities across Canada. As Palestinians living in Canada, I think we should demand from our representative that they establish a link with us. (Participant, Public meeting, Toronto, Canada)

I think one thing that could be done is conventions — but not time wasting conventions. I think so many conventions are a waste of time and money, because you don’t want to just hear somebody, you want to really get some ideas and some solutions, you know, brainstorm, something like that. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

With regards to the issue of the channels, which is very important, we should start from bottom to top instead of starting from top to bottom. We are supposed to start the communication with everyone on the individual level and on the community’s level. We should organise the community through federations and confederations inside the country and then on the continental level. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

We must form committees and a powerful association dedicated to the right of return on the national level, the Malmo level, and then on the Swedish level, to pursue these matters. We can then extend our activities to contact other countries, contact our people in other countries, of course. In my opinion, concentrating efforts on the national level is essential. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

Our problem in Europe is that there isn’t a confederation for the Palestinian communities. Also in Spain there isn’t a confederation until now, although there are Palestinian communities in Valencia, Madrid, and three other Spanish cities. This means that we also hold some responsibility. We should accordingly arrange ourselves as communities in Spain, and then we should organize ourselves in Europe and form the confederation to communicate directly and in a coordinated manner with our home country and with the Palestinian leadership. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

Structures of coordination must be established simultaneously. I suggested, for example, to form a council for the Palestinian communities’ presidents in Germany towards the aim of establishing relationships with the existing communities in Europe, and to continue this route. I see this as the best solution because each community in Germany has its own particular trends. Communities in each city and in each area must become effective and independent, with some sort of coordination through a board of trustees or communities’ presidents in all regions and cities. This board must communicate with the Palestinian communities in Europe. This way, a sort of coordination and correlation would be created, and contacting the inside of Palestine could occur in a later stage. (Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany)

There should be a community in Barcelona and in Catalonia. We have a community in Madrid and in Andalusia and the Canaries. If these communities form a confederation we will become bigger; then we can extend. After we tidy our house in Spain, we should work on the European stage to become a power on every level. This way we can get to know our problems on the Barcelona level and on the Spanish level, then on the European level, as Palestinians or Palestinian refugees. This power can be useful to us on the local level in dealing with the authorities under which we live. In the same time it can give us power to be able to talk with other confederations in other countries or continents. We would then also have a more powerful influence both in terms of making our own decisions and lobbying the PA or, since most people live outside of Palestine, the PLO. We shall have one voice, and our voice must be heard one way or another. If we are scattered and disunited with each one of us working alone, whether on the communities level or the individual level, no one will hear us, because each will go in a different direction, and our voice will never be heard even if we have a million problems. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

In Europe, there are Palestinian citizens who are members in the Right of Return committees. We haven’t participated in these, because we haven’t yet formed a right of return committee. Throughout Europe, Palestinian communities have deputies that represent them in these committees. Every city has a local committee,
3. Local, Regional, and International Representation

and in France for example, these committees send delegates to a national committee that represents the entire community. These committees hold general biannual meetings that rotate between different cities. (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)

But why don’t we decide upon forming a front here in Europe for the Palestinian refugees who live in Europe, specifically, in Western Europe, about contacting lawyers and committees?

What do you mean by a front? Do you mean by that an organisation having a political dimension? No, what is meant is not a political organization in the literal sense of the word, rather a civil front. And then other European parties and committees can be contacted, along with figures who advocate the Right of Return. And, in Europe, we can resort to the judiciary, for there are more possibilities available here than for the refugees in the Arab countries, like Lebanon or Jordan. I estimate that the best thing to do is to file cases, even against Britain in the first place, and the European judicial system receives such cases. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

Concerning the issue you just brought up about how to make our voice heard by all Palestinians, I suggest that we appoint a representative for the community in every region on the ground that he is the one to represent the community, and he can report to all the Palestinians in the region he lives in. This way we can, at least, convey any message we wish to inform people about. This representative can work at home; it isn’t necessary to have an office as an employee in the community. He can use his house to get the needed information by phone, like the meetings to be held or the decisions that are made or anything to inform all Palestinians in his region. (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

The role of the communities should be substantial and they should interact and be united. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

What is meant is that all the Palestinian communities in Al-Shatat should elect representatives, at least two. These should conduct a meeting with the Palestinian leadership, to hear all the issues so that they know the nature of the Palestinian presence in the world, because no one knows about us, and at the same time we don’t exploit the professional, scientific and literary capabilities we have. I think that we should have a frame to unite all these capabilities so that they could be clear and prominent. (Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)

It is obvious from these suggestions that solutions to our problems can be pursued if we act upon them, working on the suggested bases to increase cultural, political, and social awareness, and improve the living standards for the community members. All these issues can be achieved through cooperation and love between us. The suggestions of the community are fine: member registration the undertaking of a statistical survey, the study of the community’s pressing needs and the problems it faces, and the production of a report about these issues. The problem lies in implementing these suggestions and solving the community’s problems. We must also build communication links between the community and other communities in the various countries of exile, learning about their problems, needs, and news and coordinating with them. In general we know the ways to solve our problems, but we should know how to get the communities to the institutions and federations, so that the communities can establish contact with each other. (Participant, Public Meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

We can try to hold a congress or a Palestinian national conference that includes all the communities, to be able to eventually hold an international Palestinian congress like the international Zionist congress. Naturally, we stand by the Palestinian national struggle, with the issue of the right of return, and with our national representative the PLO, and with all the legitimate Palestinian institutions. (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)
4. Local Representation and Communication

I think that there should be a democratic forum for participation which we could call a popular conference for the Palestinians in Italy. The six major Palestinian communities in Italy would be represented in it. There are union federations that can be activated through the political conferences, and we can then form a preliminary committee for the popular conference, including the existing political organizations. We keep forgetting that there are political organizations like Fateh and the PFLP or DFLP. Or we can find a formula to represent the youth of 1948 who are present in the communities. Also we have educated people who don’t necessarily belong to the community, some of whom are journalists and some are students, so that when you hold a popular conference it can include all the Palestinian presence in Italy. Based on this conference, a representative organization can be elected to communicate with the PLO and the other communities, so that it can represent the Palestinians in Italy, and have a say on the political scene on a representational basis organized in accordance with a set of rules and standards.

(Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)

a. Local Representative, National Representative, and Other Palestinian Communities

I said that we can first form councils for university students, and councils for camps. These camp councils can contact the Palestinian Embassy, and the Embassy should create a special department for the refugees. Despite the fact that the number of the refugees exceeds that of the West Bankers, there is no department dedicated to the refugees. Even when I go to the Embassy, I don’t feel that it is a Palestinian Embassy, because I can’t find any refugee there.

(Participant, Women’s meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We, as a refugee Palestinian association, badly need to build effective and clean popular committees which are elected by the people. We don’t have effective popular committees in the first place. We like this problem to be solved under the auspices of the PLO; otherwise the situation will stay as it is.

(Participant, Workers’ meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

Frankly I want to raise an issue. We are always against individual work and for institutional work. We want a representative. We can’t guarantee that anyone who manages any work to be our representative, because we can’t guarantee their future direction. So I am with institutional work which can’t be outside the framework of the only legitimate representative, which is the PLO. The PLO has consulates and embassies through which we can work, even if we had to form special committees within them. The embassies and consulates would give us a legitimate cover, and enable us to have freedom of movement in the countries we live in. I think that this is the problem, and I think that you faced it [the Project Coordinator] in Syria and other countries. Some countries even refused to receive you because you suggested issues like institutions and civil society for the Palestinians. The issue here, in the Gulf in general, could be more sensitive. Consequently, our consulates and embassies should still be the main headquarters for any organization or institution.

(Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

Our brother here said that it is necessary to choose one person from every city, and that those 11 members can provide means of pressure on the Palestine embassy in Denmark to gather the community and to call for a general meeting for all the community members in Denmark, in a similar way as we did for Land Day. And that they should elect a committee or an organization which should be formally recognized by the PLO and the Palestinian Authority.

(Participant, Public Meeting, Aarhus, Denmark)

In order to prevent limiting the PLO relationship to certain people, there should be direct dialogue with the Palestinian leadership to discuss all the issues so that this leadership would listen to the refugees themselves. This way the voice of the Palestinian refugee is conveyed through ordinary people, not through certain people that they choose.

(Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

In my opinion, we should focus our intentions as a community to consolidate the community and to have one voice and speak through an Ambassador if we still have an Ambassador.

(Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

One of the participants says: for seven or eight years, there has been a community here in the country, but when a Palestinian official comes here, they remain oblivious to this fact, and this official comes and leaves without anyone knowing of their visit. This means that no one knows that this official came and left, whether he came for a personal visit or an official one. In contrast, when one of the Zionist leaders comes, regardless of his importance, there is a work schedule for him, and he meets with the communities in the first and second day and listens to them. But this doesn’t happen with us. It is as if each one of us has become an employee, if you work for a company, you meet with several people and then you get a nice supper and leave the country the
next day: All what the matter involves is that this official visiting from abroad should meet with the youth in a certain hotel or restaurant for an hour or so to talk and hear their news. That would be an important gesture for community members as it would make them feel that there is someone who asks about them. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

Concerning the solutions, it is obvious, as you must have noticed that there is a need to change and to create new institutions. From my point of view, we haven’t been able to think of solutions and have instead been indulging in accusations and finger pointing. Maybe the solution is to come from outside, from the PLO, considering that it is our national representative, or from any exterior pressure. You talked about three sides, the PLO, the host country, and the international institutions which provide services for the Palestinians. I just hope that meetings will hopefully be held. I am a member in the engineer’s union, and I think that the federation’s structure is suitable. There are a lot of activities which the federation conducts, and we receive a lot of letters and invitations. (Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany)

I think that we all visualize the wish that was expressed by all the brothers here, which is that we need an institution or unions or anything that could guide us or make our work programmed within them. This is one matter. The other thing that was expressed by many people is that individual efforts do not succeed; these must be tied with a higher institution, and we only have the PLO, because the PA doesn’t represent most of us. Everyone has a lot of question marks. (Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany)

Why don’t they dedicate an office for the community in the PLO headquarters. An office or a room, it doesn’t matter; and this office is what should unite us all around the world. But to come to a meeting, and say a few words then go home, this would be a problem, because you will have to appoint one person or two in every region to follow-up on the community’s conditions with you, and this is hard to achieve. (Participant, Public Meeting, Koge-Olby, Denmark)

I am living abroad, and I’m not represented in the country I live in. My national Palestinian representative is the PLO. As for local representation, we, as Palestinian students in the university, perform activities to represent our country, Palestine, and to introduce it to the people, but there is no representation outside the country. As for existing structures, and despite all the activities we engage upon, we can’t conduct elections, for we don’t know whom to elect! That’s why we should organize activities to get acquainted with people, and with the person we want to elect. This person should have an electoral program that benefits the community. We don’t want to elect someone we don’t know, or to elect someone because he only has a good reputation. There aren’t so many options, but I think that the PLO represents our thoughts. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

As for the needs and priorities; our needs, are the same needs that were mentioned by the brothers here. We need effective associations which can absorb their societies by avoiding the Palestinian organizational and political frameworks which are the remains of the sixties and seventies and eighties, and working for the interest of the community in the different aspects, whether technical, sports, youth, or even social, like arranging picnics, and making use of all the capabilities offered in this country. We hope that the PLO understands, if it can, the political difference between the Palestinian National Authority and the PLO, and the political weight of each of them. We also hope to conduct democratic elections for the Palestinians who live in Sweden, so that they can elect their representatives for the PLO’s frames, you can name it whatever you like, a presidential, legislative, or national council. And the claims of the PLO that it can’t conduct elections in Arabic countries are not convincing. We, who live in Europe, stress upon the need to politically interact within the frameworks of the PLO under a free and democratic and clean elections in Scandinavia and Europe, this is our right, which is given to us by our national belonging to Palestine. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

Why don’t we commemorate some anniversaries, such as the Sabra and Shatila massacres, and organize activities for the community on these days. You need active people from the top to organize activities for the community. For example, documents about Palestine can be distributed. The Ambassador must make a tour; visiting the community residence areas; she can visit every area, at least once a month. This way, the Embassy can be activated, to become closer, as a result, to the Palestinian community, and to get to know its concerns and problems. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hilero, Denmark).

There are principled demands. There should be a magazine or a newspaper distributed to the all members of the Palestinian community, so that people can know and read the community’s news and activities. We also demand that a conference be held for Palestinian institutions. In addition, there is a suggestion of how to communicate...
with the PLO towards the aim of conveying our wishes and recommendations to the concerned representatives. We have many aspirations, but we don’t have an appropriate structure, and we have future ambitions to be able to achieve communication and contact channels. In the past, the election process in Germany for the community or for Palestinian institutions wasn’t correct. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

We shouldn’t blame the Authority or try to create alternatives to the PLO. The PLO will remain the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people wherever they are. If its role is weakened now, that doesn’t mean that we should blame it or try to find alternatives. There is another thing: in this meeting we should define the way of dealing with our Palestinian institutions. What do we want from them? Every Palestinian who lives in any of the Palestinian camps knows exactly what they want. (Participant, Public meeting, Berlin, Germany)

What I’m saying is that if you possess power in the country you came from, you will possess power in the Authority and the PLO. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany).

The framework that can gather all the Palestinian communities does not exist yet. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany).

In this project, we should address such matters as work mechanisms. For example, I have been in Italy for more than ten years, and I noticed that there are no unions or vocational associations representing the Palestinian community and its diverse political and social currents. Bodies such as the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) and the Union of Medical Doctors should be reactivated so as to reflect the Palestinian presence in Italy.

These institutions should moreover be connected directly with Palestine. We should address the world through these channels connecting the community in Italy, and ultimately through our representation in the Palestinian National Council (PNC). (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)

We will never renounce the Right of Return, and we will not allow anyone to renounce it, whether directly or indirectly. We want to convey our voice to the world in any possible way and through any mechanism. I would like to also criticize this meeting, because although it is true that it gathered many active people from the Palestinian community, it did not lend an ear to all the community members. We need another meeting, and I also suggest that we define a mechanism to form the PLO in the UAE and for the Palestinian communities all over the world so that we can form a higher commission that represents the Palestinian people or the Palestinian refugees in exile to correctly present their positions. Thank you. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

I also want to say that we blame the leadership while we don’t even know it. It’s been fifty years; it’s the longest revolution in history! But unfortunately, we can’t brag that this is the longest revolution, because it is futile. This hurts my feelings; it’s the longest revolution in the world’s history because it wasn’t a success. The best revolution is the one that lasts one day and achieves its goals. (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

I think that on that point that we should have a refugee council and the importance of that would be a) to provide a forum for all of us in which we can access each other’s ideas and give each other support and so on b) and to block any attempts to undermine the refugees’ right of return, to make it clear to the major Palestinian negotiating bodies that they can’t negotiate the refugees right of return without permission. That council can block the possibility of giving away the right of return. Judging from the reality at the moment, there are people who are negotiating the right of return but they are denying it because their view of the right of return is very different than ours. They interpret the right as involving return to the supposed Palestinian state that is going to emerge out of the negotiations. What’s happening is that people act like the issue is sacred and pretend that no one will touch it, but in fact people touch it all the time and mess with it, so we need to break that silence, we need to have some kind of a body of refugees that gives the final say on their own issues. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

We should also have a policy that corresponds to the circumstances and the conditions. For example, the Palestinians in Lebanon and even those abroad are different from the Palestinians in Jordan. We should have a policy to give them independence within the limits of the general line, because the Palestinians know the area they live in and know its conditions. Therefore we should support the political line that the Palestinians in Lebanon and those of 48 take, in addition to those who live in Gaza and the West Bank, because their tasks are national, including establishing a Palestinian state. As for the right of return, I think that it is a very important issue and is supposed to be solved through activating the PLO which has been frozen for the past few years. But how can we activate it? Through activating the elections of the National Council and the democratic coordination of Palestinian communities everywhere, even in Lebanon. In Lebanon, there are representatives in the national
conference who elect the Palestinian institutions in Lebanon through the popular committees in the camps, and we can activate the PLO institutions through the National Council. I think that we are forgetting Palestinian organizations abroad that should have good representatives. For example, we don’t have good representation in Europe in the National Council. Of course, I am only expressing my personal opinion of activating the popular institutions and holding a popular conference because there are organizations too. (Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)

b. Local Representative, National Representative, and Host Country

I suggest forming a regional council, following the example of the Iraqi regional council, and to separately hold elections in every region. Forming a regional council, just like the Iraqi regional council, and electing its members, not appointing them, or recommending such or such persons. These members can represent us in the state. Also, the council should contact all the regional councils in the region, and lay our suffering before these councils, these would in turn convey our suffering to the state, and also help to solve our problems. This would furthermore help us to move politically, and to unite all the organizations. This way, we can build a simple base through which to move and contact the Iraqi regional councils, and start contacting them and discussing with them, and try to solve our problems through them, if only in part. We live in a situation that requires that we cooperate with each other.  

(Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurriya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

We don’t have any of our own structures inside our refugee community. Even within activist circles we have nothing and we are still in a preliminary stage. We don’t even know enough about ourselves and I think most of us have that feeling here that we care about it. Our national representative is another problem; we almost have no communication with it. We used to have some communication before the Iraq war. We had parties, the PLC, the DFPL and Fateh – we had an audience. That was all after Oslo. I know we never really had our own thing; we never had something like an American Palestinian Party. The crux of the matter though is that we are different from any place in the world, since the US is the only country that is trying to keep its foot on our neck, and we know that we have to unite among each other and again the structures inside our own community and unfortunately even here we are divided in Dearborn as in Ramallah, and that’s wrong. We have to look at ourselves as Palestinians and we should encourage relations with other communities like the Iraqi community who are even bigger than us here. We don’t utilize them too. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

The suggestion is to work collectively. We have been donating in vain. We depend greatly on others. We suggest forming a “committee” or a “lobby”. What matters is to form a committee to follow up on the community’s issues with the state and its institutions. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark)

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In fact, I want to talk about two points: communication and representation. In the bulletin, it is mentioned that on what relates to representing the Palestinian communities here in the UAE, we had in the 1980s social committees and social solidarity funds. As my friend here said, our Palestinian community in the UAE suffers greatly; a lot of people are homeless, and they suffer more than other communities here. Some of the Palestinian families can’t find food and can’t live or travel. The other thing is that we don’t have any representation in the UAE; there are no associations or movements. We had federations and social committees in the UAE and they used to play a good role. We also had the solidarity fund- headed by a council of trustees consisting of 11-30 members- which dealt with the social issues in the country. Social committees were formed under the ordinance of the late Sheikh Zayed and of the embassy. I will show you now the embassy’s decision in 2001 to form a social committee. What we are suffering from is facilitation in everything. The Palestinians are educated and aware and can take their decisions; they don’t accept to be inferiors. We want to form our moral presence in the UAE and we can correctly represent and we have the capability of communication. The problem we face is that the official organizations, like the ambassador or the consul, don’t really care. Yet we have the decision of the head of the country, Sheikh Zayed, and we have a decision from the Ministry of the Social Affairs, to allow such a thing. All the Arab and foreign communities have clubs, schools, health centres among other things, but the Palestinian community doesn’t have any. Our problem is communication, we need to communicate on this matter and we need a mechanism. We support these steps which I think are very good, but we need to establish constant communication with you to personify them. We want real legitimacy by the PLO and the state. I will show you now the ambassador’s decision in 2001 to form a committee. Its reasons are not legal or social but personal. How can we communicate? What is the mechanism or the structure for this communication? I think that these are issues that should be discussed, and in the end there are different points of view, but we can achieve good
results in this regard. There is another question. I affirm what the [participants] said about the principles issue which we really need. From what I understand we need democracy, human rights, citizenship and transparency. You can choose an unclear name, and we chose this because it expresses the things I mentioned above. We had an experience which was almost a pioneer one; the system of [participant] represents the Palestinian community in the Arab Cultural Club. There have been experiences in the 1970s and 1990s. The experiences of Kuwait were excellent, and there were framework for a limited period, then they ended. The experience of the UAE is in the second place after the one of Kuwait in which all the unions were elected. We have the Palestinian teacher’s federation, the lawyer’s federation and all the Palestinian unions. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

As for the regular civil issues and all our issues which require formal contacts with the State, we have our national and legitimate representative, the embassy of our country, which will hopefully become independent if the retreat from Gaza and the West Bank was achieved and the peace negotiations continue. This is a very simple vision with regards to what could happen on this front. We should also have an authority to which we can refer and with which we can communicate through periodic meetings and visits to the embassy and the offices of the various factions. (Participant, Public meeting, Khartoum, Sudan)

As for the Palestinian community in UAE, it has some problems on the level of communication. Most of the communication efforts are individual, like the social committee in UAE which lacks many things. What we really need is to convey the voice of the Palestinian refugee to the PLO before the international society hears it with shock. One may ask how, and the answer would be the formation of a committee or a parliament for the Palestinian community in the UAE. This parliament should coordinate with the embassy and the consulate without forming an alternative to them or losing its independence. This could be achieved by creating a social committee in every emirate, and we have seven emirates. This should be a united committee which speaks in the name of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian community in the UAE. This is what I have to say, and the others may add what they have.

One may say that the liberation struggle and its ramifications in the UAE are unclear, so it needs a special society in the UAE. This is in addition to what the brother here said about the PLO badly needing an international committee in the UAE which would be a communication committee with the reference body. This means that we should communicate with each other and form cultural committees that translate the books and the cultural bulletins, keeping in mind the right of return so that it won’t be forgotten. We need such things, and also we need to activate the federations and the unions, which are the institutions created for the Palestinian people as you just said. We were at a peak twenty years ago, because the Palestinian writer’s federation had a heard voice, and also the Palestinian workers federation, even on the level of the international conferences. It is very necessary to restore these federations which can absorb the Palestinian capabilities in the UAE through the main federations in the PLO or in any department. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

We must strengthen these relationships, and, if we can, we should establish our civil organizations from vocational federations and confederations or unions, through the cooperation of all those involved without struggling about whether Hamas or Fateh or Al-Jihad should lead them. People should meet and form an alliance to serve the Palestinians under the auspices of their legitimate representative, the embassy of Palestine State, which is the representative of the Palestinian people before the State on the formal and demotic levels. And this doesn’t prevent these organizations or factions to perform personal activities. However, on what relates to the Palestinian work, I request forming a complete cooperation alliance to fulfill the interests of the Palestinian people or the Palestinian community in Sudan. (Participant, Public meeting, Khartoum, Sudan)

There should be an organization or link committees between all camps so that they can coordinate work between them. On the political level, we wish to reactivate the PLO’s role and its representation in Lebanon. (Participant, Workers’ meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

Political conflicts have had negative ramifications on the Palestinian reality and have resulted in the absence of a referential authority in the right sense of the word which can discuss with the host Lebanese State the various problems we face such as the question of civil and social rights and the issue of restrictions barring Palestinians from working in about 73 occupations and preventing Palestinians from owning houses. In addition to that, reforms should be implemented in the PLO, and all powers and factions who represent the Palestinian people should participate in the fight. Also, there should be democratic elections for the popular committees so that they can represent the skills and activities and all the segments of the camp’s residents. Also reactivating the PLO’s

Mechanisms, Mobilization, and Representation

4. Local Representation and Communication
b. Local Representative, National Representative, and Host Country
Institutions and forming a referential authority on the PLO's level and forming popular committees with the factions, doctors, and engineers as a framework, in addition to the camp's residents. (Participant, Workers’ meeting, Shatila camp, Lebanon)

First, communication should be established between us and our representative on the domestic level through representatives from the camps or through representatives from the Palestinian leadership. This communication can be achieved, for example, through our representative in Nahr el-Bared camp, so that we can meet with the leadership in Lebanon, which in turn leads to the communication with the Palestinian leadership, through visual, audio, and written media such as magazines. I don’t necessarily need to communicate with the leadership face to face, I can do so if I read some thoughts on the internet, or read a certain book; it doesn’t matter; they are all means of communication. Let's discuss now the communication with the Lebanese state. We, as Palestinians who live here, don’t have a referential authority. So I think that we should resort to a certain group in order to form delegations to represent the PLO so that we can communicate with the Lebanese state. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

People implementing this are the Lebanese politicians, formal officials and other Lebanese. They agree with the Right of Return and disagree with refugee settlement projects. They utter a word of truth with a malicious intent! Even if someone wished to get married, they say that it is forbidden to have a house, so where will he be married? In the street? These are our rights which were given to us by God and international laws and they ban them. These laws are unjustly applied to us in the absence of institutions. If we had institutions, and if we preserved the national institutions, we would be living in much better conditions. Therefore, the most important issue for us is the organizational structure and the mechanisms of communication. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

It is suggested that a delegation from the Palestinian Authority should go to Iraq and meet the Iraqi government, with Dr. Al-Ja’fari specifically, the head of the Iraqi government, and with the Iraqi officials, to put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian community, and the transgressions against it, and to set the laws that define the relations of the Palestinian refugee in this country. It is not a process of decision making. The decisions were already there in the past, but they don’t define the situation of the Palestinian in this country, because the decision that is endorsed today is revoked tomorrow. You can find more people now telling you that they are willing to go to hell just to get out of this country. These people say: I don’t want to go to Palestine, just get me out of here. And that is what they want. They say: I don’t want to die in vain for nothing. I can’t have Palestine, nor do I live like a human being, so this is dying in vain, aside from the insults that I hear everyday. I don’t want to die just like that. I am valuable, they can’t buy me. No! I deserve to establish, at least, a homeland for my children. As for me, my life is over, and I don’t have any problems, but I want my children to live, at least, in dignity, without insults. I want them to have a good life like the rest of the people on the earth. We want to live in our own homeland in dignity and honour. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tabaq), Baghdad, Iraq)

I want the Palestinian Liberation Organization to meet with the Iraqi prime minister to solve all these problems. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Humiya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

As a Saudi or Lebanese state, for example, you should establish a committee with the PLO concerned with improving communication channels. (Participant, Youth meeting, Damman, Saudi Arabia)

c. Local Representative, National Representative, International Organizations, and Other Palestinian Communities

We are talking as a Palestinian community. You care about this, and I do too, and we came here to talk freely. The civil structures which are available in the Palestinian community can’t contact the Danish government or the humanitarian and social organizations or even our representative who speaks in our name before all other communities in exile such as Germany, Austria, and Greece etc. We don’t communicate with these communities.

At present, there is an office for the PLO in Denmark, and what it talks about is not useful. They want to make your voice heard to the top levels in the world. The Jewish community for example, formed effective social and civic federations and they achieved good results by using these methods. We are blaming the PLO’s office in this country, because it does not make such contacts, at least with the Palestinian community. (Participant, Public Meeting, Koge, Denmark)

We have an educational problem which has to do with UNRWA and also with the PLO. In the past, it was supposedly the case that the PLO offered support, aid, and scholarships for the high school students, because UNRWA at the time was not responsible for the high schools. So the PLO used to grant scholarships and it had a school of its own. Today we have a high school here but this high school cannot absorb students from certain
The result is that the student heads to the street. Assuming that this issue of secondary education is addressed, there remains another problem which concerns civil rights, the most important rights. We are denied two fundamental rights, which are the right to work and the right to be housed. The Palestinian is barred from working in 73 occupations, and lately, a law which forbids the Palestinian from owning a flat was issued, and this is one problem out of many. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddoun camp, Lebanon)

The Palestinian camps in Lebanon are a real tragedy resulting from deprivation of the most elementary of civil, political, and social rights. We demand that the Lebanese government examine these conditions, so as to enable our people to fight settlement projects. Therefore, we demand the opening of a Palestinian Embassy, which is a task to be coordinated between Lebanon and Palestine. For that reason, we demand the PLO, the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, to ask the Lebanese state to allow Palestinians to work in Lebanon. And we demand UNRWA, which doesn’t provide enough medicines or proper medical care, to do a better job. And there is the relief supplies issue, which are taken by those who abuse their power or are connected to important individuals. Also we can’t build houses unless we have access to the networks of nepotism. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Buq el-Shemali camp, Lebanon)

From a legal perspective, first are the humanitarian and international organizations. We have reports from them about the war crimes and the genocide being committed, but we are not doing anything about it. The United States does not bring it up, the United Nations don’t have a general agreement to investigate this, our senators and representatives won’t bring it up. None of them ever says one word about occupation or about what Israel is doing to us. We need to call on our national representatives to advocate for justice, law, and order in Palestine and to weed out any corruption. (Participant, Public meeting, Detroit, Michigan, United States)

Contacts should be made with the organizations that are internationally experienced on the Right of Return issues. This is a complex issue discussed by the United Nations in Rome at least twice a year. The goal is to explain our cause to them in detail and to encourage the international society to help us get our legitimate rights. (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)

As for the health sector and under the agreement signed between you and the UNHCR, as opposed to UNRWA that serves only some of the regions, the UNHCR is compelled to offer health, educational and social services to any refugee who comes to Egypt. Yet Egypt was trying to free itself from this obligation since 1978. You are no longer allowed to receive medical treatment in a public hospital, even if you have an accident, and you have to go to the private hospitals, because you are a Palestinian. Establishing Palestinian hospital, which is, in a way, one of the PLO’s hospitals, was a very important step to make up for the failure of the Egyptian state. Yet the problem of Palestine hospital is very complicated. First it is not known whether it is one of the PLO’s hospitals or the Palestinian authority’s hospitals. All the Palestinians who work in the civil structures of the PLO or the Palestinian Authority have a health insurance card that enables them to receive medical treatment with reduced fees. But what about those who don’t work in such institutions? They are treated like foreigners. In addition to this, some people who used to work in the PLO or its institutions resigned, and consequently lost their insurance. The Egyptian state has another crisis related to the privatization of medicines and the medical equipments, so the Egyptian also suffers from this problem. But at least he has a health insurance to cover part of the fees, which is something that we don’t have. So you would be very confused if something happened to you, and you became obliged to communicate, if you can, with the Palestinian Authority and the health ministry in the Palestinian Authority to grant you a permission that covers your invoice and transfers it to the health ministry. It is like there are three of four structures that serve the Palestinians, yet with no coordination. Things would get worse if the ambassador has a problem with the hospital’s manager. For example, if the ambassador told you that the embassy would cover your fees, the hospital’s manager can hinder that if he doesn’t have a good relationship with the ambassador. There is financial corruption along with the administrative corruption, and some are using their influence in the different structures which have no coordination between them when it comes to offering services for Palestinians. Hence we are suffering from a health crisis. All the Egyptians, whether in private or public schools, have insurance, but not the Palestinians. You pay for example three thousand yearly but they won’t give you insurance. Why? Because private schools have public health insurance, not the private one. So even if you are paying three thousand each year, you won’t get insurance. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

We should establish channels of communication and try to unite the Palestinian community in Montreal and then in all of Canada. We should
also open channels of communication between us and the Canadian government and officials, and with the local authorities in Montreal as well. We should moreover set up a channel of communication between the community in Canada and the PLO, our only legitimate national representative as Palestinians. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

I suggest that we should form at present a provisional committee at least, that can be later expanded by the attendants. We can do that by agreeing upon some names to form a provisional committee, and to put a program through which we can work in an organized and coordinated way, to prevent us melting in this country. Our children will be lost whether you like it or not. It is not enough to depend only on the role of the single family, in case this role is correctly performed, rather, there must be a collective extensive role here. But I will need your help. The entire Palestinian framework in Europe should seek the Palestinian and Arab legal persons to add a legal committee aimed to defend the Right of Return before the European Union, and the United Nations, with coordination of all the refugees’ frameworks in all Europe, in order to complete all aspects of this issue. As for the legal issue, Israel is translating forgery into facts by saying that the law is in its side, but it doesn’t resort to it. And this is a very critical and important issue. There are many tales of this sort. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

d. Local Representative with All Bodies

Frankly we want to be able first to have a committee or organization that represents this community. We can then form some kind of a structure that can contact or serve as a communication tool. The issues I am talking about are issues like the Right of Return. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

Brothers, let’s go back to the starting point, which is how to form a committee in Helsingor as the brother said. This committee will go to London in the future, God willing. This committee will represent the whole Palestinian community in Denmark. As we said at the beginning of our meeting, this work is the beginning of the foundation stage, and any beginning which is not organized will fail eventually. Therefore, we must contact the Danish government or the social and humanitarian organizations or our national representative. This should happen within the organized frame of the community in Denmark. (Participant, Public Meeting, Helsingor, Denmark)

The role of the popular committees in the camps is weak. The committees should make the necessary contacts with UNRWA, the Lebanese State and the PLO, to improve the infrastructure in the camp like the sewers and the streets which are flooded with water in the winter; (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

I suggest forming an external contact committee to link the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) and the community members, be they doctors, professionals, or members of the different committees and activities, with the other international organizations in Italy. These links should contribute towards conveying the voice of the Palestinian refugees, and conveying their priorities and demands on what relates to the right of return that we all insist on. For example, we should have links with the Italian higher council of refugees and other UN organizations. (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)

I want to ask some questions. Our faith is in institutions and we hope to have a united community federation that provides an umbrella for all institutions, taking under its wing all the clubs, committees, and the union. And we hope that this community federation becomes the channel of communication within the community, and between the community and the German state, provided that the leaders of this community federation are qualified, and that this federation becomes the channel of communication with the national representative, the PLO, and the Palestinian national institutions inside Palestine, and also with the institutions in the host country. Another point is that we have sent delegations from Germany to Palestine and to the PLO, and perhaps there is no communication between these institutions, that’s what I don’t know anything about. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

We badly need an embassy, for we are not formally recognized as a community. For example, until today, there are no areas which are joined together, through twinning them with the Lebanese cities and towns for example. We can twin with Ba’abda village, so that we can visit it and they visit us and that we interact with each other. Our relations with other camps in Lebanon is not very good; so we can meet and hold a central meeting, provided that mutual visits can be made, so that certain institutions can be asked of their achievements and ideas for common work. These kinds of things are not happening. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Naher el-Bared camp, Lebanon)
Some people wrote a comment piece which says that the result commonly agreed is the contact issue. We mentioned that this should be with different organizations. With regards to the Lebanon front, considering that we live in that country we don’t have a structure to communicate. We don’t have an embassy in Lebanon. The relationship with Lebanon does not exceed the camp’s borders. As for the communication with UNRWA, UNRWA is providing services in the camps. We, as individuals, raise these demands, and we want to have direct contact from the PLO’s side. The organization which conveys our demands to the PLO is the General Union of Palestinian Women. Our relationship with the popular committees is an open one in the popular committees’ offices. Every one can go and submit their demands.

As for the foreign and Arab countries, there is no communication with these countries except through the PLO which makes all the contacts and holds the meetings with the countries. But there is no participation on the individual level. As for the civil institutions, every organization could be represented through institutions or meetings that are taking place between the institutions, or through individual representatives with a mandate to convey demands. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Burj el-Barajneh, Lebanon)

Before I mention the communication channels for the PLO, we should rebuild the PLO. We must form committees in the camp to follow up issues in the camps. These committees can then contact the committees of the other camps, if any, like Sabra, Shatila, or Ein el-Hilweh camps. As a result, the communication and the coordination between camps can be achieved, and we can then be better poised to discuss our thoughts and ideas with the PLO and the host country in order to improve our conditions. For all the camps, especially in Lebanon, suffer from misery and poverty as a result of the absence of the basic services and infrastructure. We also demand to form a defence committee to defend the rights of the Palestinian refugees, because many of our rights are lost in Lebanon. These committees can contact the host country. As for the humanitarian agencies, especially UNRWA, these committees can contact the social divisions in UNRWA such as the educational and the health departments. As mentioned the condition of the camps is a priority, and we need to contact the Arabic and international media so that they can see our condition inside the camps and know our thoughts and ideas concerning the policy they are following against the Palestinians, particularly the refugees. As for the Resolution 194 on the right of return, this is one of the fundamental truths, but Resolution 194 also addresses the social situation in the camps in one of its articles that states that the refugees’ conditions should be improved so that they can return to their country. This also relates to the host country and the Arab and international media, because if we want to do everything in the camp, our voice will not be heard by the world, and we want the whole world to hear us and know our suffering.

We also demand to follow up and coordinate with the Palestinian communities and with all the countries in the world. We demand that contact be established with other communities in Lebanon; every camp can form a committee to contact the committees of the other camps so that they can twin with the other camps. We should also establish contact with the countries in which Palestinian communities live, such as the European countries, and for Lebanon to twin with the Palestinians from the other communities. Even inside Palestine, there should be coordination and contacts between us and the Palestinians inside the occupied lands.

We will not work alone, and we don’t want every member to be active alone. We demand collective work for all the community members. And we demand to elect a body or committee, or whatever you want to call it, to organize the community’s activities and be its representative, and serve as a channel of communication between the community and the other organizations, whether the PLO, or the host countries, or the international institutions which are concerned with our case. Or to contact the other Palestinian communities in Al-Shatot countries. (Participant, Public Meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

We must recommend that we organize and form the community, then establish a body to serve as a channel of communication for the community with other parties. This is what will be done from now on. (Participant, Public Meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

We have basic components, from the smallest cell which is expressed by the community or the association in a certain city, to the biggest gathering which is the associations’ federation and the presence of a Palestinian commission or an office for the PLO, the legitimate representative for the Palestinian people.

This structure exists, but the problem lies in activating these frameworks. Before we can contact the PLO’s leadership or foreign institutions, we should tidy our own house in the first place.

The Palestinian associations and communities don’t represent all the Palestinian gathering, therefore, what is needed from the leaderships of such communities is to define programs that are able to unite the whole Palestinian mass, not just a social or artistic programs, but a comprehensive program able to attract as many of the community members as possible.
5. Issues to be Raised at Several levels

Undoubtedly, there are different interests and goals, but what unites us is a basic goal, which is to build an independent Palestinian State in Palestine, and to implement the right of return to those Palestinian refugees to their country from which they were forced to leave. We can then move to the communities and associations’ federation which represents all these associations and would thus be entitled to have the right to represent the Palestinian community in Sweden. In coordination with the Palestinian commission or the Palestinian embassy, it can organize direct contacts with the Palestinian leading bodies in the PLO and its various institutions, and at the same time, it can establish relationships with the Palestinian communities living in other countries in the same way. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

I think that the important thing for any Palestinian refugee gathering, wherever it is, is to keep the issue of the right of return alive. The right of return can be constantly demanded by representative chosen by the community itself. No one has the right to chose persons to represent the community other than the community itself. Here in Sweden, they elect people to represent them to discuss this issue. To exercise pressures on the European Union and on the legislative body in Palestine, the Palestinians who live abroad should be represented in the Palestinian National Council. This is a demand that should not be renounced. There should be a European Palestinian Parliament that embraces the federations or the federations’ gatherings and the Palestinian associations in every country.

For example, Sweden can choose a parliament which would of course comprise a general federation of the Palestinian associations and organizations, and elect through it one representative for the right of return in the European-Palestinian parliament. Of course, in the European Union, there are big financial facilities dedicated for those who will make such parliaments. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

5. Issues to be Raised at Several levels

We have a lot of concerns as a Palestinian people, but as we already mentioned, can anyone think of his national concern while he feels hungry and can’t find anything to eat, or can he think of his country when he can’t even build a house to live in. I have one room in which 12 people live, is it possible for me, while suffering from a bad financial situation, to worry about my national concern? Or the legitimate representative, the PLO? Or the Palestinian State and the right of return? (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

I always think how to provide for my family. I don’t think of the Palestinian Cause. This applies to all the young men. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

According to the UNRWA system, the handicapped girl is not considered as someone who is entitled to receive social assistance if she was productive, nor if her parents are. Excuse me, but I know that the international law says that the handicapped has the right to be cared for and to live a decent life. A very simple example is the situation of my family. In UNRWA, if you have a note from an important political official, you will get what you want, if you don’t, you will not get a job. We also need transportation facilities so that the handicapped can comfortably move and easily get to his destination. Besides, there are the public places, which do not probably exist everywhere.

For example, we don’t have appropriate clubs for the handicapped who may have hobbies, and we don’t have streets or roads suitable for the use of those handicapped. We demand the local society to take into consideration these engineering issues that help people with special needs to move. There is a big proportion of handicapped who can’t communicate with others as a result of these problems. We wish that civil society would study such issues and find the handicapped jobs to live from rather than forcing him to ask the help of people or any official so that he can live and feed his family. We ask all the officials to provide jobs for those handicapped to live from, because the handicapped can be effective if they help them or dependent if they neglect them. We wish that the officials and all those who can hear us to provide jobs for those handicapped to feed their families and be able to live rather than forcing them to ask for charity in the streets. (Participant, Public Meeting for Disabled Persons, Beirut, Lebanon)

For us, the refugees, as a community, and on the administrative, not personal, level, there are a lot of issues that are considered to be of the essence for the struggle, and I wrote some points so that I can answer honestly. Whoever thinks that the essence of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle is only about the borders and Jerusalem is mistaken. In every national and political occasion, we should remember not to exclude the right of return or ignore finding solutions for the refugees under any comprehensive political agreement. The refugees’ problem is the essence of the struggle, and there is no alternative for the right of return. No fair and inclusive solution can be reached without implementing Resolution 194, and at the same time I want to mention that this initiative should be known in the West. We don’t accept any alternative for return; neither
compensation nor immigration or settling. If we want to talk about compensation, we mean financial compensation not that related to land. This means that the Palestinian people should return to their lands and properties. You should highlight this issue in your project. To me, this project has two streams. The first is addressed to the West and the second to our leadership. First the West should know that the Palestinian people is one nation, that there is no difference between the Palestinians who live in Israel since 48, or those who live in 67, and those who live in the camps. If we want to talk about solving the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, we should take this issue into consideration, because it is a vital issue for us. We want the project to convey these issues on the Palestinian level. There is something about the Palestinian leadership that you should know. Our problem in Italy is that our presence as students and our national activity was addressed only to the Italian people. We started to address our activities to the Palestinian presence in 1993.

The first Palestinian community was formed in Zambina. We started to realize that it is necessary to address our political, national, culture and media activities to our children and families. But there is negligence here, and one of its reasons is the organized Palestinian presence, or the Palestinian organizations. We should be honest with ourselves; those who belong to the Popular Front like it better than Palestine, and so are those who belong to Fateh. These should have been used as tools.

Now how can we convey our opinion and how can we make our voice heard? In order to convey information, the first issue is that we should be clear about is democracy. We should realize that it is a way to achieve our ambitions and we are supposed to use it in our national activities. In the composition of the National Council we used democracy but in an incorrect way. I mean that students and workers were represented, and we used to take the administrative councils, so we passed over democracy; yet it exists now in the Palestinian organizations and the Palestinian political parties. We should conduct elections, as in Europe, to elect the members of the conferences on the level of a national conference. What is therefore needed from me is to recognize that the PLO is the only legitimate representative, and it is not true that it doesn’t exist on the political level, but there is a union between the PLO and the National Authority considering that Abu Ammar, may God bless his soul, was the one who covered the two tasks. This means that he was negotiating with the Israelis through the PLO. The other thing that is not completely accurate is that Fateh is the organization that takes decisions; there are existing Palestinian factions, whether in the authority or the PLO, which participate in the decision making process, and it is true that there are factions which don’t participate, but not in the way we are talking about. The most important issue is how to convey the issue of communication. The first thing is that the unions and popular institutions should be revived, from the students to the engineers, but after that how can we contact the leadership? For me, I think that conferences are the best way to convey information. Sometimes, we forget ourselves and engage in minor issues. We are supposed to tell Abu Mazen or Abu Lutof as the president of the executive body in the PLO that we have had enough factionalism and that we need unity in order to achieve our goal. What is needed is to reform the institutions and to use the conferences and the issue of the communities. Within our geographic space, we assumed the task of reforming the communities in the provinces and connecting them to become one community, because the goal is to build the Palestinian community in Italy. The problem is that not all the provinces have a Palestinian presence. In Milan, there is a preliminary committee, but our problem lies in geographical distance. We should think of a way for the Palestinian community in Italy to hold its conference, which should be a representative one, at least once every 3 years, to convey the Palestinian cause to our leadership in the PLO and in the Authority. And so as not to be misunderstood, by authority I mean that the authority is part of the PLO, and not an alternative to it. Therefore one of the things we want to convey to you is that we are not happy with the fact that we are officially represented in Europe by Delegations. We should demand that the countries of Europe raise our level of representation to that of an embassy in the full diplomatic sense, and at the same time we need more attention to the issues we have talked about. Let’s discuss the issue of inside now. We have needs, the chaos inside and outside Palestine is a result of the absence of institutions. We can achieve our goal if we create institutions and if we don’t get mired in negative issues, which should not be forgotten, but at the same time should not hinder us from looking at the positive side of things. I want to conclude with one issue, which is UNRWA. I was in Lebanon, and the only issue they talked about is that UNRWA reduced its services for the refugees. The Europeans should also know that Israel considers that everyone born to a Jewish mother has the right to return to Israel. We say that the Palestinian people, from all classes, who were forced out of their lands, have the right to return to their lands and properties. (Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)
5. Issues to be Raised at Several levels

a. Addressing Different Levels Simultaneously

What I wanted to ask is why don’t we hold conferences? These could be for people at all levels: parents and institutions, so that we can figure out an ordered comprehensive method to get rid of our problems and agree upon one target. The other thing is the embassy.We wish to have an embassy in Lebanon, because in other countries, Palestinian embassies help to carry out the necessary work and present issues to the host countries in a more effective way. Bigger participation would be achieved through conferences and numerous other activities. There are also problems pertaining to health, job opportunities, old people, and education, and you can’t separately solve each problem without considering the other problems. (Participant, Public meeting, Burj el-Barajneh, Lebanon)

We stress upon our right to return to our homes and villages from which we were forced to leave in 1948. We came from the Calonia municipality in the town of al-Lid, and we were forced to leave our country in 1948. We strongly insist upon the right to return to the same village we were forced to leave, and our right to have material and moral compensation for the damages that we suffered since the date of our leaving in 15/5/1948. And we are loyal to the political organization named the PLO, which fights to restore our right as refugees to return to our homes which we were forced to leave. We have the right to have a role in the decision making process through our representatives in the PLO’s formal departments like the National Council.

We think that the best solution is the sovereign Palestinian independent state, the return of all the refugees who wish to return to their villages, and giving them the compensation for the damages they have suffered. The best solution is the binational one-state solution with the return of all the refugees, otherwise, the fight will continue. (Participant, Public meeting, Oslo, Norway)

What exactly is needed from us in Italy? Basically, our only problem is that we were students and we had our heyday in GUPS [General Union of Palestinian Students]. We did good political work in this country. On the media level, we were heard a little, but now we turned into workers after being students, and after the 1980s students no longer came here. Practically we are not refugees, we are students, but we went out as refugees. Our only problem is the absence of the institutions that connect our work as an institution. And even on the community level, there is no connection between the communities in Italy on the national level. So the problem is that we don’t have the communication ring that connects the organization or the people with the leadership. It is true that we talk about democracy and activating institutions, but what is the way to do that? Therefore, our particular problem in this country is that we can’t establish a community in Italy. And it is difficult to ask for a general decision in a democratic popular conference. In addition to this, the tasks are currently confused between the PLO and the Authority. Those who influenced our political and social thought established the revolutionary movement in the inside. Perhaps the problem is that the Palestinian leadership is not conscious enough to activate the institutions. I am saying that while trusting it, but I think that it is a little lazy or desperate because the peace negotiations with Israel took too long, and the Israelis are very stubborn. And even the American and European public opinion is against the Palestinians. Why? Because of our incorrect policy in the occupied territories. The militarization policy has harmed us. How could the demonstrations and the weapons inside be effective on the moral level for the Palestinian people? And on the international level, we are facing a lot of problems. Any program that talks about the Palestinians presents the ugly image of the Palestinian people, even if the material dealt with Palestinian suffering. When Israelis killed Palestinians in Nablus for example, programs present the Palestinians as masked men who are shooting. There should be political awareness to force the military system to be more cautious. Our struggle should be through Palestinian or Italian journalists who would convey the real image of the situation. If we considered the right of return in the Palestinian past and future we could achieve political gains. This would be the role of the political process which devises certain solutions. Everyone has the right of return to where he came from. Also it would be a very good thing if there were political gains for the Palestinians who live in exile; I am not suggesting a passport, because this would mean that one would have to renounce his Palestinian nationality, but I am among those who are able to live better with the Italian passport because I now have rights. I faced a lot of problems while I was holding the refugee travel document on what relates to work and movement. So we are demanding more facilities for the Palestinians who live abroad to improve their living standards. (Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)

It will be good to have a committee for social and political development to enlighten us, for the Authority doesn’t do anything for us. Concerning our return to our country, I think it is a right that we can’t renounce. As for the federations, none is effective.

Now with regards to the PLO, we don’t trust it at all. Our voice and opinions are not conveyed on
Mechanisms, Mobilization, and Representation

5. Issues to be Raised at Several Levels

a. Addressing Different Levels Simultaneously

what relates to any decision that is made. I demand forming an elected Palestinian National Council to convey the voice of the masses. Concerning UNRWA, there are a lot of suggestions, but no one can suggest anything for the projects and ideas that are suggested are shelved. (Participant: Preparatory Workshop, Jarasana camp, Syria)

What are the economic, social, legal and civil issues that concern us? The PLO’s institutions including the cooperatives and the popular committees should study the problems our people in Nahr El-Bared camp face. Many people in the camp became unemployed as a result of the disablation of these institutions. The popular committee should be activated since it is very important in establishing security in the camp and in directly examining the problems we suffer from. However, the committee should be representative of all the organizations and the Palestinian people.

The Reduction of UNRWA services for the Palestinian people affected our society on the health, economic, and educational levels. The camp does not have enough schools to absorb the number of the students, and there is no high school, despite the fact that the largest proportion of Palestinian students in Lebanon is in Nahr El-Bared camp. (Participant: Women’s meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)

Through contacts and conferences, or correspondences or brochures for the organizations which foster the refugees. As for UNRWA and the PLO organizations, our relationship with the PLO is good; however, UNRWA does not perform its role properly towards the citizens with regards to rights and obligations. And we like to contact all the Palestinian structures and institutions wherever they exist in the countries of Al-Shatat. We demand that concerned organizations, like the federations, ask for an embassy. As for our relationship with the Lebanese people, it is not very good, but the relationship with Abu Mazen on the Palestinian level and with Sultan on the local level is good, and everyone agrees with Abu Mazen and with all the institutions, I mean, if he addresses the Palestinian people on their right of return. (Participant: Women’s meeting, Bujj el-Shemali camp, Lebanon)

It is enough that we demand to preserve UNRWA, and they seek to cancel it because it was formed under the Resolution 194. We are looking towards the future brother, I advise you to read them. I’m telling you that the purpose of these civil and practical structures is to facilitate the participation of the Palestinian refugees and their communities in the immigrant countries, on what relates to the main issues that concern them. This project can devise the necessary steps to include the refugees’ voices in the decision making process according to the democratic models of participation.

We have a problem in the Arab countries, which is the lack of democracy. We want to try to work in them. We are in a democratic country here in which I can speak, I’m not just talking of Denmark; I’m also talking of Sweden, I think what is demanded from the community here is to design its civic structures and its own mechanisms and operations. We want to send the authority our demands, and also the United Nations. We need to organize ourselves. At present, we are effective at the municipality level. We want political foundations. We are entering schools, and nurseries, and we are entering the municipality itself. (Participant: Public Meeting, Helsingor, Denmark)

In brief:

- There should be a single reference body.
- There is a wide gap between the leadership and people.
- UNRWA should improve its services offered to the refugees.
- The people are a synonym for the PLO not an alternative to it.
- We demand the donor countries to offer help and support to the refugees. (Participant: Worker’s meeting, Ein el-Helweh camp, Lebanon)

We have civil, social, and legal issues. The institutions which must represent us are the PLO and [name of Palestinian official]. And we have no rights here as Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. If, for example, someone finished his studies and would like to become a doctor or an engineer; he has no right to do so. He gets so far in his studies, but then ends up working in a totally different field due to the fact that the official bodies do not allow him to practice in his own field. Here, the Palestinian student can’t enter any university, not necessarily Lebanon’s universities, and they are not given any support to finish their studies. Some parents can’t afford to teach their children in the universities. As for the camps and the houses, there are a lot of houses that are not suitable for human habitation and we have zinko houses. UNRWA does not help with such issues as providing houses for the Palestinian people in the camps. If we want to talk about surgical operations, there are a lot of people who die during such operations. And there are people who die as a result of not finding medicines or support. For example, I can afford a surgical operation for my child, but there are others who can’t, and a lot of people are dying because of this. And every Palestinian refugee is entitled. We have a right to access the assistance that is dedicated to the camp. We have welfare cards and we receive support, but the rest aren’t able to receive anything. Every refugee in the camp is entitled to get the help of UNRWA.
5. Issues to be Raised at Several Levels

b. Security

The things we badly need as Palestinian refugees in Nahr el-Bared camp are, first, that the refugees help themselves by realizing their conditions. Second, having representatives and security authorities in case of problems, so that we can know where to resort and to whom. Then electing representatives for the Palestinian families and neighbourhoods who are entitled to pursue and implement the reform projects in the society to create job opportunities to the educated young men who are unemployed and who are not allowed to work in 70% of occupations. Caring for the existing public facilities and providing others like libraries and public parks and kindergarten. We also need social workers to address the psychological problems of the students in schools and kindergartens. The number of the students in the schools should be reduced by building other schools to absorb this number. Schools should also be equipped with laboratories and the necessary equipment required by the modern educational curriculum; the lack of such equipment is causing a lot of problems. Training courses should be held for the educated school principles. Developing the medical devices in the local hospitals, and this is something we very much suffer from in the hospitals, for there is no advanced equipment to continue the treatment of patients. Facilitating the procedures of immigration abroad to work or to study, and this is something the students very much suffer from.

Coordination between the institutions and the associations which offer services for the refugees. We notice that several associations come to the same families and the same entities go to them, yet there are families who are poorer than them. Developing the regional water resources and electricity resources; we, who live in Nahr El-Bared camp and all the Palestinian camps very much suffer from these matters. Taking care of the young men who are economically neglected, for there are several young men who are not educated, but who have the right to have workshops. Establishing vocational institutes which fit the living conditions in the camps. Encouraging talent. We have many people who have talents but who can’t find anyone to encourage and help them or guide them to the right path. Stopping the random building in the camp, whether in the new neighbourhoods or what are called the old ones.

The most important thing is that UNRWA is the only safeguard and witness of the refugees’ disaster and it is fully responsible for offering services and support to the refugees, because it is not the task of the factions or the PLO, although they assume some political and ethical responsibility. The PLO is the authoritative body of reference and its role is political in the first place. The host country assumes also some responsibility, but it doesn’t offer anything. On the contrary it is imposing tough laws and harsh procedures. A dialogue should be held with it to solve all the problems and to open an embassy or an office for the PLO which would be responsible for the refugees before the state.

To begin with, activating the social institutions, and having representation for us as Palestinians in the PLO through establishing an embassy or a recognized authority, reviving and renewing the social institutions and improving their work inside the camps, not keeping only those old institutions and this is a very important thing.

Also addressing the security situation and the social issues. We wish for the return of the institutions of the armed struggle so that security protection can be guaranteed for the camps, it is a PLO institution after all. For this to happen, the popular committees must play a role.

Addressing the social and security situation for them. We also mentioned establishing committees for the neighbourhoods to represent them, and to have within the popular committees the unions of women, workers, engineers, students, doctors and other unions.

Facilitating the role of the committees, and the recognition by the popular committees of the social and security issues. Another important point is for these popular committees to have a role inside camps, and that the PLO supports them whether socially or financially and at all levels. As for the Lebanese State, there should be coordination between the popular committees and the Lebanese institutions or the Lebanese State for people to gain their full civil rights.
There is also the security issue, which is an essential demand along with having a security authority. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

The popular committees don’t represent the Palestinian people, especially in the north region camps which suffer the most from the lack of security. Consequently the essential demand is to rebuild popular committees which are recognized by all sectors of society, and which are able to provide security. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

From the Palestinian side, and to address the security aspects, I ask all my brothers and colleagues in the different Palestinian factions to have a presence in the institutions of civil society so that they won’t carry the faction’s name and to prevent the occurrence of any harm to their security. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

But the most pressing daily problem we face as Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is fear. We are very afraid today, and there is no hope with the absence of an effective and powerful Palestinian representative dealing with the Lebanese authorities so that they won’t carry the faction’s name and to prevent the occurrence of any harm to their security. (Participant, Public Meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)

As for the camps, the primary concern is security, for the security situation is very grave, but the most important of all is the health and the daily bread. (Participant, Public Meeting, Beirut, Lebanon)

Before the regime fell, we requested one thing from them, and one of the brothers adopted it. It was building a fence outside the shelter. So we contacted the brothers who were previously from the club, and they said that they are willing to help us. The reason was to protect the Palestinian families inside the shelter against the attacks—whether verbal (chauvinistic and offensive insults and curses) or not verbal—and they said that they will build the fence. All of them were willing to do that; one of them said that he will pay 50 thousand, another donated 45 thousand Iraqi dinars. But they delayed building it, and at the end they didn’t. (Participant, Syndicate meeting, Hurmiya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

After the fall of Saddam regime, things got worse. And god knows what will happen next. Maybe things will get even worse, and there might be American and Iranian intervention. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, the shelter of Al-Salam Neighbourhood (Al-Tabaj), Baghdad, Iraq)

c. Displacement
Displacement is also one of the problems we face for many reasons. First it was the security factor during the civil war in Lebanon, and then it became the lack of job opportunities for the Palestinians. And after the PLO or the Palestinian State moved inside Palestine, efforts were all channelled into Palestine. Few institutions are left, such as the United Nations institutions which are weak and don’t fulfill the required needs for the Palestinian people. 70% of the residents of this camp are immigrating. Young men always try to immigrate; they pay thousands of dollars to find a job opportunity because there are no opportunities in this country as a result of the Lebanese law that doesn’t allow us to work. (Participant, Public Meeting, Wave Camp, Lebanon).

There is an important thing in Lebanon. There is a proverb which says that “he who eats well sleeps well, while the hungry never sleeps.” Our Palestinian people are not allowed to do a lot of things, we live in great uncertainty. Our students ask the teacher about the reason they have to learn since they will eventually have to leave to another country. If he became an engineer, he will not have a job in engineering, and if he became a doctor, he is not allowed to open a clinic. So we don’t know what will happen tomorrow or what we should do. They keep saying that there are some problems, but the thing is that we are living in uncertainty. Our economic life is undergoing a crisis, and there are many people who ask for charity these days. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

\[5. Issues to be Raised at Several levels\]
\[c. Displacement\]

\[d. Status, Mobility, Travel, and Documents\]
I was astonished when I wasn’t allowed, as someone who has a temporary passport for two years and who lives in this country, to join any club or association or union. I wasn’t even allowed to join the association of Yazur, which is my Palestinian village, because of an article in the internal system for this association which indicates that “only those who have the national number are allowed to join!” But I am from Yazur! How can they allow for someone from El-Salt to join the association while I can’t, although I am from Yazur? Where should I go? These laws undermine the human spirit and the will for life, approaching the cause as a refugee one. (Participant, Pilot meeting, Amman, Jordan)

I have a simple suggestion, a petition, through which we can initiate our political activity, and in which we demand to be recognized and confirmed as Palestinians, especially those who were, whether they or their parents, born in Palestine. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

There had been several attempts to register the number of refugees in Iraq, but these attempts had failed because the Authority used to refuse, and Saddam Hussein’s regime used to refuse
5. Issues to be Raised at Several levels

5.1. Status, Mobility, Travel, and Documents

Palestinians Register: Foundations and Directions

Mobilization, and Representation

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counting the Palestinian refugees in Iraq. Three years before the collapse of the former regime, I remember that the immigrant department in the PLO tried to count the refugees, but Saddam Hussein’s regime demanded that people should be registered in UNRWA, since it is its task to assume responsibility of the Palestinian refugees all over the world, not just in Iraq. So, we are losing our political and civil rights. My political right is my right in Palestine, and to return to it. And if I didn’t register in UNRWA, then I’m not a Palestinian. They don’t recognize us. And if there were to be a solution in the future, they would say that those are not Palestinians and that you registered them in excess of the original number. They already complain about the number that is going to return. They say that only three thousand people should return to Al-Jalil (the Galilee), and that they must be born in 1948. How would they accept that I return when I have not been registered in UNRWA records in the first place? How would they give us our rights? When the registration process took place in the club, after the regime collapsed, UNRWA didn’t show up. The [UN] High Commission for Refugees was the one that registered us, although supervising the refugees is not its job. It works on humanitarian issues of concern to all refugees in the world, not just the Palestinians. Therefore, it is providing a humanitarian service, a temporary service, and this doesn’t entrench any political rights or civil rights. Yet we are entitled to have political and civil rights, especially considering that our people are politicized. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

I am from Husn camp in Irbid. My family consists of one boy and three sisters, two of us are in Gaza, two in Egypt, and nine here including myself. My father- God bless his soul- was married to two women. We are 1948 refugees; we immigrated from al-Khodira to Jenin. My step-mother immigrated to Gaza. My oldest brother is 45 years old and the youngest is 30 years old. I don’t have any brother who works in any governmental institutions or in UNRWA institutions. I was deprived from studying in the public schools because I don’t have identity papers. My late father did not apply on our behalf for identity cards. I studied until ninth grade in UNRWA schools, but I was not allowed with my brothers to continue our study in the public schools because my father didn’t have any document that proves that we are Palestinians or Jordanians or from Gaza. We have a residential unit in the camp. Of course my brothers grew up and we wanted to build an apartment for every one of my brothers but they said that this was not allowed, although we were lately allowed to build a second floor; but it is still not allowed to build a stone façade.

First everyone has the right to return to his land, properties and country. Second, there are many problems that we face here as Palestinian refugees. Some Palestinians don’t have legitimate residencies in this country like the brother here. Some existing gatherings have other kinds of problems. This association or community can be activated with other Norwegian committees, such as the human rights committees, or any other legal committees through mutual understanding. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

A conference is going to be held in Egypt relating to my specialty in computer technology and I’m insecure about attending it. Why can’t I have a committee here in Saudi Arabia that would guarantee my return to the authorities if I went to attend the conference in Egypt to develop my knowledge? Egypt doesn’t allow me to enter. This is because I am shut in here on the pretence that I might do a terrorist act or that I might settle down in Egypt. (Participant, Youth meeting, Damman, Saudi Arabia)

For example, you who live in Europe can work on paving the way in order to facilitate the immigration so that the Palestinians can improve their living standards, because there are people who are very poor. I suppose that the PLO or the Palestinian Authority can improve our relations with Europe and the world to help the Palestinian people to improve their lives. (Participant, Youth meeting, Damman, Saudi Arabia)
Excuse me, but on the personal level, I can’t get married because people don’t accept me as a husband so long as I carry a refugee document. This is a very big problem. (Participant, Youth meeting, Damam, Saudi Arabia)

Let me tell you about a situation I found myself in. The other day, I was going to Syria, and you surely know that the Syrian government prevented those who have Egyptian documents from entering its territory. I didn’t have a visa at first, so I had to go to the consulate because I was going on a business trip, and since the consul wasn’t there, I met the vice consul. This man was very rude telling me that “the country which issued the travel document prevented us from entering it without obtaining a visa in advance, so why wouldn’t we prevent you either?” This is indeed the reality, but his way of talking to me was very rude. We used to get our visas from the airport when traveling to the Gulf countries. For example, we would take the visa from the bridge or the airport if we wanted to go to Bahrain because sometimes one would be forced to travel in the same day. But now, if I want to go to the United Arab Emirates, my sponsor or the person who would host me there has to apply for a visa for me and wait for four or five days to get it. Someone then interrupts him wondering why he should be treated like a weird person or a lost one that does not exist, and why does he want to seed hate between us and the Arab countries while they only do that because this is what the PLO asked them to do. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

As Australians you have access, but I am a Jordanian citizen and do not. I am longing to see Palestine as that is degrading. Also, having a Jordanian passport does not entitle you to have a visa.

Even as Australian citizens we have limitations. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

6. Discussing Palestinian Identity

I want to talk about the definition of the refugee and the emigrant among the Palestinians. I think that when they formulated this project at first they thought that the refugees are those in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan and in the occupied Palestinian lands. But practically, and although we are emigrants, yet we consider ourselves also Palestinian refugees! We came to this country seeking work to be able to live. Currently there are some problems that concern us. The first important problem is preserving our identity as Palestinian Canadians, and I think that this is a very important issue, and it was one of the reasons behind the establishment of this institution. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

I am half Palestinian, half Anglo-Australian and I myself don’t know the story in full and was never fully aware of my identity until a couple of years ago. Recently a racist incident happened to me where I was blamed for the September 11 attacks. Awareness is needed, not just for others, though, but for Palestinian youth as well. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

We have to be really more involved in society … we are Americans of Palestinian origin. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

When we are trying to identify an identity and when you plan things in how you visualise this strength of traditions in the Palestinian issue, you comment on things that are in some way particularly Palestinian; and one can see that Palestinian-ness is reflected in these traditions. The Patronato neighbourhood, the stadium, the church, which are somehow groups of people who share certain types of customs, the “paisanos” who are within the tradition that is inherited and that maybe they know more about the Palestinian issue, maybe they dance Dabka, maybe they have a series of cultural characteristics or customs that are maintained in a more permanent way. On the other hand though, there is a large group as well that would be the Arabs or “paisanos” that are outside this traditional circle, that somehow are just as Arab as those within the circle, but who at the same time have no idea of the United Nations’ resolutions, probably do not dance Dabka, and most likely feel just as Arab as the ones who are more observant of Arab traditions, and who very likely also eat stuffed grapevine leaves. So, what we try to do in this debate is to identify, more than the things that separate us, the things that unify us and which is really the identity that we have as the Chileans that we are; or what things will make us have that common sense of belonging, because at the same time that the ones that are visibly part of the community are equal to the ones outside the community, they are both very different from the young Palestinian Diaspora who live in Belgium and who probably feel the Right of Return more strongly, if they are first generation or if he is a refugee and wants to return. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

I am an academic from the Arab Studies Centre. I was listening quite attentively, well besides being an academic from the centre I have been a militant for the Palestinian Youth Association.
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6. Discussing Palestinian Identity

during all my youth. I would like in this respect to share a few comments regarding what the [Palestinian academic] was talking about and then the [moderator] and sum up a little the comments that have been made here in this debate. First we are trying to reflect a little upon Palestinian identity and regarding that, I would like to share let’s say the diagnosis that I have, the elements that we could allow us to, observe how we as Palestinian Chilenes see or distinguish the elements. One is the life experience of the Palestinian Chilean; the other is to watch the issue of links. The life experience of the Palestinian Chilean subject who we wish to refer to, we wish to express ourselves and the links with Palestine. The memory towards Palestine makes us see the ancestor’s land in a way particular to the Palestinian Chilean subject. I’d like to hear [Palestinian academic] argument with regards to the issue of identity construction’s intersection with experience. I would tend to think that it is highly personal especially in the case of us as Palestinian Chilenes; I say this because we are not the product of a homogeneous wave of migration. There were many migration waves. I was discussing this matter before coming here with my colleagues [Palestinian academic] and [Palestinian academic]. Through each family one can tell the eventuality of living in this Palestinian Chilean identity.

Well, the other issue concerns the links with Palestine. One would be the cultural, family link, and this is very much based on memory, and is about issues of traditions, meals, folk dances, languages. The other is the ideological political link, where one is true in the affinity that one has regarding the Palestinian and Israeli conflict. These two links are not mutually exclusive and, mind you according to us they are not necessarily complementary either and by that I mean that in a way I think I understood [moderator] that someone true can be perfectly linked politically to the Palestinian cause but not necessarily eat jaemara on Sundays or dance the Dabka.

And vice versa, well that person is no less Palestinian than another who is very linked to the traditions but does not link to the political issue, so on the one hand I suggest regarding these two elements the lived experience and having links with Palestine and would like to question a bit why we are interested in creating a Palestinian community. Is it an issue with experience? Why create a Palestinian community? Why construct, why that necessity to build? True, I saw in the study the results, the opportunity that we were talking about something attractive, profitable, something renewed, believable, why? I think that entering that issue is something shameful and is something that can border the dangerous in tactics of supplication in the construction of a Palestinian subject the construction of a subject true that the important issue there is that by constructing this subject showing an impulsive differentiation subject true we have to articulate a rhetoric of the issue that defines the constituting elements of this subject that we want to construct so I would like to stop there. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

I would say, without a doubt, that the question of going to Arab schools and other institutions is important. But they have not so far given us comprehensive solutions. I have statistics on the number of school-age Arab children in Chile. I imagine that there are at least several thousand in Santiago alone. If one sees the amount of people that are interested in the organs of the Palestinian community, whether on the level of schools or other institutions, we are seeing that depopulation is occurring gradually. We have some people here who have been linked in one way or another for more than 30 years to the institutions, some for much longer, and we all know that the number of participants has significantly dropped. Some new faces appear; but in general there is, as you said, a great dispersion.

I think that we need a profound debate; lets say an analysis that determines some policies concerning the conflict of identities. I think there is an issue that must be overcome. We must not see identity or the elements of identity as negating each other:

I think we can build, and be Chilean as much as we are Palestinian. I think that we have a great opportunity of being Chilean and yet retaining the aspects of identity that are particular to the Palestinian or Arab in Chile. In fact, I think that we must not see hybridity in a negative light, on the contrary, I think that hybridity is a decisive factor in the generation of wealth, of debate, of pluralism, hence I would say that the acceptance of hybridity and diversity is a decisive factor with regards to a matter that is almost particular to each one of us.

This is an issue that we must resolve, but one witnesses it in one way or another; at least in the University of Chile’s Centre for Arab Studies, where we organise activities open to the community; We frequently get many Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese descendants who feel an identity vacuum and are precisely looking for ways to reconstruct their identity by reclaiming a certain historic memory.

I would say that at its root, historic memory plays a fundamental role in shaping visions of the future. The Palestinian, the Chilean, the Syrian, the Arab in general cannot be seen as something that stagnated and retained its identity from one
generation or from a third or fourth generation. From the past through, the future can be built. I think that this is what we can contribute to this country. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

On the whole, we belong to a good house, but matters are connected to each other. Belonging requires the creation of an atmosphere whereby things complement each other. (Participant, Youth meeting, Damman, Saudi Arabia)

This means that your internal belonging defines your belonging to this cause and your struggle to defend it. (Participant, Youth meeting, Damman, Saudi Arabia)

Concerning the issue of the Palestinian refugees, we are all refugees whether in Canada or other countries, and every Palestinian who can’t live in Palestine because of the practices of the Israeli occupation is a refugee according to international laws and conventions. A refugee is a person who can’t live in his country. Under international law the Palestinian cause is principally a refugee cause. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

There isn’t much more I can say other than reiterate everybody else’s demands. I should mention that my name was bestowed upon me by my grandparents as an expression of their wish to return, so I was named Aida (female for returnee) and my brother was named Ayed (male for returnee) and by fate or luck or destiny our last name was mistakenly converted (male for returnee) and my brother was named Ayed (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

I have just been made an Australian citizen. All Congratulations! We have to keep the Palestinian identity alive, although I am now an Australian citizen I am very much Palestinian. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

There are traditional rituals and activities that we no longer practice. Many cultural activities used to take place back in Palestine and there is no reason why we shouldn’t continue them abroad. Many of these, like the Nabi Musa festival for example, were reinforced after the crusades so that the communities developed stronger relationships to the land. So actually you see they are documented by the Mamluks. These were originally put in place to differentiate ourselves from the Palestinians in the camps. The term ‘refugee community’ is problematic and ambiguous and is best to replace it for our situation to stateless/dispossessed people. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

To rapidly present our social problems, we live between two mentalities. The mentality of the Palestinian who lived in exile in the Arab countries and internalised some of that environment’s outdated outlook. He currently lives with his children in European society, but he doesn’t know if he is a European. Let me say that he wasn’t able to be Swedish, but his children are not able to be Arabs having an Arabic mentality. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

We have affected our children with this regionalism. I was in a meeting last year with some young men and women, and when I would ask someone: are you a Palestinian, he would answer: No, I’m from the West Bank, or I’m from Gaza, or I’m Lebanese, or Syrian, etc., and when I would ask where did he get that information from, he would say: from my father and mother: We should focus on this phenomenon, which is probably contributed to by all people. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

I was born in Beit Sahur. I graduated from Birzeit University. I was in Palestine during the first Intifada, My husband is Greek. Since we are part of Greek society, I think that we need to activate our community so that we can live and preserve our identity as Palestinians. I think that this is a normal psychological state that is experienced by everyone. It is a part of our cause and belonging, to our history, infancy and youth. I grew up like this and you all did, but I don’t think that there is any change. We want something to fulfil the Palestinians’ needs. This is something that we all agree on, and this is something that will not be obtained if we continue on doubting people. I miss having a Palestinian society in Greece, at least for my children to be part of Palestine. I can’t say that my children are merely Greek, they
are Palestinian Greek. I am doing my best on an individual level, but working on an individual basis only produces weak results. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

You’re saying that people should assimilate into American society, then forget about falastin [Palestine], if you’re going to assimilate yourself into American society then forget about falastin…. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

A letter to Civitas: if I want to address a letter to them, I think that I would first demand to have a Palestinian identity and define the notion of the identity and its elements which I can work on from here. I should be able to know how to gather the people. It is important for the Palestinians to have a map that can be a communication link between them. I wouldn’t be able to establish a communication relation with a united institution or structure before drawing a map for them first to know their places. Also I should know them as a Palestinian; I should know that the house of so-and-so is in such-and-such area. I need this kind of information. I need to standardize the information before conveying it to people. The third stage is for us to establish the structure so that there would be communication lines for people through which we can know the joint problems we suffer from. A part of this problem is social, political and cultural. We need to educate them. I don’t have enough information about the Palestinian identity. I started to read and search, but not all people like to read. I should work on this information before conveying it to them. They should feel their different identity as Palestinians so that they can demand their right to have one. As a civic institution, I should work on this first. I think this needs to be done in Egypt somehow to start dealing with the division issue, to gather people and make them feel different. The Palestinian does not feel that he is different from the Egyptian except for the suffering aspect. He suffers, and here is the difference. He should feel that he is a Palestinian and that he has a different history, culture and identity. When he starts to realize his identity, he will feel that he is different and that he has rights. He will start seeking his right of return and feel that he has a place in his country, and that he has a different history. This is what made us lose our way. This is the real problem. We are lost because this right was lost. It is not about describing the history of suffering, or writing an article in the newspaper. I am not trying to convince you that I am educated; this is simply my life story. When they ask me where I am from, or what is my history, what would I say? The first thing Egyptians ask is where you came from, and you would answer. It is not about the idea of suffering; it is about a history which is connected to the loss and dispersion and details of daily life. You are talking about the simplest rights which are not separated from your real life as a Palestinian. When you follow the Palestinian news, you do this because you are a politically educated person who has the right to pursue his right. It is not about bragging that you are an educated person, it is about seeking your right. That’s because I know that I would be thrown in the street and have no country to accept me, not even Palestine, with a single signature. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

Are the institutions here effective? No, [the institutions] are not effective. I don’t know how these institutions work. This is collective and not individual work, and this community is for all the Palestinians, and there is another for the Muslims. Why don’t we unite them under one roof and contribute? (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

I don’t have any objections to us being a united Muslim Palestinian community. (Participant, Public Meeting, Slagelse, Denmark).

Basically, I have a comment for [participant] and this person that is here. From a young person’s point of view (I’m in my twenties) we are in a Palestinian Chilean society that is more and more immersed and integrated into Chile. Mind you, I would like to point out that it is a society that is becoming less and less religious, regardless
of the value judgement on whether it is good or bad for the maintenance of our identity. With the affection that one has towards Palestine, I think we have to be careful in passing on that growth to the church. We have to be aware that young ones are not going that way on a global scale, so we have to achieve other steps where we can develop our Palestinian identity in Chile not based so much on religion, and make it a little more free. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

Of course, at the bottom-line of the question that you are asking lies in the assertion that identity rooted in religion could “run the risk of being lost” given the decline of religion. The other point that arises out of your comment can be left for later, but what happens to those young professionals? How can they acquire or support our identity? (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

I would like to comment on [participant]’s remarks. I think that there is a dangerous tendency to confuse the religious with the ideological. This especially arises out of the North American outlook, not only towards Islam, but also the Arab world in general. Judgements can be understood as ideological residues, and religion seems to me not to be as rooted as it seems. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

What I wanted to say about religion is that it is inherent to the Palestinian culture; I mean it is very difficult to pull out an Oriental from the religious concept and instil the occidental secular concept of culture, that is what I wanted to say. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

I don’t want to waste your time. We are all thankful to you for organising this initiative, the truth is that it has been a hugely interesting thing and I thought that while I was listening to what [moderators], and what all of you were saying. The truth is that many things came to mind, I’m sorry when I take the microphone I have trouble letting it go. I am dean of the Faculty of Law of the University of Chile. I assume and to be truthful I think there are a series of things that come to mind. I am of Syrian descent but my wife is Palestinian. She was born here, and what happens to us is a natural process. My father was a first generation immigrant, while my mother was a second generation immigrant. What [Palestinian academic] was talking about, about when life is hard it makes the general feeling stronger. I remember for example I was born in a small town, there was a stereotype that changed a few years ago but as kids we learnt that there was nothing one could do in a big town in a big city like Santiago de Chile, as we were in that time ostracised or pressured due to our identity. With time, as the economic status of our elders became more favourable, ours did too, as we achieved greater education. This tendency to disappear but I think that this is where we the intermediate generations are failing. I say intermediate because in the feelings of our elders I am lucky that my father still lives. [Participant] said that they had the feeling of fraternity and solidarity in the hardships that came with migration. Fundamentally, they migrated for a religious reason. I think that an Arab value, which is distinctively Arab, is spirituality, but I would not locate it neither in the Catholic faith nor in the Orthodox, though the Orthodox is what unites us here because our families migrated due to persecutions or difficulties. I was telling [moderator] in a visit he paid to the faculty, that regrettably the Arabs we never learn. In the Palestinian Constitution one of the first articles, the second one I think says that it is a Muslim State I think we must start to learn the lessons and I think the Arab value is spirituality, not being Muslim or being Orthodox or being Catholic. From the moment we settled here, we placed our Orthodox and the Catholic roots, it unites us but in turn we separate from the roots over there which are fundamentally ninety percent Muslim. Therefore I think we have to strengthen the ties that unite us without losing our identity, we are Christian Arab descendants but we must recognise what is left over there which is the bulk. I think as well that just as spirituality is something defining what is Arab for me, the values in which we were shaped, and in which we must relate our children, the concept of family, the concept of loyalty, the concept of the word, use that concept that makes each one of us stand here and say proudly I think we are proud to be Arab descendants and I proudly say I am Chilean of Arab descent and, when I am here I highlight Arab and when I am in the Middle East, I have been there six times, I highlight Chilean. I think we are proud of what we are, we have to recognise our roots and in this sense I insist spirituality, values, formation of our children to maintain the links, because as we get further away from the time of the migration or immigration of our elders, obviously, we tend to lose ourselves in the society in which we are immersed in. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

One thing, the Constitution of the Palestinian State does not say that Palestine is a Muslim state because its rough drafts have not been erased; it says that the main source of law is Islam. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

It says that the official religion is Islam. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)
Here in Chile we were given a secular state in 1929. I think that that is the good thing about each practicing their own religion. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

Our community cannot part with money! I truly believe that. Our parents established businesses here, and a lot of them have money, and when you come to them and ask them to donate for a kid in Palestine or anybody they say “oh leave me alone, I don’t have time for this, the money is gone.” We need to change that, now our generation has to change them, we are growing up we are part of society we need to get politically active. Don’t get me wrong, we are not politically active but we are learning, I bet that this was the same with everyone when they first came to this country they went through the same phases, they ran before they walked, and that’s exactly what we are doing. I just think we need to do it on a larger scale, I think we need to unite the Arabs and the Muslims across the United States. One thing we are lacking is that as Muslims when we go to the Pakistani or any other community, we present Palestine as a watani [national] cause but it’s not just a national cause, this is a Muslim cause whether you are in Bangladesh or elsewhere. It’s not a nationalist cause; it’s an Islamic cause at the most fundamental level. Well, actually, the most fundamental level is that it’s a humanitarian cause so everybody in the world has to work for the cause of Falastin [Palestine] whether you believe in Palestine or not it’s a humanitarian cause. Second, it’s a Muslim cause, you know don’t get me wrong, ihna falastinia mazboot (true, we are Palestinians) but at the same time it’s Palestine and what does that mean? Palestine is like 300 or 200 years old and prior to that it was bilad il-sham [Greater Syria] What I mean is, I don’t
Part II

VII) The Right of Return

A right is never lost as long as there is someone to claim it.

(Paricipant, Syndicate Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany)
I. Insistence on the Right of Return

The Right of Return is under significant threat at this stage because of the decline of the institutions of the PLO, the retreat of the priorities of the struggle, and the international pressures that aim to harm the Right of Return. We are therefore obliged, as refugees, to make our voices heard to preserve the right to return to our country, specifically to 1948 territories, and not just to 1967 territories as is suggested now. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Homs (’Adeen) camp, Syria)

I have heard so many demands from people here tonight, and we spent three hours searching for what we want. All we want, and I hope we all can testify to this, is to clarify that all we want is to go back to Palestine, and we want no one to manipulate this truth. Anyone can use this testimony to solve the refugee problem, they made the problem for us, and we need to solve it. All we need is to go back to Palestine, and we want no one to manipulate our demands to go back. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

Is there transparency in dealing with the PLO, and in what direction? There are no new interpretations on the right of return. The Palestinian issue is not summarized only by the right of return and compensation; it is also about liberating all the Palestinian lands from the Israeli occupation. Also, we, as Palestinians, have a common nation, and a common cause. Every year, a new project appears about the right of return, like the Geneva initiative. The Palestinian communities in Berlin and all over Germany are trying to make these meetings and this conference successful, but unfortunately, some wonder, do they want to get rich at the expense of the Palestinian people? (Participant, Public meeting, Berlin, Germany)

Of course the one and only representative on the national level is the PLO, and it is certainly the representative at the local level. As we can all see, there are associations that work to meet Palestinian aspirations, be it in terms of heritage, or national issues and problems. But as mentioned by those who spoke before me, there is work missing that specialises in the Right of Return. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

I demand to return to Palestine, if there is a chance. I also demand to have a passport to enable us to move around, and I don’t care whether the passport is a Palestinian one or not, just give us something. (Participant, Meeting, Hilwan, Egypt)

We, the Palestinians, are considered refugees, no matter what country we go to. We are Palestinians who live in Al-Shatat and who demand the right of return. The right of return can’t be discussed nor renounced, regardless of the conditions, justifications and pressures. We will not renounce Jerusalem because it is the eternal and historical capital of the Palestinian people. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

I think the right of return is the most important need we have. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

The Right of Return is a sacred right, and you won’t find a Palestinian who would renounce this right. (Participant, Public Meeting, Koge-Oby, Denmark)

I personally think that no Palestinian exists who would renounce the Right of Return. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Sandenborg, Denmark)

The most pressing need for us is the Right of Return. (Participant, Public Meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)

The Right of Return is a sacred issue that is above discussion. (Participant, Public Meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)

Good afternoon. In our discussion here, the issue of the Right of Return seems to have taken many turns and widened, and it seems as if we are going to discuss all the aspects of the Palestinian cause, and I think that we are recycling and repeating the same talk. The Right of Return is a genuine right which is established and incorporated into UN Resolution 194, and it can’t be negotiated. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

Take me back and I will set up a tent on the beach and live in it, I don’t want a house to live in, I will set up a tent and live, but let them take me back. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

Everyday I dream of visiting Palestine, though I have never been there. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

I have a right to my homeland, and I should go back to my homeland. Why not? (Participant, Public Meeting, Vlaardingen, the Netherlands)

If you want to get me out of this country and that would be a renunciation on my part, and I am positive that this is to pressure us to give up and renounce our rights. We are forced to renounce our rights under any conditions so that I can eat, or my son can eat, or that I can solve my problems. They purposefully force us to reach that level, in cooperation with the host countries. The host countries could have made things easier for us, so that I can stay awake, but the host countries takes those benefits away so that I can surrender quickly and God willing we will never kneel or surrender. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)
I want to get to know my country and visit it. I am deprived from visiting my country. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

Any Jewish person in the world can go back to Falastin and live, not like the sister that had to renew her visa every two months and she was born there, you know. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

Though I may be absent from my country as a Palestinian, whether I am absent or not, I mustn’t ignore my country. I was forced to leave my country; me and our parents and grandparents. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Amman, Jordan)

**2. Components of the Rights of Return**

I want to go to Palestine as a Palestinian citizen who has rights, and who knows that she has a land with people around her who feel her pain. I don’t want to be a stranger in Palestine. This is an important issue. I want to go there as a Palestinian citizen recognized by everyone. I don’t want to face problems with the Authority treating me like a third-class citizen. I don’t want to face cultural problems with internal Palestinian society. I have had enough with the special status thing. I don’t want to have special status. I want to be a normal citizen in my country who exercises her rights there. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

When Resolution 194, which was passed in 1948, says that every Palestinian that has been forced to leave his land and his home is to go back, Israel then refused, and it is still refusing, although the Resolution annually renewes the Right of Return of Palestinian refugees to their home. Moreover, the Resolution calls for the Right of Return and the compensation. This means we have a right to return to our country, and to get compensation for the years of deprivation we had experienced in the refugee camps, and for the harm we suffered. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark).

I have never been to Palestine but I really look forward to going there just to get a sense of the power and justice. For me, it is outrageous that people are in a rush to settle the Right of Return. So it must be said, my government that is in charge at any point and time, must very clearly state what it means by the Right of Return. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

I see that all of us are with the right of return. The right of return is the heart of the Palestinian cause, and if we solved it we would solve the issue. As Palestinian refugees, this right is clear to us, but we are worried that this right is not clear to the Palestinian Authority. Five months ago, we saw Abu Mazen, and he said that he is not against settling Palestinians in Lebanon or giving them Lebanese nationality. The fear is that if there are secret negotiations with Israel, which has a clear project in terms of the Palestinians, that this is also the project of the PA. With the construction of the wall, and when this wall is complete, the Israelis will withdraw and give the Palestinians the eastern area of the wall while they take the western area. Sharon intends to solve the Palestinian cause while having a clear idea in his mind in the secret negotiations with the [Palestinian] National Authority about the absence of the PLO. With a border-crossing agreement with Jordan and other countries; they would allow people to pass because, as we fear, this ambiguity of the refugees’ problem would lead to the gradual elimination of this right. There is something in the Right of Return, the Right of Return is an individual right according to international law. Meaning, that even if the National Authority renounced this right, this doesn’t mean that international law renounced it too because it is an individual right.

The definition of the Palestinian refugee should be changed, because the Palestinian refugee of the 48 territories is different from the refugee of 67 or 2000 or 2005. Those who were refugees are not any more in the European countries because they became invested in Europe. Therefore statistics should be done again and restudied, because there are about 5 million in Palestine of whom only 500.000 get out, and how would things be when they return while they can’t now even feed the 5 million? The Right of Return needs a deep study to define who the refugees are and where do they live and do they accept to return or not? When the Authority was established in 1993, everyone left the Palestinian arena, and all the federations of the 1970s and 1980s that were active, why were they cancelled? Because people were depressed by the Authority. I am not happy with its performance and efficacy, but I am completely happy with the PLO. Thank you very much and I hope that you maintain the communication and discussion between you. (Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)

By God’s will, and however long exile lasts, we will return. We hope that the Authority will help and support us to give us a chance to return to our country again and live with our families. We’ve been raised in exile for 35 years. We hope that the Authority can offer us the right to return to our country and traditions so that kids can be raised with their families. We don’t want our children to go through what we suffered. A grain of sand in our country is better than a 100 palaces abroad. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)
a. An Individual and Collective Right
The right of return is a sacred right which no one can manipulate. It is a right which we determine. (Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Sondenborg, Denmark)

I think that everyone talked about the right of return for all the Palestinians, whether those in Canada or in Al-Shatat, in the exile countries in Europe, Australia, the refugee camps in Arab countries like Lebanon, Syria and Jordan and in other Arab countries or those who live in the occupied land. The Right of Return is one of the main issues we are discussing, and this project covers all Palestinians. Our decision is that the right of return is something we will not renounce, because it is our legitimate right as Palestinians, whether in Beirut, Amman, Damascus, Montreal or any European country. This project should include all the Palestinians in Palestine because they live in camps too and they are deprived from returning to their lands and properties. This project hasn’t mentioned the refugees in the occupied Palestinian lands. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

We think that the Right of Return is an individual and collective right which belongs to the set of Palestinian people’s rights, and which is solid and can’t be manipulated or subjected to referendums. Any referendum results can’t change anything from its legal and ethical strength, regardless of the referendum’s purpose. (Participant, Public meeting, Burj el-Barajneh, Lebanon)

Palestinians everywhere want to return. Palestinians in countries other than Lebanon enjoy civil rights, particularly in Jordan where they have Jordanian nationality, and the Jordanian passport. This brother says that he lives comfortably in Denmark and let’s support Palestinians in Lebanon. They all consider this as the main obstacle: If only Sharon would agree to the return of Lebanese Palestinians, because the Palestinians in other countries live comfortably and they don’t want to return. I agree with the right of five million Palestinians to return to their country. (Participant, Public meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)

And even if someone has citizenship, or even if we don’t represent the Palestinian refugees abroad, because most of us have German nationalities, do you think he is willing to renounce his rights? I don’t think that there is a Palestinian who doesn’t think of the day he will return to Palestine. (Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany).

I must have the right to return to my land any time I want, regardless of where I live now. It’s not about whether I return now or not to return at all, I am totally free to go to the United States, or Canada, but I must have the right to return to my land whenever I want to. (Participant, Public meeting, Vlaardingen, Netherlands)

I want to tell you about the right of return. The right of return is a right for everyone, isn’t it? We are not talking about Palestine’s conditions when we say give us this right. After that, whether I want to return or not, I’m free. Meaning, you have the right to return to your town. (Participant, Syndicate Group Meeting, Sondenborg, Denmark)

And even if we are living a comfortable life in Canada, and although we have the Canadian nationality, yet according to the Resolution 194, we are refugees…. We are Palestinian refugees here in Canada like all the others. Our number here is about fifty thousand, but we have rights like all the other Palestinian refugees all over the world. (Participant, Public meeting, Montreal, Canada)

I just want to go back to the issue of the Right of Return. I want to stress upon the fact that the Right of Return is an individual and communal right, and this is a very important point. What I mean by communal is that it is a right at the level of organizations like the PLO, and at the level of the national structures in which Palestinians live. But we are in a critical situation. And it must be stressed that it is an individual right, which means that the right of the individual will not be cancelled regardless of the decision on the communal right.

To understand this idea is very important in this stage, because if we don’t trust our representative and the governments that will represent us, or the organizations that already represent us, it must be stressed that our right, as an individual right, will not be cancelled, and it is the right of every person, and what I mean by every person is all the Palestinians, whether the ones who left Palestine, or those who were born in it or abroad. This is a very important thing. (Participant, Public meeting, Oslo, Norway)

The Right of Return, historically and according to Resolution 194, is to the 1948 territories. (Participant, Public Meeting, Aarhus, Denmark)

b. Restitution and Compensation
The first right and the primary need for the Palestinian refugees is to restore their lands and to return to them. This is the first legitimate right, which was guaranteed by the international community through its many resolutions starting from the Resolution 194. Although these laws have been manipulated, it is still the first legitimate right and the primary need for the Palestinian refugees. The second civil right is to feel secure and safe, and to not suffer killing and destruction and displacement in the camps in which they live. (Participant, Pilot meeting, Amman, Jordan)
The Right of Return

2. Components of the Rights of Return

b. Restitution and Compensation

We will never renounce the right to return to our land and houses. And I present in this file about twelve real estate certificates; a piece of land that belongs to me, and my house certificate which was bought by my father for 50 Palestinian pounds, with the sum written on each, and which have the complete stamps. We won’t renounce this land and we won’t accept compensation at all. And this is what I’m saying in my testimony. The last certificate that we bought was one year after the immigration, in 1949, on the basis that we will return. (Participant, Public meeting, Oslo, Norway)

On the other hand, we hear some Palestinian voices, and from the Palestinian leaderships, and the Palestinian leadership’s right, is working on more than one option. For example, the “Geneva document” has emerged, and also the “Abu Mazen-Beilin” agreement, and the “Nusseibah-Ayalon” agreement. In my opinion, all these agreements and documents are not in accord with the internationally legitimate resolutions, nor with international law. And all countries in the world are bound by these resolutions which “even if a country was built on the remains of another country”, in other words and in our case, a country called Israel had been built on the remains of Palestinian society! We didn’t have a Palestinian country; it was just a province within the Ottoman State’s, which was followed by the “mandate”. And even if this country was built on the remains of this province, the Palestinian citizen, whether he is inside or outside the country, who is registered as a resident of this land, has the right to regain his properties, because this is individual property which is considered an uncontachable sacred issue under international law. (Participant, Public Meeting, Koge, Denmark)

What concerns us more at present is to return to our country, our nation, and to our properties and homes, as Resolution 194 guarantees. And even if this generation can’t return, it must insist upon the Right of Return. Perhaps our children or grandchildren would be able to return some day. (Participant, Public Meeting, Copenhagen, Denmark)

The PLO is my only legitimate representative and national shield. There is no doubt about that, and it can’t be substituted. I hope that the Right of Return Committee will convey our voice loudly to the international organisations. I will never renounce my mother’s house in Haifa, nor my father’s house and our properties in Yafa. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

I want to reiterate everything people have said, but in terms of priority, we should be surveying every centimetre [of Palestine], what’s happened to it, who holds title to it now, how they got that title, and to begin to strategize on how to get that land back. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

The issue is not only about the refugees’ Right of Return. On the contrary, you know that a lot of other issues and tragedies followed which affected generations of refugees. They must be legally forced to admit their guilt, especially Britain, and assume the responsibility for this disaster that hit the whole nation. And the issue is not only about the Right of Return, there is also the issue of compensation as some of the brothers said earlier. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

There is that part of the resolution that is related to return and compensation, not in the form that is now being promoted in the media, which is return or compensation, as if the refugee should choose between them. The other point, which was much discussed, is the right of return which was voted thirty five times by consensus, except by Israel. There is also the Moscow agreement. What is strange though is the lack of clarity in Oslo as a result of American objections. This matter is dubious. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

We affirm that the right of return is a sacred right that cannot be renounced. And we should not discuss the Resolution after all these years. We will not accept compensation alone, we want the right of return and compensation for our suffering. Even if some Arab Leaders abandoned us, we are not supposed to surrender, whatever the price. (Participant, Public Meeting, Arhus, Denmark)

Our problem lies in the Right of Return. We want the Right of Return. We are not interested in the compensation, but rather in having a home to go back to. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)

c. Return to Original Homes

I want to return to my country and to my city whether alive or a corpse. I want to return to Haifa. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

We address all the relevant entities, including the Palestinian State, UNRWA and the host country, to search for us to see our conditions. We have the right to live in dignity and to return to our original town not to Gaza. It is true that we were raised in Gaza, but our ancestral home town is Yubna. We will not renounce it for any reason. Therefore I implore the relevant entities to do what is necessary for every Palestinian refugee wherever he might be, whether Egypt, Syria or any foreign country. This is what every Palestinian refugee in Egypt hopes for. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)
The Right of Return

2. Components of the Rights of Return
   c. Return to Original Homes

They now took Gaza back. Let us go there and I would live in one room with my grandson. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

If I were to choose between staying here and returning to my original country (Yafa), or if my father were to choose, we certainly won’t refuse. Maybe I am more hesitant because I married an Egyptian man and my kids are now Egyptians, so it is difficult for me to return. But if I were married to a Palestinian man, I would certainly choose to return to my country. When they ask my father whether he wants to return to Gaza, he refuses, saying that he wants to return to Yafa, where he was born, and his home and land are. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

This is what we should hold on to; that the right of return is a sacred and individual right which no one, regardless of his status, can manipulate. This right is an unalterable right according to the Return Resolution [194]. The Gaza Strip is 360 km2, and the West Bank is 5000 Km2, so I wonder where should we exercise the Right to Return; in Palestine, or in the West Bank, or in Gaza? Where should we return? (Participant, Public Meeting, Arhus, Denmark)

I am a member of the Right of Return committees in Denmark. As for the refugee issue, there is international law concerning this issue, and there are internationally legitimate resolutions which form the cornerstones or frameworks for solving the refugee problem! The internationally-legitimate Resolution 194 which proclaims “the right of the refugee to return to his house and properties and land, not his return to his country”. There is a new twisting of the law concerning this Palestinian right, to mean that he can return to his country in the West Bank and Gaza, but not the returning of every refugee to his land and properties and house. This is an attempt to twist this resolution. (Participant, Public Meeting, Koge, Denmark)

I want to say that we, as a Palestinian people who live in camps, have the right to return on the basis of a fair and comprehensive peace which guarantees the right of return and Jerusalem for the Palestinians. This can’t be achieved without establishing two equal countries. The Palestinian State by itself is not enough. We want the right of return of the ‘48 refugees and a peaceful coexistence. (Participant, Public Meeting, Burj el-Barajneh, Lebanon)

First, I think that there is no Palestinian who renounces the Right of Return, whether he was asked or not. Both the leadership and the people are committed to it. Whoever renounces this right is a traitor. (Participant, Public meeting, Shajrah, United Arab Emirates)

People are fed up with talking; they are desperate. This is our reality. News only reaches us from satellite television channels, where we hear that Abu Mazen is demanding the ‘67 lands only. The right of the refugees of the ‘67 is legitimate, but what about the ‘48 refugees? Yasser Arafat refused, in the Oslo agreement, to renounce the ‘48 territories. This is good and this is our reality. But when Abbas demanded the ‘67 lands, does that mean that he cancelled the ‘48 lands? Then there are no ‘48 lands, and this means that he cancelled the Right of Return which is the right of every honest Palestinian. If you have cancelled the Right of Return, why don’t you offer me an alternative? What alternatives do you have that are better than the reality in which we live? (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Za’faraniya shelter, Baghdad, Iraq)

As a Palestinian, I want to go back to the village of al-Hamama. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

What are your ambitions as a Palestinian, what do you want as a Palestinian refugee?

We have so many ambitions, and we have been refugees since 1948. We have been living in Al-Shatat for tens of years; in Syria and Lebanon. We want to return to our homeland. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

The basic and most important right for a Palestinian is the Right of Return. (Participant, Public meeting, Khartoum, Sudan)

Exile imposes great pressures on the refugees’ lives. Return is a legal and legitimate demand. We will not accept anything other than returning to our lands and properties. I refuse to return to ‘67 territories because I will return then as a refugee. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Jaramana camp, Syria)

I have the right to return to my country now, but I can’t do that. Yet that doesn’t mean that I renounced my Right of Return. The Right of Return is different from the land; when you tell me that you are from Yafa, I can assure you that you can’t return to it now, but the question is: do you have the right to return to Yafa? This is what all the guys here fight and tire and move from one place to the next for and work hard for, God bless them, they work till the late hours in the night. The struggle now is for the right of return. We are not demanding to return to Yafa right now; but we are demanding to return to our homes. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)
3. On Compromise and Negotiations

And I think that the ultimate goal for every Palestinian refugee who lives in exile and in the camps is the right of return; it is a solid right for every Palestinian refugee and it can’t be negotiated or minimized. The Palestinian Authority has no right to discuss it in the final solution negotiations, because it is a right for every Palestinian on the individual level and the Authority has no right to discuss it. The Authority has no right either to negotiate or discuss international Resolution 194 related to the return of the Palestinian refugees.

As for the Palestinian communities and organisations abroad participating in this project, I am saying that this project should be implemented in coordination with the PLO, not the Palestinian Authority. I have a simple question: what is the Palestinian National Authority concerned with? Is it concerned with conveying the voice of the Palestinian right of return to the world? I am worried that this voice is seen as a problem by the PNA. What does the PNA want from the peace negotiations with Sharon and other Israelis? Are we 100% sure that the PNA insists upon the right of the Palestinian people to return? Or is it possible that our project is an obstacle for the PNA in its negotiations with the Israelis?

I think that it is very important to raise the issue of the Right of Return as guaranteed by the Resolution 194 because it is indisputable and I hope that this is one of the main goals of the project. This committee or this project or initiative that we are discussing now aim to take away the right of return from the negotiation table, because it is indisputable for us. This is what I wanted to affirm.

As for the Geneva Initiative, and its spear headers, we know that this initiative and the directors are people who work in the [Palestinian] Authority and who are members in the [Palestinian] National Council. What I understand is that there soon will be elections for the Legislative Council and elections for the Fateh movement. What we are asking from Fateh movement is to fire all the “Geneva Initiative’s” spear headers, because renouncing the right of return is a betrayal. In addition, we ask the Palestinian people inside Palestine not to vote for the Geneva Initiative’s spear headers at all.

Thank you all. Before talking about the Right of Return, we need to discuss the outcomes of the Right of Return. Is it an inalienable right or something that can be negotiated? This is something that we should understand before talking about the Right of Return. Is it as clear as the UN resolutions and the PLO resolutions say, or is it a right which can be negotiated in the same way that happened years ago? There are cases which are moderate, like returning 100,000 refugees and compensating some of them etc. I will say my opinion, but I and the brothers here think that it is not heard.

As Palestinians, we should have the full right to this land and this nation and the Right to Return to them. Let’s go back to the referendum issue. This is also a dangerous issue. I am a Palestinian refugee who can’t determine his fate, or the fate of his children, grand children, or his offspring! I don’t have the right to ask for a few hundred dollars, for example, in exchange of renouncing my properties and the right of return. I owe it to my children and grandchildren to protect this right for them! For I don’t know what they will decide, I don’t decide for them. Legally, under international law, it isn’t possible to renounce it because it is an individual right as well as a communal right. And this right can’t be cashed! I shouldn’t assign a representative to speak in my name, so as to say that the PLO is the only legitimate representative for the Palestinian community which represents me on the political level and which is authorized to speak in my name. If I take this decision, then it’s all over; this shouldn’t be the case, according to the international legal point of view.

We must insist upon the Right of Return, or leave it to the future generations, because Palestine will return only by force. Palestine must be freed and it is a big mistake to renounce it. Who renounces his land is like the one who renounces his religion.

The thing is that I am one of those who recognize the PLO in its present form and its officials as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people wherever he is, whether at home or in Al-Shatat. And whoever represents me should restore my full rights to me! It is not only my right as a person, but the right of every Palestinian person whether at home or in Al-Shatat. And not in terms of the document that was presented to the grocery man from the 48 territories asking him to renounce his land, however he refused and said that this right isn’t only his right, but the right of every Palestinian, whether young, infant, or old.

Palestine is an Islamically-endowed [waqf] land; it is owned by all Muslims; it is a land that shouldn’t be renounced whatever the reasons are, even if it is indeed small, it shouldn’t be renounced. This is his right, because he is a Muslim, and Islamic law indicates that Palestine should not be renounced!
And I don’t accept that anyone can renounce this Right. (Participant, Public Meeting, Slagelse, Denmark)

There are two essential points we don’t want to discuss. First is that the PLO is the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and second is that the Right of Return is a communal and individual sacred right which can’t be renounced. (Participant, Worker’s meeting, Beddawi camp, Lebanon)

In order not to repeat ourselves, I say that there is no way that we would renounce or argue the right of return at any time. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

I think that there is a consensus in the Palestinian street and on the level of the Palestinian people with all its categories that the Right of Return is a right no one can renounce. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

No one wants to renounce the Right of Return; otherwise he will be considered a traitor. We are not represented by Abed-Rabbu, Nusseibah, or the [Palestinian] Authority. The PLO is the only legitimate representative for the Palestinian people, and no one can cancel my Right to Return, not even a traitor. (Participant, Preparatory Workshop, Homs (A’ideen) camp, Syria)

What’s more important is to reiterate again and again that the Right of Return is inalienable, so nobody can touch it; no body can even negotiate it, because it’s both an individual and collective right no body wants to give it away from the refugee community. The purpose of these meetings behind closed doors is to sign for a state that has no worth to anybody. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

Any person would definitely support the right of return, regardless of who in the world they are addressing. But some people, even some refugees, consider that the PLO could easily give up this right. I think that we, as Palestinian communities and assemblies, form the strongest foundation for the Right of Return. (Participant, Youth Meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

As a Palestinian, no one can renounce my right on my behalf. (Participant, Public meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

My right, as a Palestinian, is to return to Palestine without facing troubles upon returning. It is my right to return as a Palestinian citizen to my land and to my village and country. For us, or for me personally, the Right of Return is a sacred right that can’t be touched in any way. I can understand what is called the ‘tactic of stages’ but it is impossible to renounce anything related to Palestine. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

You have the right, as a refugee, to be able to enter to your country, and this is a right you should not renounce. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

I came here to affirm my right, even if I don’t have any document; I still have the Right to return. I came here to ensure that my desire to return is guaranteed and I will preserve it and fight for it, and I want to make sure that my voice is conveyed. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

The Right of Return is not guaranteed; no one can sign it off, and no one can renounce it. No one can sign off the Right of Return: to return to my city, Yafa, and your city, Yafa. No one can with UN resolutions sign off on the Right of Return. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

4. On Resettlement

I want to say that we do not emphasize the Right of Return which is our legitimate right. Every Palestinian has the right to exercise the Right of Return. Currently it is said that the Palestinians in Al-Shatat, especially those who live in the European countries, are financially comfortable, so they wonder why would they want to return, and why don’t they just settle in the countries that they are living in. We have the Right of Return, and we want to exercise it and return to our country, lands and properties. No one can prevent us from this right, not the United States, or the United Nations, or Europe. I can’t forget my country, neither will my children. I want from the United Nations and Israel to respect my rights as a human being and give me back my right from which I have been deprived for so many years.

I don’t belong to any country except mine, and I don’t belong to Canada even if I have Canadian nationality. I am a Palestinian in the first place. Who is responsible for forcing us out of our land should assume the responsibility of our returning. Unfortunately our leadership tries to forget and delay and renounce the Right of Return, as if we don’t have any presence as Palestinian refugees. It is also said that the Palestinians are extremists who refuse the peaceful solution and that they threaten the lives of the Jews and that they are terrorists, despite the fact that the Palestinian people are being killed and face death every day by the occupation soldiers. We are not responsible for offering solutions to the Israelis. We want our Right
5. Working Towards the Right of Return

Before solving the issue of the Right of Return, we want solutions for our problems in our daily life, which can lead to solving this issue. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

For the sake of the right of return, everyone should have the prerequisites for steadfastness. The most important thing is to be able to live decently in a house, and to be able to have good food and clean water. One should even have the right to watch their child live their childhood. These basic human rights are reaffirmed by humanity as a whole. (Participant, Public Meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)

We have the Right to Return and the right to live in our land like all the nations in the world. We all know that, and if I want to talk about the Right of Return, I can only say, “what was taken by force is returned only by force.” (Participant, Pilot meeting, Amman, Jordan)

There are Islamic, cultural, and social associations. I suggest holding a national Palestinian conference dedicated to the Right of Return, and through which we can form a special committee to pursue this issue nationally with different areas in Sweden. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

It is good if we, within the frameworks of these associations and clubs, display some kind of specialization about this Right. We must focus on the legal and political side to this Right. I think that this committee I am inviting you to form as a specialization must coordinate with any of the Right of Return committees which exist in Sweden. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

Of course, all of these ways are good, but it’s too early to implement them. What matters in the end is to activate or form committees. There must be, of course, a specialized committee dedicated to the Right of Return. And when that happens, there will be broader discussions. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

But I stress upon forming a committee now, which is dedicated to the Right of Return, and which doesn’t belong to any ideological, political, or intellectual class; it must only belong to my right as a Palestinian to return. Of course, it must be supported on the Arab level from all the Arab communities. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

The Right of Return is unquestionable, but I want to hear from you how it is to be implemented. At present, it is difficult to implement Resolution 194, because America and Israel are the strongest on the international scene, and since they have the power, they won’t allow five million Palestinians to go back to Haifa, Yafa, and Akka. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)

The Right of Return issue has been covered in dust, and in order to wipe the dust, we must be well-armed in order to assert the Right of Return, we cannot renounce it. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

Since the first Palestinian catastrophe in 1948 to the beginning of the Palestinian Revolution in 1965, the Right of Return issue has been falling and rising, like stock markets, mainly according to international conditions, and according to the way our Palestinian people deal with it, since it is the foundation, and if he doesn’t insist upon his right, he will not find anyone to support his right. This is a critical point. So, when the PLO possessed...
strong political and military powers and was supported by the refugees in Lebanon, and in Jordan formerly, no one dared to even talk about the possibility of negotiating the Right of Return. (Participant, Public meeting, Malma, Sweden)

What I am saying is that all conscious people insist on the Right of Return, so the great majority of the Palestinian people insist on it. But this right is in danger because of the time factor and because of the powers that work against it, which are not only foreign powers, but also internal and local powers. And as one of the brothers mentioned, there are children who don’t know their village, and can’t even speak Arabic. Yet there are still generations who lived in Palestine and who still interact with the land of Palestine. There is a lot of important work to be done on this front.

Secondly, I think that this factor should be civil, I mean amongst educated ranks. Let’s speak frankly, we can’t form committees everywhere, and we don’t want to talk in vain. We formed many councils and we achieved nothing. I think if there could be academic work and freedom for academics abroad, this would be helpful. The academics abroad have more freedom in working than those in the Arab world, so let them assume this responsibility and support us. There should also be a memo from a group of academics and known figures on the international level so that it can be trusted. This is the first point related to the Right of Return and insisting upon it. (Participant, Public meeting, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates)

From what I heard, the Right of Return is an indisputable issue. Therefore I want to talk about another fact. It is said that we would accept settlement and becoming citizens in this country for a certain amount of money, maybe fifty thousand dollars or some other amount. Some people began to accept this idea, especially since there are a lot of reasons for that. First, the social and economic situation. Second, the integration of the Palestinian people in the Lebanese society. We have many from them and they do the same, so the Palestinian people have integrated into the structure of Lebanese society. Third, the Palestinians have no social ties with those in Palestine. We have relatives in Palestine, yet we don’t know each other. This means that the Palestinian no longer has a relationship with his extended family to which he belongs in Palestine. Therefore we think that the more appropriate suggestion is to reinforce these ties between the family inside and outside Palestine. We should find a way or a structure to contact them. But the time passes without us doing anything. And those who know elderly relatives in Palestine, his ties get looser every time one of them dies, so the relationship ends. So I stress upon this point; that there should be communication between the Palestinians inside Palestine and those who are outside, so that we will at least have something in common to unite us. Thank you. (Participant, Public Meeting, Wavel Camp, Lebanon)

Regardless of what we have said, we should activate our institutions so that we can work correctly and enlighten our people about the Right of Return. It is a good thing that we are demanding it, but is it possible to absorb five million Palestinians now in the West Bank and Gaza? It is very easy to suggest slogans, or when Abu Mazen negotiates on one meter to establish the Palestinian state when we present the issue of the Right of Return, can these demands be easily achieved? I think not.

The issue of the right of Return is not about who wants to return, it is about the UN resolutions. The Right of Return can be implemented, and we suggested a timetable that starts from Lebanon because of the difficult situation our people who live there, then Syria. Then we can start with the people who suffer more, why should I renounce my right? I remember very well what was suggested in the last Camp David, and Abed-Rabbu in Geneva, not Camp David, solved the issue by suggesting the return of people with humanitarian cases, returning 120,000 Palestinians, and issuing compensation. This is what was suggested and agreed. How can we talk then about the Right of Return, while we have a prominent figure, the president of al-Quds University saying that Right of Return talk is illogical? (Participant, Public meeting, Padua, Italy)

To come back to this current of “it’s unrealistic”, or “it’s not practical that you want to return” and this is a huge current that we are seeing. We have collaborators coming every week and saying that its unrealistic, Sari Nusseibah comes to his non-Palestinian audience and he is not even a refugee himself saying that it’s ok if refugees don’t return and that they have all these centres in Ramallah that get their funding from the EU and others. This current really needs to be combated by the refugees and it would be something for other communities to make sure that when these speakers stand up we make it clear that they are not welcome to come to talk on our behalf. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

As for the Resolution 194, which guarantees the Right of Return, it is the political interpretation of the Right of Return. If pressures are exercised to implement the Right of Return Resolution, it is possible that this can, at least, help in getting Israel out of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, because returning to Yafa and Akka and Haifa is possible that this can, at least, help in getting Lebanon out of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, because returning to Yafa and Akka and Haifa is possible that this can, at least, help in getting Israel out of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, because returning to Yafa and Akka and Haifa is possible that this can, at least, help in getting Lebanon out of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, because returning to Yafa and Akka and Haifa is possible that this can, at least, help in getting Israel out of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Right of Return Resolution was issued in 1948. Doesn’t the United Nations know that 1948 Palestinians live in Syria and Lebanon? And does the Right of Return Resolution state only the return to Gaza and the West Bank? The resolution includes everyone, and the return to all the occupied lands of 1948. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerod, Denmark)

In the Madrid conference, and in Oslo in Norway, the Palestinians felt that the United States is neglecting the natural right of the Palestinian refugee to return to his country, village, and properties. When the Palestinians felt that danger, they wanted to express it through taking practical steps; through a Palestinian assembly that expressed the Right of Return and through the Right of Return committees and centres. These committees started to go wherever the Palestinian refugee might be, whether in the West Bank or Gaza, or the Arab host countries like Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt, then in the southern and northern Americas, then in Canada, Australia, and Europe. The feeling of neglecting the right of the Palestinian refugee to return to his country and properties was threatening. This Right is the core of the conflict between the Palestinians and the global Zionist movement and whoever supports it. Yesterday, Britain and the United States today, want to offer the Palestinians a partial and weak solution: a self-governing region in the West Bank or Gaza, and the Arab asylum countries. This is a great injustice and a historical scandal for those who praise democracy, civilization and the human right of anyone to live in his country and his house. Therefore, the Palestinian revolution was born, and the Palestinian activists started to work and feed the Palestinian revolution. When the Palestinians realized the threat that aims to neglect the right of the Palestinian people to return to their country, they started to form assemblies and committees in the hope that they will support the rights of the Palestinian people, and that they will advocate based on international legitimacy and laws, supported by the free people of this world, whether Muslims, nationalists, or others, to stand in the face of the biggest crime in human history against the resisting Palestinian people.

We are part of this Palestinian nation, and part of this cause, we feel its pains and suffering, like millions of our fellow citizens. It is our duty to answer this call and to do our best as much as we can.

That’s why four years ago, we formed, here in Norway, committees known as the “Right of Return committees” based on those in the Netherlands where the headquarters of the European Union is located. Some brothers were delegated to be the communication link between the Palestinian Right of Return committees and the European Union with all its institutions, from the Parliament to the European council, and in its different countries. In other words, the Palestinian activists who are charged with this historical responsibility meet to jointly express the right of their people to return with their fellow citizens in all fields. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

We should work on finding a certain channel to official entities in the Gulf countries, like the Gulf Cooperation Council. We can demand that the Gulf Cooperation Council discusses the right of return during one of its meetings, this is not a usual demand; rather it has strong foundation and represents the demand of the community members. Other national councils can join and demand the right of the Palestinians to return in the aim of issuing new resolutions that are based on a strong foundation. (Participant, Public meeting, Damman, Saudi Arabia)

Concerning the issue of the Right of Return, there are also two sides. From the external side, the right of return depends on the general regional, local and international situation, and also the attitudes during the negotiations, and our attitudes as Palestinians towards this issue. In general, international conditions will determine if we are going to return or not. At the local level, the embassy can help the community. But the embassy has limited capability. It can help to create job opportunities for the community members. It also can do whatever it can to help us in this country. (Participant, Public meeting, Sana’a, Yemen)

What [Participant] said about the bulletin is very important, it is very important to issue a simple bulletin, that focuses on and simplifies Resolution 194 on the Right of Return. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

Because this is a critical period, we must focus on one particular thing, which is the Right of Return. This needs a structure. Therefore, I think a body, committee, or a framework must be formed within the assemblies, which will not be an alternative to them, but a part of the community’s activity which focuses on the Right of Return. (Participant, Public meeting, Malmo, Sweden)
The Right of Return

5. Working Towards the Right of Return

What do you want from the PLO?
I want it to give us some benefits.

like what?
To show us that we have rights, as Palestinians, to return, that we have land and properties.

You mean insisting upon the principles?
Of course, I can tell you that I reached this age, and I’m eager to visit my country; it is a dream for me. I visited the Prophet’s grave (May God’s blessings and peace be upon him), and now I long to visit my country, like I visited the Prophet. I can still remember its landmarks from when I was a child, and all we can say is Inshallah [God willing].

How do you think you can improve the relationship between you and the PLO?
By sweet talk during meetings

You mean you want to meet with them?
Of course, there must be meetings and communication.

Communication of what sort?
Of every sort. We can’t convey anything to the PLO. Yet they must know our opinions, and there must be communication between young men and women and between the PLO. This is our right my son. And God knows what will happen tomorrow, nevertheless, for our country, and whatever happens, we will not forget Palestine. The child will become a man and the father of your children’s children will not forget. Don’t you ever believe that they will, and the victory is ours by God’s will, no matter how long this will take. Everything has a start and an end

What must we do to activate this Palestinian community?
They must meet with each other; my dear. They must hold regular meetings to get to know each other and know each other’s pains and needs, in order to be able to benefit each other.

So what are the community’s problems?
Actually, I don’t meet them very often.

What are the social and psychological problems it suffers from? Problems in general?
It suffers from all these problems

All of them?
Yes, all of them and the main problem are the drugs which they seek to get in any way. We, as Palestinians, must cling to our cause and not drugs, and other things. We claim it as our right, my son, and our right shall never die if God wills.

Moderator: what’s your name, Hajja?
Latifa ‘Umreen.

Welcome Latifa ‘Umreen and I wish you a long life. May God protect you and bless you and preserve you. And it is with your help that the victory will be achieved, God willing. I pray to God that you will return with your children. It isn’t important that we do, but the important thing is that you return.

You will return as well, God willing. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

We should not stop demanding our rights. A right shall never be lost if there are people to demand it. As long as you preserve your enthusiasm and demand your rights, you will obtain them.

(Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)
Part II

VIII) The Next Generation

A younger generation must be elected to lead the community.

(Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)
1. Highlighting the Role of Youth

I think that the various Palestinian communities in exile need to comprehend the particularity of the country they live in. The needs of the inside are different from those of Jordan, Syria or Lebanon, or the communities in Europe, Italy or Britain. The particularity of the Palestinian community in Italy is clear as the brothers mentioned. This particularity is manifested in the fact that this generation of the community is still nascent, having been here for 30 years or less. Moreover, most of the members of the community are doctors. Accordingly, what are the characteristics of this community and what does it need? Its needs are very simple: to concentrate on its youth structures, to start now in constructing the structures, or for the current generation to start organizing itself. Now there is an initiative in the community – we are talking about the structures to focus on establishing a club, association or a committee. What you want is not the problem, the important thing is to find a frame, but you should focus on the youth, the second generation in Italy. This is the particularity of this community. (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)

As a Palestinian community, we shouldn’t talk about the PLO or the PA all the time. We have to depend on ourselves as a Palestinian gathering, in order to form an elected body or institution to represent us before the host country, or before our national representative, or before international institutions. I think that the people in this gathering should change their style, and the way they deal with the new generation of community members. They must start to form a powerful community which can speak in their name. They should hold cultural and sport events to teach their children about their national cause. That’s why we should change our mentality and methodology in dealing with our children; otherwise we will not be able to develop. (Participant, Public Meeting, Thessalonica, Greece)

Our youth and children have had enough of the talk about the refugees, which is boringly repeated in vain, and they have had enough of the patriotic songs, and they lost their faith in the institutions of the civil society, and in our elderly, and even in our fighters. There is a damaged segment of our children who don’t have a foreseeable future. I suggest that we care for the future of our youth. Also, I have a question: what is the difference between “citizenship” and “resettlement”? Maybe I would refuse “resettlement” but I may not refuse “citizenship”? Why can’t the educated Palestinian young men benefit from their knowledge? There is social injustice, and there are efforts to wipe out the personal identity of the Palestinian youth. (Participant, Pilot meeting, Amman, Jordan)

For us Palestinians we need to move forward and not cry. Now we need to move forward, so how do we do that? We have the brothers here. When we talk about the Chicago area, it has so many personalities who are really sincere about the Palestinian cause. We really have so much knowledge. We should start with that; we should start with the organizations that care about Palestine, and we should then involve the new generation in our organizations. The new generation is not going to be that easy. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

As for the existing needs and operations here in this country, since you have been living here for so long, what are our priorities as a community here, and what do you think we need to focus on as a Palestinian community?

To maintain our children’s identity, and teach them to preserve Palestine and to always think of it. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

Do you want to know what the mechanism is? You need to realise that some of the biggest movements in the US happened in universities as the case of Vietnam shows. Whatever war it was, whatever cause, a lot of these movements happened in universities. So if you want to know who to address and where to go you need to target the youth at the universities. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

Palestine for us is not just a country on the political map. For us, Palestine is a history, identity, life texture, living, breathing; it is absolutely unique. You made me cry by remembering it. We no longer have relations with Palestinians. The Palestinian families that lived with us are scattered now. Some left and some immigrated. I always ask my father to tell me stories about it, because I can’t even find a book with these facts. I started to seek my soul and my history. I no longer know where I am. I was watching a TV show when my father was telling me how the Zionists invaded. I no longer connect with this feeling, I feel that I am in a different world. The Palestinian youth lost their way. I won’t tell you that they forgot their history but they made them forget it. I am searching very hard for something very difficult to find. I keep telling my friends that I am connected to things in an unusual manner, because I know that when you remove a plant from soil before it grows, it will forever remain wilted and it will never grow. They removed us from our land. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)
I was born and raised in Maysaloun in the countryside of Jenin. I obtained my education there, and I continued my studies in Ramallah. My husband is Palestinian from the same region and I have five kids. The most important thing for me is to implant patriotism in our kids, for they are the continuation of our being. Some day, we will be gone, and if the new generations don’t feel love for their country, Palestine, then we will never succeed in anything. Our children should be proud of their roots. They should be proud of their names when they go to school. They should say: I am a foreigner of Palestinian origin and this is my name. They shouldn’t be ashamed of their names or their traditions. The most important thing for us is to raise our children to love Palestine and Arab nationalism. We wish that some day the borders between Arab countries will be erased, and that we will be again one country and one world like in the old days. This is the basis for everything. Israel has been placed in the heart of the Arab world to disperse and dissolve it because it is the most potentially strong power in the world economically, religiously and socially. If we fail to teach our children to be patriots and to belong to the Arab world, we will never achieve anything and we will gradually vanish. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

I think I agree with everyone’s arguments and wish list I suppose, but I would like to raise a different point. As far as I’m concerned, the most pressing question at the moment is how to maintain the cultural identity of the Palestinian people because I truly believe that the Zionist movement is a footnote in history, nothing more, and once they get defeated we have to get back to our land and move on, so we really have to keep our heritage and our cultural identity as a nation and that is very important. One of the most vicious attacks on our nation is embodied in the division of Palestinians into different communities in different countries. I think the only linkage that we have with each other is that we are Palestinian and we share the same culture and its very important for your children to learn from the Palestinian heritage, from the food, to the music, dances, to Dabka. That’s what makes us a people, and we have been forced into this problem of the Zionists idea of colonizing all the land, and as I said earlier Zionist colonialism is really a footnote in history and after its over we need to pick up and move on, and I think the most important issue for us as Palestinian refugees is to maintain our cultural and heritage, our Palestinian identity. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

2. Youth Issues

a. Marginalization

As for educational events, there aren’t any educational or political seminars for the young men and women to make them understand their goals. We live in a situation where we are supposed to be more profoundly informed on the political and educational levels for our youth to have a direction. We lack such events, what we have is only meetings in which people talk about matters they don’t really understand. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

We lack activities for the youth to meet on social grounds. ( Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

In the past, they used to give us lessons, “Palestine is my home and the way of my victory.”! At present, they don’t teach them any more. When I was in the first grade, I knew that there is a Palestinian Intifada. But if you ask one of the students now: what is the capital of Palestine, he would not know! And if you ask him: where did you come from? He would say: I’m from Jordan. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Amman, Jordan)

As for the cultural clubs, we frankly don’t have a cultural club to take the young men and the school students when they need a place to turn to. We don’t even have a sport club. We hope to have cultural, social and sport clubs to foster our students in order to raise future generations. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Wavel camp, Lebanon)

How about organizations, are they doing their job in getting to your generation?

A lot of them, for example you know the Islamic Associations, they rarely talk about Palestine and when they do it, it’s a very sanitized version of what’s happening.

Do you think they should?

I mean I don’t know, it’s an educational issue, maybe it’s to protect their organization. I am saying that even those organizations that we have, the mosques, the Palestinian schools that we have, aren’t teaching kids about Palestine, aren’t creating a real connection. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

The main problem we suffer from is activating the committees. We can devise solutions if we activate the committees. For example, we now have a basic problem which is the foundations, but we have a foundation in youth, but they are totally marginalized now. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)
b. The Role of Parents

There are Palestinian committees which work on the Right of Return for example, but it is difficult for them to work on social issues. I remember that a while back, they tried to help children, who were facing problems, but parents didn’t accept that involvement, they took it as an insult. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Stockholm/Uppsala, Sweden)

I think that the generation of my parents and everybody else’s parents that are my age, you know, a lot of them had high expectations and hopes, but through time not a lot has changed at all, and what happened is that they went from trying to make it work over here to trying to make it work over here and provide for their families here. The great thing about my parents generation is that they provided financial support, they set up the foundation and the fundamentals for our generation, and you know whose job is it now? It’s my job and hers from now on, you know, and our parents remind us and keep us moving. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

Also the associations have their role and organization, if only they would let other people work in a way or within frameworks that they develop themselves, and if they would also depend on the new generation. This is a generation that has a vision and clear goals. The new generation has a bigger role in media; it knows the language and is able to communicate more because it has greater capabilities than the old generation. Yet we are neglecting this new generation. We, who sit here, are all parents; our children work better than we do. So we should benefit from the new generation and focus on it, for we are not granting the attention it deserves. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

As it was mentioned earlier, we are not going to make peace in one day. No of course not, that’s why people in the sixties came together to Sweden. My father was one of them, and they enjoyed a good life here, and they were working for Palestine so much really, and when they got old, the next generation despaired. This generation did not see anything happening and they got fed up and hopeless and lost their sense of activity. It seemed like no matter what one did, nothing would happen even in ten years time. That’s why they stopped caring and working. Maybe they didn’t stop caring, but they stopped working for the cause. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Stockholm/Uppsala, Sweden)

I think it’s very true that the families don’t want the kids to be involved in politics at all, but I think that’s just the fact of the history of politics that we have of how many people have been hurt or betrayed or their lives have been taken away because of their involvement with politics. I think that people are afraid of not just the outside but of the inside community as well because it has been a long hard road. I think we need to set up language classes which are not affiliated with anything political or religious, something that people can approach and they don’t feel afraid that their kids would immediately become involved in politics or religion. It’s just something nice and friendly and it’s cultural because a lot of people don’t want to lose their culture when they are here but they are afraid of all the baggage that comes along with the culture, and as people get involved with the culture that is up to them and that grows in their own consciousness whether they want to be involved in politics or not. This is especially the case with the youth, because a lot of the older people are jaded. (Participant, Public meeting, Toronto, Canada)

Socially, I don’t want my son to go now to free Palestine; I just want the youth to meet each other and know the reason why we are living here. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

I am also American born, and I think a lot of it has to do with parents also. When our parents came to this country, they accepted that they will be here for a long time, they accepted the fact that they are here to ‘assai masari iv arav/vehi’ [to make money and go home]. That was their bottom line. Unfortunately they died here, their kids had kids, and we assimilated into the population. We got into the political process — they forgot to teach their kids about Falastin. I have friends who only know, ‘Oh I am from Beitunia, or I am from al-Bireh, or I am from this or am from there, ask them anything about the Balad, ask them anything about Palestine, and they have no idea. All they know is I am from this and Falastin is on a map, and Israel is occupying us. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

I think we need to get involved, to continue activating processes and making connections. Sending your kids for example every year to Palestine. In our Jaliya [community], quite honestly, there isn’t much education about Palestine…. they don’t know anything about Palestine. They are sympathetic in a sort of tangential way, ‘oh I am Palestinian,’ ‘oh we are oppressed’, but they don’t really have a sense. There is no, you know, feeling of urgency, a deep down urgency, of going back to Palestine, or even fighting to go back to Palestine intellectually. I don’t think I really see that in our generation. I think that’s the biggest problem that we have. I don’t want to say that it’s the first generation; we always blame our parents’ generation for everything. They did what they can. I am just saying we are always saying oh it’s the
I want to tell you about a scene that I will never forget in my life. When we left Libya with a non-return visa, I was in my first grade. We stayed and slept in the airport for three days. Not a single hotel accepted to receive us. We weren’t able to leave the airport, because we are not allowed in or out! I was seven years old, and I guess that this was the turning point in my life. When I was studying in the university, I couldn’t afford to fail; I had to take my final exams even if I was sick. Indeed I got very sick in the final exams, yet I studied hard, because my father told me that if I failed to pass the exams I wouldn’t be able to continue. He couldn’t afford to pay 10 thousand pounds yearly. If I failed in any year, the scholarship would be lost. So you see, we have different motives for studying. Yes, we study to pass, but we know that if we failed we wouldn’t be able to continue. You are always a different case with a different vision. You can call it the third perspective in society, different from the perspectives of men and women; it’s the perspective of the stranger and it is a totally unique one which analyzes things from a totally different standpoint. (Participant, Meeting, Cairo, Egypt)

The issues which the lady talked about, that this generation can’t study, work, or integrate, and that it faces a cultural problem. The second generation came to integrate and to invigorate institutions which are able to loosen things up, and solve the problems the community faces, be they internal, or with the host country, or between the community and the PLO. Certainly this generation is mostly comprised of students, doctors or engineers, and I don’t want to say businessmen. The vast majority came to Germany in the past to study, and few of them came to Germany in the past to apply for political asylum, or just to work. Perhaps one would study and work, and the rest were Palestinian students who came from Kuwait and other Gulf countries to study and not to work.

So the main reason is the German government which did not allow me to integrate with the German society. This was in the past, but in the coming period we must work on this issue, otherwise the failure to integrate would be our fault and not the fault of others. That’s why mothers should correctly teach their children the German language. They must enter schools and learn and get high grades. They must learn how to use the computer: One shouldn’t just stay home saying to himself that I can’t do that. We must work and we must work hard. We must learn and work hard and build our institutions, and work on integrating the new generation in German society. They must join the parties to be able to defend the community’s interests first, then the interests of the Palestinian people. Without doing this, we will never be able to build an institution or serve the community’s interests. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany).

First I want to defend the rights of those who came and were asked to sit in the back. Those who came early should have sat at the table. These are the people who really want to defend their rights, and to talk about their problems. As a rights seeker and a person who has a case, I should have sat at the table to talk about the problems that concern us as refugees. I respect all the existing representatives but we are partners in development, work, thoughts, cause and suffering. It is not acceptable that any of us takes the role of the other. This is the point that I preferred to start with, and I wish that in future meetings the team will go to the unfortunate areas because they talk there about their problems in a more open manner. (Participant, Pilot meeting, Amman, Jordan)
The Next Generation

2. Youth Issues

d. Other Challenges

I don’t know if anyone knows about this but there is the Palestinian Media Watch, every time there is something negative getting pointed out they immediately send emails out, do this do that, call CNN, sometimes following this path is very successful. Unfortunately though, we don’t follow through, so the mechanisms are there but we are just not following them, the organizations are there we are just not following them, what I think needs to be done is open positions they need to target the youth especially that committee for Palestine like we said we need to set up something for the Midwest for all local activists and get them united to work together. There used to be workshops at the University of Michigan, there needs to be workshops all over; for some reason they die out. What we need to understand is that the older generation, the immigrants that came to this country; they are tired of working on Palestine, there are a lot of people that are … See unfortunately they are naturalised citizens, not born citizens, so the government is trying to deport them, you know like, Sami Al-Arian. I am sorry I recommend that the brothers who are not natural born citizens not work on el-Kadiyya el-Falastinia [the Palestinian Cause] because they will be targeted. You have the LA 8 case, ten years and they are still trying to deport them. It’s our generation, natural born Falastinia [Palestinians] in this country, who have to actually stand up and actually start doing things. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

d. Other Challenges

It’s not about social or political activity, we are registered as social institutions, but sadly, we don’t understand, in these institutions, what the requirements of work are in German society, therefore, we don’t know how to work in this society, or within this organization to serve our community and our people. Perhaps it is useful to have more than one Palestinian institution, but if we considered the proportion of existing skills, a lot of question marks can be posed. And we don’t accept to solve our problems peacefully or with good intentions. We live in a complex and tangled society which has many different institutions, and in which laws change constantly. I can’t behave according to a certain law that will later change without me knowing what happened, and to start advising people about a certain law which is no longer in effect. I accuse the institutions which work with our people. There are no clear lines delineating my responsibility to preserve my Palestinian identity from my need to be part of the German society which I live in along with my children. I could easily face, and expose my children, to contradictions with German society. The result of falling into these contradictions is evident in that there are so many young men and women who did not finish their studies. Sometimes, some would finish only the tenth grade and then head to streets, and their future is ruined. There are a lot of girls who go to the preparatory school which is far from where they live, so that they could do whatever they want, even if what they are doing is wrong. But Palestinian family life does not realize these girls’ needs; for girls find contradictions between the home and the society in which they live. All this is the result of the lack of clarity in the way these young men and women are approached. (Participant, Syndicate Meeting, Berlin, Germany)

We have many problems on what relates to this. The most important problem is that we are part of the society we live in, which is the Swedish society, but sadly, we sometimes seem to be worse than this society, especially on what relates to drugs. If there were statistics for the Palestinian students in the Swedish universities, I will not be very proud of the results. The number of those who are in Swedish jails exceeds the number of those who study in the universities, and I am not exaggerating you all know that. Of course, there are a lot of reasons for this but we are not trying to explain these reasons here. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)
3. Youth Empowerment

a. Community Involvement

It would be good if [Participant] had had the chance to speak a little more because he is a representative of those in and out that really embraces his Palestinian-ness. Many of us met his father 25 or 30 years ago, I think we have been involved in this work for enough years and we are excited because we see that there are so many young people who really have Palestine in their hearts. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

We can start with schools and universities, and people will participate when they see results. (Participant, Public meeting, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

By the way, I would like to remind you of something. When I was in Beirut and before I came to Greece twenty years ago, I wasn’t very adamant about my Palestinian-ness. But when I came to Greece, I joined the students union right away. We formed a band, and there were six young men who danced the Dabka, and we used to organize parties and sing about the war and so on. Greek students gave us tremendous support from the very beginning in 1984, and they used to attend our parties. We really felt that we were doing something very special. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Athens, Greece)

I think in our community we should think about starting a leadership contest for our youth; it is really important to build leaders within our community. I can’t stress the point enough because most of the activities done in Toronto are done on a voluntary basis and I think we should really attract the youth to give them the chance to become leaders in the future and we can do that in so many different ways. We could have a contest, a camp for a week, a boot camp, but we really need to reach the youth in our community, to get them involved because those are the people who will meet our cause in ten fifteen years. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

Especially considering that it is for children, I think it would be useful. As the sister here said the camps are really important. Back home we used to travel and perform certain activities and the result was wonderful; we remember it until now. They can show the children documentary films about Palestine every Saturday after the Arabic class. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

We should unite ourselves; we should form institutions and associations and federations to reinforce the belonging of the second generation and to connect it with the national identity. For example, we have a club for the community in this city, but this is the first time we ever enter it. If there were communication links and relations between us, I would have known everything about this city. Secondly, you should know something about me, my activities, my problems, and my needs as a member in the big Palestinian community. Unfortunately, we lack this kind of communication. That’s why we should form communication rings between us so that we can get to better know each other wherever we were in Denmark. (Participant, Public Meeting, Slagelse, Denmark)

My point is that we should be united as a Palestinian community in Denmark. We should have national Palestinian associations and institutions which can care for us and for the new generation and provide the national knowledge and culture to reinforce its belonging to the Palestinian people. The new generation must participate in all the national events. Political seminars should be held to explain the Palestinian matter to this new generation and the reason behind our refuge in this country. The new generation should work on this.

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I have an idea. I wish that we would adopt the scout-camp idea, whereby we would exchange experiences between us and the Palestinian children in Europe. When our children join such camps they will promote our cause in Europe through art as the sister here said. They can throw parties and hold seminars in the scout-camps; this is an entertaining and accessible way to reach the children. They can also benefit from the things that we have and that Israel prevents, like thyme and sage and show them these things and their benefits through these scout camps which would be arranged every year all over Europe. This is also a good idea. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Malmo, Sweden)

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to obtain its right and to return to Palestine, and to stop living in the countries of exile. We should also hold regular meetings with the new generation; this is essential. (Participant, Public Meeting, Slagelse, Denmark)

It is necessary to induce the next generation to develop a sense of belonging to the Palestinian identity, and to involve this generation in all the national events. It should be encouraged to learn the Arabic language and religion. The future will reveal what the sense of belonging will look like, and the extent of its strength or weakness. (Participant, Public Meeting, Slagelse, Denmark)

We should focus on the young men and women before we even think about how to free Palestine. We should raise the consciousness of the youth in Sweden by means of activities. We should identify the activities that attract Palestinian youth in Sweden and provide them. (Participant, Students' meeting, Stockholm/Uppsala, Sweden)

There is a noteworthy issue. Why don’t we form what is called the people’s army for youth? This is an organizing tool that would awaken a sense of responsibility in the student. Why don’t Palestinians know how to use weapons? Why did they cancel the obligatory service in the army? I frankly agree that the Palestinian should serve in the army so that he could learn how to use weapons, and he could also learn discipline, why was it cancelled? I mean the “flag” service and the people’s army in the schools for boys and girls. They used to learn how to use weapons in the summer; this taught them the meaning of discipline. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Amman, Jordan)

I think that children are neglected within our community. We don’t pay a lot of attention to our children, we don’t really involve them in our activities, we don’t talk to them in our events, we don’t do anything especially for them, and I think that those are the people that we need to pay attention to. I think we should have a camp for Palestinian children; it’s very important for Palestinian kids in Toronto and Canada to meet and play with each other. I think we should have more fun activities for children, because if we connect children from a young age, they would know what a Palestinian community means. That is one idea on how to be connected in our community and how to extend a hand to the next generation of Palestinians who are going to be Canadians. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada).

Concerning our most pressing needs as a refugee Palestinian community in Norway, there are many priorities. But the most important of these is to be united and feel with each other; and to visit each other in the national and Norwegian occasions. Why not hold a meeting every month for the community members? The adults can meet in one month; the next can be for women, and then the children. In other words, to implant the idea of not renouncing our Right of Return in the new generation and the youth. (Participant, Public meeting, Stavanger, Norway)

I suggest something in the interest of the social, to preserve Palestinian nationalism and Palestinian identity, and the close relations between families who live here by encouraging the marriage between Palestinians and within the Palestinian families. This should strengthen the relations instead of looking for a Swedish girl. In this society, most marriages are not successful—although I have a successful marriage—so it would be great if some committee focuses its attention on interaction between families. This is a more practical suggestion. (Participant, Public meeting, Stockholm, Sweden)

One of the things we need to change is our method of education. Unfortunately, year after year, Israeli groups take students; they provide them with room and board, set them up and take them on trips. They tell the students: “this is our country; this is what you need to do.” Take Palestinians to ard falastinia [Palestinian land] and they wouldn’t agree on two things. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

How can we attract the new generation?
We have to go up to them. (Participant, Public meeting, Chicago, Illinois, United States)

We demand the senior officials to form a community to speak in our name, and to teach our children our heritage, and the history of our cause so that they wouldn’t forget Palestine. Also, women must teach their children to love Palestine. Our children must also learn Arabic, our native language. (Participant, Public meeting, Vlaardingen, Netherlands)

We should prepare the children on the basis of having established principles for them to follow.

Our generation passed its time
This is important and we lived through it in the past. I remember when we went to the camps in Syria in the 1970s where they used to prepare the youth through continuous courses, and I was one of those charged with political guidance for these youth and children. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)
A leadership project needs to happen in the near future and it should suit the needs of our community, especially the youth between eleven and sixteen and that's what I am interested in. I would be willing to finance it and its doesn't matter if it takes four months, six months, a year; for us to get to ten or fifteen youth and make leaders for the future, I would be willing to finance that. (Participant, Public Meeting, Toronto, Canada)

b. Education

We should be educating the Palestinians who want to know but do not know enough about their identity and history. (Participant, Students’ meeting, Sydney, Australia)

Frankly, there wasn’t enough communication between us, how should I say this, we weren’t an independent association, we were affiliated with the Palestinian Association, and when we came, there were a lot of suggestions and activities, but they required raising the level of awareness. When we spoke, for instance, about the issue of giving lessons about the history of Palestine, it was towards the aim of learning and knowing before we get down to business, and in order to able to convey the picture. (Participant, Public meeting, Uppsala, Sweden)

When we used to memorize the poem of “Palestine is my home...” the child would ask his mother what does the word Palestine mean? He must draw Palestine’s map, and know every city of it! At present, such a trend does not exist. In the past there were many festivals to support Palestine and the Intifada, and I participated in some of them, we were very excited and filled with enthusiasm, and we used to listen to the news. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Amman, Jordan)

I visualise half of the project to be the centre, which should be big. The child would be enrolled early on in the community school, learning the Quran, the Arabic Language, his history, and where he came from. (Participant, Public Meeting, Sondenborg, Denmark)

Language courses are essential, I took Arabic courses when I was a little kid, at a Muslim school.

As this brother said earlier, we lack a strategy. First, the community has been living in Britain for so long; yet there isn’t any Arabic school for the children of the Palestinian community. This is the most important thing, because it connects the children to the cause, and children can figure out the correlation of all these issues when they have such a school in an accessible place that the majority in this area can get to. We must consider opening a school for the kids, like any community would. (Participant, Public meeting, London, United Kingdom)

And what about teaching Arabic in Denmark? Isn’t teaching Arabic a necessity that would enable our children to understand our traditions, customs, and religion, so that, if a child ever goes back to their country, or to one of the Arab countries they wouldn’t be illiterate in their own mother tongue? Even if they studied medicine, and worked as a doctor in Denmark, they would not be able to work in the Arab countries. What have you done to the municipalities that forbade teaching Arabic language? Isn’t it our right to learn our Arabic language? Isn’t that a right? Who among you defended it? The municipality abolished it despite the fact that it is sanctioned by Parliament. The law says that “if 12 pupils are interested in learning their mother tongue, the municipality must enable them to learn it.” The law was however changed as follows: it replaced the compulsory language with ‘may’ (or can), this means that the municipality may agree or refuse. But the municipality takes the effectiveness of the community in the city into account. If the community is effective and strong, the municipality will be careful not to abolish.
teaching of Arabic. Since the municipality had already abolished teaching Arabic, this means that the community is not respected, and that it is inactive and ineffective in the city, in addition to not having a representative body for the community in the city, to follow up on the issue of teaching Arabic. This is just to bring up one example. (Participant, Public Meeting, Hillerød, Denmark)

We must go back to schools, and start asking questions concerned with receiving suggestions from the female students; and ask them what do they want and prefer as refugees? We should establish suggestion guidelines, and develop this idea. We can first begin with the female students. Perhaps they don’t have a high degree of awareness, but we can ask them to seek help from their parents at first, and those of them who have suggestions can place them in the box. These boxes should be gathered somewhere. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Amman, Jordan)

We can, at first, start by organizing seminars for the female students, and ask them to offer some suggestions in a later stage. (Participant, Women’s meeting, Amman, Jordan)

Teaching our mother language is something that we lack. (Participant, Public Meeting, Helsingor, Denmark)

I am going to try to organise my thoughts regarding what is being said. I think that identity is a construction; it is something that is being constructed, and is not something that comes simply from a last name or comes from the genes. The truth is that someone born without knowing that they are 100% of Arab origin could be born in China and if he doesn’t look in the mirror he would not realise he is not Chinese. I think that it is something that is constructed but we must be careful in how we approach the identity we construct as well. I say this because I have seen the experience of some Syrian youths and some Lebanese young people. Of course, the construction of the Palestinian identity has different components to those who are rightly the children of exile, the young ones particularly, and this has to do with the historical juncture and the human tragedy experienced by our people, so I think that we must take that which is a historical fact, which is real, to form in that way an identity. We must search for a balance, in the sense that it is not only the preservation of traditions that generates an identity. Of course, you may not know how to dance Dabka or even speak the language, although I think that these things are fundamentally important aspects of identity, but if this is how we construct a relationship with Palestinians I think that it is vital to have the Arab school because it matters within the Chilean society and the Arab world in general. I must say that when Abu Mazen was in Chile it was in this school, his emotions reached the level of tears by feeling Palestine here in my school. The young people feel so tied to the Arab world and to the Palestinian cause as many have Arab origins on both sides. Then the issue is that we must be responsible with the identity we construct as well, as we have had to struggle as a school with the caricatures of Palestinians or the Arab: those stereotypes of spending, womanising, acting pompously, and gambling. There were a series of things that the students have had to understand that [being Palestinian or Arab is not that], and furthermore we are not interested in constructing an identity alienated from the national reality and I think that that is a task that many more schools must work towards. How can we connect our young people more with the Chilean national reality, because ultimately that’s what we are? The adults, without a doubt, when voting time comes we are more or less clear on what we are going to do with our vote, who we are going to give it to or if we are leaving it blank or if we are going to nullify it because we have a clear national responsibility. Without a doubt if we are here in this meeting, it is because we have a clear link with our Palestinian identity so the issue is in how we transmit that, I think, and stand up for the school. Today those who form a vital part of the board of directors or youth movements that are linked to the community, they have all been born or formed as part of the school or are linked to students who graduated from this school. A school that has a capacity for 600 students, but only has 260 students means that there are many other factors without a doubt. If we compare what the school is capable of offering with what other schools offer many opt for another school because of the social networks it generates. The other schools though alienate our values and our culture so I think the issue is also how to strengthen us in our institutions. The concern for our identity has to go through
the strengthening of our institutions and one of the ways to this end is, to reiterate [participant]'s brilliant point, on the need for generating spaces for debate. This is beneficial for us and of course understanding that the historic vision and respect for roots are a construct of the future and not an alienation of the past. (Participant, Public meeting, Santiago, Chile)

Why don’t we have a Palestinian university on the internet?
There is the Al-Quds Open University in Riyadh and it opened also in Jeddah and we demanded to have one in Dammam and they agreed on that. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)

Take the children for example. When you ask one of them where did he come from, he would answer you: from Doha, and another would say from Jeddah or Kuwait. We can gradually inform these children under ten years old about their origins. We can first tell them that their fathers came from a certain village in Palestine and show them these villages and cities on the map so that when you ask them where are they from they would answer from al-Murra or al-Dir villages. (Participant, Youth meeting, Dammam, Saudi Arabia)
Part II: Further Findings

I) Palestine Meetings

The key to belonging is participation

(Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)
We are the base; the people are the base, and all the Palestinian people agree that their only representative is the PLO, and we say that there is a problem with our only legislative representative while we watch. No, the problem lies in us, and enough with wooing the PLO, for we are the base.

We can create the PLO; the solution is in our hands. (Participants, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)

I. Organizing Structures

I think that everyone agrees that the PLO is our only reference point, and that we, at the same time, are the only reference point for the PLO. This is the most important thing which cannot be achieved without having communication channels between us and the PLO. (Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)

I don’t wish to discuss the details, but I think that the structures, especially within the Palestinian refugee communities, have a constructive fault, as well as an ambiguous vision. This could be due to reasons related to these structures and those who constructed them. Certain circumstances disabled them at the Palestinian political level by the political parties or the Palestinian leaderships here, or the PLO itself, because preparing for a peaceful stage required destroying previous structures. It also required destroying some political locales and undermining other locations that were progressing Palestinian reality and the Palestinian voice all over the world. I think we should be self-critical of how make use of these old structures, and the existing ones that emerged in the 1990s, which are the services committees. And as [participant] said, this issue has a great importance. The services committees, in their function and purpose, had a developmental role in strengthening the refugee community that became larger than their relief role for various reasons. This role should be re-examined through an open relationship with all the services committees and the refugee schools, and whether they still desire to assume only a developmental role or not? (Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)

In fact, we are loyal to the PLO, refugees or not, and we don’t have any other choice. The basic issue is that I don’t see, as a refugee, any possible achievements from what is left of the PLO, or from reconstructing it again and restoring its essential strength. Of course, there are a lot of projects, such as the Palestinian Authority project which took over the PLO, in one way or another, and was able to embrace the refugee issue, through the Refugee Department, and to create an alternative to the PLO. The Refugee Department and all the activities it performs undermine the PLO which didn’t have any reaction towards the Refugee Department. So the Refugee Department totally controlled the activities of the popular committees in order to perform services. This affected Palestinian dialogue which went beyond discussing the Right of Return and began supporting some figures, and they all moved away from the notions of the PLO and the Right of Return. There wasn’t any convincing reaction from PLO to stop this march that aims to undermine it. Thus I say that a universal satellite channel must be created with the banner of the Right of Return. What I mean by a satellite channel is that it should highlight this issue, just as we do in our simple modest bulletins. Also the PLO’s offices all over the world should be rebuilt and renewed, and not rely on the Palestinian embassy and the diplomatic representatives who have caused the failure of our cause, and are considered bad lawyers for a fair case. I have pointed to the painful hindering situation which the PLO suffers from, so it should be rehabilitated or repaired. (Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)

The refugee problem has three dimensions: a national dimension, an Arab dimension and an international dimension. We can cancel this equation. Our pressing national cause is that the PLO is our only representative, and this is something we should be proud of, regardless of those who are in it. This is a problem we have. In Palestine, there is a confusion of the PLO and the Palestinian Authority. The national Authority is taking over the PLO, and it is well known that the national Authority is responsible for only a limited geographical area, and some refugee camps. This political problem should be solved by making the role of the national Authority a part of the PLO and one of its arms or institutions, not making it the PLO. (Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)

Perhaps we accidentally commented on the structure of the PLO itself which we are attached to it despite the decline of its performance. There are many things which were imposed on us under the Oslo agreement and by the Palestinian Authority, and which in addition, weakened the role of the PLO. Of course when we talk about reconstructing or renewing it, or whatever the expression is, we also mean all the organizations of the PLO. (Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)
I don’t know, but I see this vision as pessimistic, and I think optimism comes from serious revolutionary work on the ground towards renewing the structures of the PLO. (Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)

I want to again emphasize many points which he highlighted in order to draw recommendations. The first thing I would wonder about and ask you is: do our Palestinian people need a mediator between them and the PLO as a legitimate leadership and the only representative for our Palestinian people, and which have a presence all over the world? We have 120 embassies and an office of the PLO all over the world, and they exist regardless whether they are effective or not. Therefore, they are the communication link between any community, in any place, and our Palestinian people. Another thing, I say that the Right of Return is a right, and this right is legal and legitimate according to all international laws. As for the rest of the rights, whether of compensation or settlement, they are subsequent issues. The content of the basic right is clear and unambiguous; I do not think that any Palestinian would accept any project that would compromise this right. (Participant, Meeting, Gaza, Palestine)

I go back to the list of recommendations as a starting point. First, the Civitas project emphasizes the Right of Return to the 48 territories, not to the territories of the Palestinian National Authority as a Palestinian State. It also emphasizes that the PLO is the sole legitimate representative and decision-making authority. It is true that there is something wrong in the PLO and its activities and departments, therefore we demand to reactivate it. I am addressing here those who assume the responsibility in the PLO. Reactivating it means re-electing its entities, whether the National Council or the executive committee or the like. We demand that the PLO be corrected and reformed, and there is no alternative to that, because eventually it will include all the different factions across the Palestinian spectrum. Communicating with the PLO as an organization means that those who are responsible for it should directly contact the PLO and the representatives of the Palestinian people inside and outside. Therefore any Palestinian assembly that takes exception to this process is effectively giving away the Cause entirely. (Participant, Meeting, Gaza, Palestine)

Brothers, there have been a lot of projects that failed because the Palestinian people insisted on resistance. The Aqsa Intifada returned the Palestinian Cause to its roots, with the resistance and the martyrdom operations and everything that had happened during this Intifada. The Palestinian political structure is far from representing the existing power in this nation and the refugees. The Palestinian political structure considers process of compromise a strategic option. The strategic option for the Palestinian people is Palestinian rights, especially their right of resistance. As for the international community and Resolution 194, the Palestinian people have been waiting to implement it for 57 years, but in vain. After being deserted by the international community, the Palestinian people took their decision and resolved to get their rights by themselves through Al-Aqsa Intifada. The hard work our brave nation exhibited resulted in this withdrawal in Gaza. Therefore what is needed from the political leadership, represented by the PLO, is to be on par with the ambition and strength of this nation, and to have the same vivacity by continuing to restructure the PLO on good foundations in order to become the representative of all the Palestinian strength without being confined to any faction, category, or party. (Participant, Meeting, Gaza, Palestine)

We need to strengthen the embassies, and the communication link between Palestinians and the embassies, by reinforcing and completely restructuring the embassies in order for it to have a strong role for the Palestinian community. And as [participant] said, there should be Right of Return committees and institutions for the Palestinian refugees in every area they exist through this project. (Participant, Meeting, Gaza, Palestine)

Now that we are about to hold a new Arab conference, maybe a week from now, we wish that a telegram from the refugees would be sent to it, emphasizing the Right of Return to the ‘48 territories, not the ‘67 territories, because they are focusing on the people from ‘67 territories, the West Bank and Gaza, while forgetting those from 48 territories. I was born before 48 and I insist upon the Right of Return to my house in Damra, and we all insist upon this right, and this is a basic demand. There is another thing. As a refugee, I refuse that anyone would speak in my name without adhering to my terms, which are the Resolution 194. No one should negotiate in our name save with coordination with the PLO, which is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. We also refuse to reach any agreement, even with the delegation negotiating with the PLO, whether outside or inside, without first taking some necessary steps. Thank you. (Participant, Meeting, Gaza, Palestine)

We must return to the idea of serious work in order to build the PLO on foundations that are responsive to changing circumstances. It should be rebuilt and activated to become an
1. Organizing Structures

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actual higher entity representing the people. We felt optimistic when Abu Mazen talked about rebuilding the PLO, but the PLO now is much worse than it was in Abu Ammar’s days. (Participant, Meeting, Nablus, Palestine)

Restructuring the education system and reviving the federations that could achieve communication like popular unions, labour unions, women’s unions, student unions, etc; these unions are very old and are no longer good or able to communicate. The last point I want to say is that we should be aware of not letting changing social concerns affect the discussion of national political concerns, particularly the Right of Return. (Participant, Meeting, Nablus, Palestine)

We are talking a lot about the PLO, and we are hold on to it because it is, for us, a political frame and a frame for the refugees. The PLO became very important for all the Palestinians after the absence of the Authority. It is useful for us, even in Lebanon, Syria and the occupied lands. The political factions here, the national movement, the refugees departments and UNRWA are our framework to provide the facilities we need. (Participant, Meeting, Nablus, Palestine)

Although we have a lot of structures, and populist structures that are being formed inside and outside to connect the political movement, they are all trying to find a connecting link with each other to fill the political gap because of the weakness of the PLO. Yet they all have the PLO and its refugees department as their authoritative reference. Here also, questions and problems are raised. (Participant, Meeting, Nablus, Palestine)

We don’t want new institutions or structures, because we already have ones, whether in the refugee camps, or in the Palestinian cities. As a national movement, we should activate these structures to enable them to effectively play their role in the PLO. (Participant, Meeting, Nablus, Palestine)

These structures, or this project, can be correctly implemented. The camps live in miserable situations, whether in Lebanon or other countries, and also the Palestinian refugees in Europe, America, etc, but no one knows this land better than its owners. We think that the Palestinians in the camps and everywhere should improve their cultural, social, economic and political conditions. This requires our help, as Palestinian youth, to soundly arrange our situation within the frames of the PLO to be able to achieve something. (Participant, Meeting, Nablus, Palestine)

The second issue is the oneness of representation for the Palestinian people in the PLO. (Participant, Meeting, Nablus, Palestine)

Supposing that there are structures to be imposed, it will certainly be local structures maintained by hard work rather than by education and exchanging letters. There are also suggestions related to establishing research centres about refugees on a global level, in order to discuss their issues which include granting the question of citizenship, and the establishment of centres or civil institutions. (Participant, Meeting, Nablus, Palestine)

If we had an effective system in the PLO to communicate with the refugees in Al-Shatat, and if we had honest representation for solving the refugee problem, we wouldn’t have any suspicions or doubts, because we would have a strong barrier that would prevent anyone from manipulate the refugee issue. (Participant, Meeting, Nablus, Palestine)

Succinctly said, we, the Palestinians, all recognize the PLO, but what is needed is to rebuild it, and also to have real representatives for the Palestinian communities abroad, I mean the Palestinian refugees, within the Palestinian National Council. What is needed is to re-elect and build its basic structure within the PLO with the rest of the popular European federations abroad. We don’t need to create new structures. Thank you. (Participant, Meeting, Nablus, Palestine)

I want to talk about the PLO. After Oslo agreement, the PLO entered into a coma, and we all know this. As for the structures, we need to activate the PLO and the Palestinian structures in Al-Shatat and Palestine in every way possible. These structures have been in this country since the 1980s, and we are now in 2005. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

What I know is that the Refugee Affairs Department is supposed to be an executive body focused on the refugees wherever they are, am I right? Yes.

If I wanted to speak in my own words, I would tell you that the refugee committees, the Legislative Council and the National Council should work together. There are other branch committees. Nabil Shaath has a Refugee Affairs committee in the Ministry of Planning. The Governor of Ramallah has a Refugees Department in the district, and so on.

We wish that you would include your suggestion on the executive and legislative levels in one suggestion. This way we will move to a more practical level. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)
So, as for how to unite these committees at the legislative and executive, be it at the official or popular level, we mean that there are some active people who try to form committees and federations between them. At the official level, there should be a meeting at the level of the Refugee Affairs Department to include the refugee committee in the Legislative Council, as well as in the National Council, in the ministries, districts, and the camp affairs committees, and the President's advisors for camp and refugee affairs. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

Like he said, the capability of the PLO is diminishing. It needs rebuilding on sound foundations, first through democratic elections in order to prepare its goals for a national council, a central council, and an executive committee with all its institutions, including and particularly the Refugees Affairs Department. The Refugees Affairs Department has long suffered from problems with so many members of the executive committee. The Refugees Affairs Department would not be official if it is not formed within the PLO in the right way because if he chaired the Refugees Affairs Department any member of the executive committee would be directed towards the Abu Mazen position, and not the refugee position, creating confusion. As for the refugees in Al-Shatat and Palestine, a single conference should be held for those in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq attended by representatives. One conference should be held in the neighbouring counties and one in Al-Shatat countries. In order for the project to handle holding two conferences both abroad and in Palestine, part of the organizing committee should be inside and the other part outside, and so create pressure from people with the aim of activating the PLO. And if the PLO is established on a democratic basis, the president of the Refugee Affairs Department should be the president of this committee to enable him to assume his responsibility for the refugees in appropriately. We have neglected and shelved internationally-legitimate resolutions that haven’t been used for decades. The chair of this committee and portfolio should assume his responsibility before the committee to be able to defend Resolution 194, which is the core of the Israeli-Arab conflict, and which guarantees the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their country and properties. There will be no compensation for those who don’t want to return, but only for those who return after leaving their money and lands for a long time; hence they should receive compensation for their properties that were stolen by the Israelis. Only by doing this the refugees can improve their situation. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

The PLO was established with the aim of defending the Right of Return. The main goal of the PLO was to discuss the right to return to Palestine. We have deviated from the PLO and its goals concerning the refugees and the Right of Return. The PLO is ‘the right of return organization’ with all its institutions, disagreeing with that means disagreeing with the PLO. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

I want to talk about activating the PLO. I think this depends on us, the refugees, and how is that? We have a lot of institutions in the West Bank and Gaza which are not appropriately fulfilling their responsibilities for refugees. From what I see, the institutions that are dealing with the refugees inside Palestine have no consensus about what we really want. Another point is how, as institutions, can we work to put Resolution 194 on the map and to activate it so that it can be placed under the refugee banner? The institutions for refugees don’t just need to meet, but to agree on single banner saying what we want from the right of return, and where would the return journey start? Would it be to historical Palestine or a return to the Authority? Another thing the refugee institutions always deal with the Right of Return resolution as a slogan, and yet they go behind schemes [that might not support it]. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

We are now working towards activating existing committees. What is needed is to activate the friendly committees in the European Union, and to hold a national conference. Of course, we are preparing to hold popular conferences inside the occupied land. This conference should be held abroad would be one national conference that includes all the representative committees in Al-Shatat countries, to which the official would be invited, avoiding the public. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

I have a problem with the PLO that I want to summarize as follows: As a refugee in the occupied land, I want the political discourse addressed to the Palestinian people to separate the Authority and the PLO. What they are doing is integrating not separating. Sometimes they say that the council of ministers and the council of the Palestinian leadership held a meeting. We want to separate and distinguish between things, because the Authority is supposed to be one of the projects of the PLO, yet the opposite is happening the National Authority runs the PLO. This is even very obvious at the level of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This is really a problem. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)
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I think the separation should not only be in the speech, but basically in the presidency. I can’t really understand how the Chairman of the PLO can be the President of the Palestinian National Authority. Some changes should be enforced concerning the methodology of choosing the president, not least because the PLO abandoned the armed struggle, although some say that it never did. What is the highest authority of the Palestinian people? The Palestinian National Council. We should conduct free democratic elections to be able to activate the institutions of the PLO. The first thing we should do is to define the standards for the Palestinian National Council. I know that this is something that depends more on tribalism than any other standards, and also on the political attitudes of the national powers, etc. but it is really important that the Palestinian National Council reforms and chooses its members appropriately. Then, the Palestinian National Council can define other issues. It has many programs and I don’t want to talk about that. [A participant] said that the PLO distributes responsibilities; in the end it is responsible for holding the consensus of the existing members. I am now thinking as a Palestinian citizen. The issue is huge. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

We have a bug opportunity to achieve this [unity] through the continuous communication between us and the outside, not through the internet or meetings, but at the level of representation, meaning the core and not at different levels. We should return to our foundations. As popular committees, there should be a true representative for them with a functional description, like the youth centres and the centres for the disabled, etc. All these formations emerge from political powers and civic organizations or factions. We should return to the principles of forming groups, so that meeting can have an actual role and no one can be suspicious of it. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

Finally, we always work so hard on a certain issue without defining summarized points. I think that discussing the issue of reforming and activating the PLO and changing its leaders is not the one we should discuss now. We should rather clarify our basic attitude including fixing our relations with each other, and the way through which we can create elected and legitimate leaders. And as [participant] suggested, this can be achieved through convening three or four conferences to create a united leadership for all the refugees in all the regions. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

All the communities abroad consider us to be the foundation, so we should start reform from here, from Palestine.

They are totally deceived.
Let me be honest, on the one hand there is this, on the other there is the PLO. Any public activity that has nothing to do with the PLO is considered suspect. “Are they PLO patriots or not?” If not, people wonder what their story is, who is sponsoring them. We have to take this into consideration. Despite this, the PLO is the sole legitimate representative, and through it we can still do something. And here I say that in order to start properly, it must work together, and then it can unite people inside and outside, and in the future, hopefully we will have a PLO, and the people will gather in support of an executive committee. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

2. Connecting between Exile Communities

a. Mechanisms of Connecting
I want to get back to the issue of reinforcing the relationships between the different categories of the Palestinian people, especially the refugees, wherever they live. How can this kind of relationship be established, and how can we get these people to participate in the decision making process? There should be structures or a certain mechanism for the Palestinians in Al-Shatat to participate in decisions at all levels. Some of the PLO’s structures in the National Council can be reinforced, and maybe people can participate in elections for the Legislative Council through one mechanism or other. The second point I want to mention about Palestinian representation in the countries they live in. This is a very important issue, especially for the younger generation. Many people whose children are abroad won’t have strong bonds unless there is some form of awareness and emotional and financial connection in Palestine. Now we can recommend practical suggestions, since we have now good communication tools. We can take advantage of the internet, youth centres, and the institutions which possess computer rooms. The computers can be used based on an agreed upon schedule, say two hours weekly, to enable any group of Palestinians in any given country to exchange ideas [with Palestinians inside]. They can be categorized into groups of a certain age, or interest, and that requires lists of these institutions inside and outside and their addresses, and also coordination to hold meetings in which, [for example] every child can tell a story to another child in the same age group. This would be very affecting. We can also open lines [of communication] between

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the students; between, say, a Palestinian student who studies in Bethlehem University and another student studying in another university, studying perhaps the same specialization, or between groups at the same academic level. These things are possible nowadays and the refugee institutions themselves can help. These are practical suggestions I can think of for participation and communication amongst people inside and outside. (Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)

Concerning the practical suggestions I have, I think it is very important to produce, as many as possible, documentary films that define the Palestinian wherever he is around the world in a detailed and explicit way. I also suggest distributing these documentary films all over the world, in order to be evaluated and watched in the aim of exchanging knowledge in this area. There are also bulletins and periodicals. Supposing that a bulletin is issued in Denmark, we suggest including an article written by a Palestinian living in America, and another living in Lebanon or Jordan, so that people can know how much their nation is dispersed. Adding expressive pictures to the brochure helps a lot too. I am only adding to the comment mentioned by [participant]. There is also the idea of video conferencing between two or three countries. (Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)

I agree with the brothers who talked about the mechanisms that help in communicating with the outside, and the important role played by the internet in the legislative elections, just like what we saw on the television during the Iraqi war, and how important it was for the Iraqi refugees abroad to participate in the elections. This, on the political level, makes the refugee feel that he is an inseparable part of his homeland and his Palestinian nation. (Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)

The key to belonging is participation. And in order for every citizen to feel that he really belongs, he should feel that he is part or has a part in the decision-making in his country. The discussion always concentrates on the necessity for every Palestinian abroad to know what we are doing here, but I think that if we really want the Palestinians abroad to belong to their country and to work in the interest of their cause, they should feel that they are part of the decision making mechanism at the simplest level. I am not talking about political decisions, but the simplest level of decisions, like the (local) institutions or activities. And since we are talking today about the younger generation, we must say that it is an active part of the Palestinian people abroad, and that is what we want. If we want to cooperate with the youth, the communication between the refugees inside and outside should be achieved through the internet. If I want, for example, to talk with a Palestinian refugee community in Denmark, I should know its address, and this is a very simple thing. At present, the Arab world cannot gather all the Palestinian people. We can create a website with the name “the Electronic Homeland” - excuse the expression - and everyone can enter it. And before we talk about the communication tools with the PLO, we should first establish communication between ourselves. The problem is not in the communication channels with the PLO, it is with the PLO itself. So, I think that the simplest way is to create communication channels with each other. The PLO reflects us, and the situation we live is reflected in the PLO. Our problem as a nation is that we're impatient and reactionary! We wait for a massacre to happen in order to demonstrate.

I agree with the suggestion of having a Satellite [channel] or centres for the refugees in Al-Shatat and in Palestine, with the aim of serving a particular goal and a defined vision. They may, in addition, have other roles, such as launching a serious documentary process to record the social development and ethno history of the refugees, and to begin the developmental process in the aim of building trust and refugee identity, because the refugees are very scattered and mentally-distracted.

Civitas can play a role in encouraging some refugees groups from all over the world to come to Palestine so that we can have a dialogue. And in the future, if any institutions outside wish to participate and to visit institutions in the Arab world like Lebanon or Jordan, there would be
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2. Connecting between Exile Communities
   a. Mechanisms of Connecting

I want to talk about a very simple issue, which is the creation of a satellite channel. I would like here to point to the modern technologies which were discovered by the modern world, and can be used. It is really a simple program; we try to make use of the media or technology to connect Palestinians in Al-Shatat with those living in Palestine. The chatting on the internet and the newspapers, in addition to the summer camps, became relatively traditional. There is another thing; there is satellite broadcasting between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv with which to talk about the refugee issue. There is also a ‘satellite signal’ which can be sent from Germany. So it isn’t a costly thing, on the contrary, it is keeping pace with progress to achieve communication between the inside and the outside. (Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)

I am principally talking about communication between the Palestinian groups while thinking that there isn’t anyone, whether here or in Al-Shatat, who disagrees with this idea. At the same time, we don’t want to talk from an individual point of view, or to categorize groups to one for volunteers and one for supporter. If we want to handle this issue within a broader framework, we must know that there is a huge mechanism that should adopt the project and only be entrusted with connecting the refugees in Al-Shatat with the home country. Second, there are several cultural differences between the Palestinians in Al-Shatat and the Palestinians in Palestine. From my experience and communicating with Palestinians abroad, I can say that there are stereotypes that form the whole relationship. And in order to jointly handle the issue, there should be a mechanism that exactly defines the communication process. The second and more important aspect is that the cultural issue and the question of the differences between the Palestinian societies, whether inside, or the 48 territories, or in the western countries should be taken into consideration. The third issue is the huge restrictions in Al-Shatat countries on the Palestinian refugees in general, be they identity cards or travel restrictions, etc. Can they come here? Can 50 people come to Palestine? This is a fundamental question, acknowledging known Israeli politics. In fact, there is another question here; what is our role, as Palestinians inside, and what can we do for the Palestinians abroad? (Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)

We always blame the world for the missing communication between us and the Palestinians in Palestine and Al-Shatat, including the refugees. No one thought of blaming the Palestinians for fighting with each other. I have a simple question: how many guys do you know from Am’ari, Balata, Bir Zeit, or Dheisheh camps? Do the refugees in Al-Am’ari camp know those in Balata camp? I don’t think so. The project was a successful cross-border one, but unfortunately we think that the camps don’t need such a project. Why wouldn’t we achieve such a project here since this communication is important? Isn’t it possible that this project would achieve the communication between the inside and outside camps? (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

We also want this project to include database committees, and a communication network between the gatherings and camps of the refugees so that we can get to know each other. We should all admit that we have failed,
as refugees, to create such a network between the refugees; between the rich refugees, the scientist refugee, and the refugees who possess all kinds of skills. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

We also want to find some kind of dual cooperation [twinning], or let’s say brotherhood, between Al-Rashidieh, El-Buss, Ein el-Hilweh, Baqa’a, Al-Am’ari camps and the Palestinian camps all over the world. We should focus on brotherhood. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

Second, I think that the PLO is still the credible institution. But the problem lies in its structure and shape, although it is still the representative under this leadership. Therefore, what is needed is to change the PLO’s structure to become a more appropriate representative. The important thing I am thinking about is how to communicate with the refugees in the immigrant countries. I believe this could be achieved by making them assume this project which should supposed hold a conference for the refugees in the immigrant countries and in Al-Shatat, and also in Gaza and the West Bank. I suggest holding conferences in the immigration countries where the biggest Palestinian communities live, like Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq, then conferences can be held in Al-Shatat, America and Europe, in addition to holding conferences in the West Bank and Gaza. These conferences should be included in one joint conference for the refugees. This can lead to activating the PLO and the Department of Refugee Affairs due to popular representation, and that’s what we want. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

b. Solidarity
I wanted to talk about several programs for Palestinian-Palestinian communication, but there is an important issue which is the Palestinian national voluntary work, whether here or abroad. There should be Palestinian volunteers in these institutions, for this is a very important thing if voluntary national work to be developed. I also suggest asking the western and socialist countries to place a small milestone in one of their streets about a certain Palestinian village, and it would be good if all the streets in the world place a milestone referring to the Palestinian refugee issue. This is a simple inexpensive suggestion unlike the satellite channels which cost millions. It would also be good if Palestinian products could bear names of projects dealing with the refugee affairs, in order to introduce the work of these projects to the people. (Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)

The point mentioned by [participant] is a very essential point. As an educational project, we talked about the importance of having a museum that is devoted to the Palestinian catastrophe. I think that this is a very important project that can teach the Palestinians what happened in 1948, and the Palestinian communities abroad can benefit from the catastrophe museum in order to teach the Palestinian communities abroad and western societies. (Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)

3. Palestinian Refugees and Right of Return
Briefly, the dangers threatening the Right of Return, I think, are not from the outside. The predicament took place: the Palestinian people are scattered outside their country while living in unusual conditions without even an identity. This has already happened. The crime is done, and of course, fingers are basically pointing to Britain and America, in addition to the international community and Israel and all the parties who contributed to it. Now that the crime is done, we, the Palestinian refugees, still face a problem. The refugees, through their dialogues with this project, have stressed on their right to return to Palestine. They also emphasized, through their political awareness, their loyalty to the political framework which represents them, indicating the degree of awareness they have, which I think is even bigger than this political framework. The political structure discouraged people but the refugees have higher spirits than it. To give an example of recent events, there are the letters sent by the President Mahmud Abbas to reassure Israeli and international societies. This implicitly means that Arabs should settle the Palestinians. It is also a way of reassuring Sharon that there would not be any refugees to bring back. These letters are like a poisoned sword into the heart of the Right of Return. Abu Mazen doesn’t like to mention the Right of Return as a legitimate right for the Palestinians. We, as activists in the refugee cause, should make him do that. (Participant, Meeting, Gaza, Palestine)
There are two prominent issues here: The political issue and issues related to the refugees’ interests and social and civil rights. On the political side, there are dangers facing the refugee issue that should be confronted, like the ‘road map’ which consists of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, instead of the PLO, about the refugees’ fate. This is causing a lot of concern among the refugees. There is also the Geneva Initiative and the official cover given to the participating delegation, although the Palestinians in general with all their national institutions, and the Palestinian refugees in particular, opposed this project. There are also the schemes suggesting the integration of the refugees through settlement and nationalization. These projects should be confronted by the authoritative bodies with one clear national position which affirms that the only solution for the refugee problem is the implementation of the internationally-legitimated resolutions, and in particular Resolution 194, which guarantees the right of return. This is what will unite the nation. Otherwise, the Palestinian nation will be divided. On the other hand, there are social and civil rights. Let’s start with UNRWA: there are some projects that aim to reduce the services of UNRWA, while transferring its tasks to a regional development organization. Here the annual budget of the Agency [UNRWA] which is intended for education, health, and social relief, is being manipulated, and parts of the budget are being transferred to finance infrequent developmental projects. This means an end to the Agency’s services and adjusting them according to the host countries through transferring a part of these programs to them. This doesn’t only affect the services which the refugees badly need, but also diminishes the Agency’s political and legal responsibility towards the refugees, and also the Right of Return. The third point relates to the host countries. What is needed is not the nationalization of the Palestinians in the host countries, but granting them their social and civil rights. For example, the Palestinian should have the right to own a house, for it is his right to have a shelter, and also to work and be able to move. He should always be given the Palestinian documents, because the refugee abroad is not alone in being without a nationality, but also the Palestinian who has an Authority passport, since it is not yet a country. When [someone with an Authority passport] goes to America they register “none” on his registration card at border control, which means that he doesn’t have a nationality, indicating that his country is not a country fully enjoying its sovereignty. Until there is a country that enjoys its sovereignty and which every Palestinian can hold its identity emerges, the Palestinians should be able to have documents. The big problem facing the Palestinians emigrating from Lebanon to the Scandinavian countries is renewing their Palestinian documents which were issued from Lebanon. Therefore this is part of the social and civil rights the Palestinian should enjoy, instead of being taken away from him to later be ignored in the Agency’s census of the Palestinians living in Lebanon. (Participant, Meeting, Nablus, Palestine)

The sacred right of return could be cancelled at any time if it relied only on international legitimacy; the right of return of the Palestinians does not only depend on Resolution 194. The aim is to stop America from manipulating this right or cancelling like it cancelled the [UN resolution declaring] Zionism a form of racism. Though it is suitable to address the international community based on international legitimacy, we, as Palestinians, should depend on our natural right, as is said in [human] rights law, to return to our country. There are also historic rights, and legal rights. (Participant, Meeting, Gaza, Palestine)

I have a comment. We should not ignore the daily needs of the Palestinian refugees, because they suffer greatly. We are talking about a political project, yet this is merely one factor. You should grant people their simple natural and human rights to enable them to keep on resisting. (Participant, Meeting, Nablus, Palestine)

What I want to say is that when I attend such meetings, a question always poses itself: how do we fight the refugees’ battle? How do we fight to maintain the Right of Return and the citizenship of the refugees? This is our Cause. Of course the right is obvious, but the result of these little battles is bad. This is one of the urgent battles: how do we drive the refugee problem back into the international scene? Do you want to know how the Palestinian Cause was corroded and became abridged to the withdrawal from Gaza and 40% of the West Bank? So it is about working hard and using all the available international methods in sustaining the refugee cause in general, and the Right of Return in particular, so that they can be returned to the discussion table on the international scene.

In Al-Am’ari camp, this problem is generally discussed and there are divisions on the issue. We should have ideas, not terms or conditions; just ideas on that define sovereignty. We should agree on how to fight to sustain the refugees cause, and how will we fight to defend the
Right of Return. If there is a suggested method, we should know how to handle it, and how to cooperate with these suggested international methods that are presented to us in a way that guarantees achieving the basic goal we want. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

A database and communication should be established between the Palestinian gatherings to enable them to express themselves, and their historical and political rights. There are also the rights of the Palestinians in Al-Shatat to return to Palestine and not to be ignored or deprived from this right. What I'm saying to my brothers is why this is about giving this project a green light or a red light? What are needed are suggestions. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

The issue is not the right of return as I said in the beginning. For me as a refugee, renouncing the Right of Return is considered treason. I can't be clearer, but I know that the real trustees of the refugee issue are the refugees themselves, not the international bodies, and Britain certainly doesn't support the refugee issue. You can't convince me to renounce the refugee issue. The only danger that threatens the refugee issue is when the Palestinian refugee renounces this right. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

We are seeking to implement the Right of Return for the sake of all the martyrs who died defending this right and for the sake of all the Palestinian efforts. We should be a robust nation. The Palestinian people, both refugees and non-refugees, are concerned about the Right of Return. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

4. The Younger Generation

The last suggestion is that our people have the right to convey their culture to others, and they have the right to express their tragedy to other nations. Therefore I suggest that we legally demand that Palestinian students all over the world should have a extracurricular activity outside the classroom to learn their cause and tragedy and express their feelings on the basis that citizenship and a homeland are an urgent need for them to complete their identity. This is very important to develop their personalities. Thank you. (Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)

The third suggestion is to recruit the necessary capabilities and resources to launch a human development and human resources campaign in the refugee communities, especially in the youth sector, in order to guarantee that we will, after ten years, find a new leadership from these communities. (Participant, Meeting, Bethlehem, Palestine)

5. The Responsibility of the International Community

The second point: we need to read in Civitas literature about a very important issue, which is the moral, legal and political responsibility of Britain as a Mandate power in Palestine that we didn't participate in. Also, we need to mobilize British society, with all its institutions and structures, to exercise pressures on the previous and future British governments to assume the moral, political and legal responsibility towards helping Palestinians refugees to return to their country. Britain, and particularly the British society, should hold the blame. I prefer to say British society rather than British governments, because it is the one who puts in place these governments. When these governments escape the blame, this means that the British citizen is escaping the blame for expelling the Palestinian people and forcing them out of their country. (Participant, Meeting, Gaza, Palestine)

Our message to the Civitas project is that it should demand, on behalf of the Palestinians, that Britain offers an official apology for the crime it committed against the Palestinians. This would serve as an entry into the international sphere to demand implementation of the resolution on the Right of Return. (Participant, Meeting, Gaza, Palestine)

My point of view is: first we should work together in this project so that the Palestinian refugee can be reassured that one of the goals, which I am sure our government will achieve, is for Britain to announce its responsibility for the tragedy of the refugees in Britain and apologize, because it created this tragedy, therefore it
should admit its guilt in front of the world. And since Britain is a member of the European Union, then the Union should issue an official statement. Also France adopted, after Britain, Israeli aim of establishing a state in Palestine. Israel even attacked us in the 1967 war with French weapons. France also participated in building the nuclear project after 1967. And now, American weapons and aids are flowing to Israel on the basis that it is the weak country that defeated the giant. Yet unfortunately, the Arab giant is a helpless giant made of mud. We want to work first, with the aim of pushing the European countries, especially Britain, to admit their responsibility for the refugee tragedy because Britain is the country that created this tragedy. (Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)

6. The Civitas Project

What I would like to emphasize is that there should be clarity, transparency and honesty in dealing from inside the project with the voice of the Palestinian refugee, so that it can be heard by the international community and by the PLO’s leadership. Creating structures to achieve communication between the PLO’s leadership and the refugees is a good idea, yet there are a lot of negatives and positives in a project that can benefit the Palestinian Cause and the Palestinian refugee. (Participant, Meeting, Gaza, Palestine)

In the end, I suppose that the Palestinians’ voice will be honestly and clearly conveyed to the international community and the European Union. The Palestinian refugee and the PLO’s leadership insist upon the implementation of Resolution 194 which guarantees their right to return to their country. The voice of the Palestinian refugee should be clear, and transparently and honestly conveyed through this project. Every Palestinian refugee has certain sensitivity upon the mentioning the Resolution 194, because it is basic principle that is a sacred thing we are looking for. You have met a lot of people who declared the Right of Return and that the PLO is the only legitimate representative within this framework. We are trying to establish a relationship between the two parties and to strengthen the PLO’s departments. Thank you. (Participant, Meeting, Gaza, Palestine)

The project chose communication as an approach to handle these problems. Communication is the foundation. The project was directed under the slogan: let him speak, let him express his opinion. It was aimed at making local Palestinian societies express their attitudes, not just about the Right of Return, the focus was on communication. They also express their attitude towards the Right of Return, but this right is the goal and doesn’t need expressing. It is a required international decree. And since the local communities have started to look at their local interests, a new issue appeared in the project; the election of choosing of local tools to express their local interests. (Participant, Meeting, Nablus, Palestine)

If this project continues on its current path, it will certainly create local powers that have nothing to do with the political framework of the PLO, because these local structures will discover that the PLO is not capable of assuming its duties, why? Not because we want this as committees in the PLO, but because there is a political scheme that seeks to convert the PLO to a dead structure. I was very clear when I talked about the importance of communication, but the approach is not the civil structures, these should come after the political structure. Do you remember the village twinning project under the occupation. It is a civil structure to solve our living problems without the political framework of the PLO. The aim of this project is to exercise pressures on the Arab and European countries. Isn’t the PLO the legitimate representative? Didn’t the PLO sign the international contract with Clinton? Why then, isn’t it allowed to establish civil structures, and why isn’t it allowed to politically work in the Palestinian gatherings? Why are the PLO’s factions not allowed to work in all the countries of the world? Is freezing the PLO essential for the civil structures to grow, and for every local society to start looking for his interest in the country he lives in? This is a dangerous strategic fault which will be blamed on everyone who agrees with this project. If objective research is the goal, then the project’s foundations should be reconsidered, which means exercising big pressures on the world to activate the PLO. The PLO has its parties and its powers which have been working for 50 years, so why should a new group be formed? I’m not against

We should demand that the Civitas project and all the other projects aiming to defend the Palestinians’ rights must call on the international community to strengthen UNRWA, for its presence is a living evidence and an official recognition from the international community of their role in what happened to the Palestinian Cause. (Participant, Meeting, Gaza, Palestine)
groups, for everyday a group is formed or a club is built, but they should be within the PLO’s framework. Thank you. *(Participant, Meeting, Nablus, Palestine)*

In brief, if the study highlighted the Right of Return, it will be a praiseworthy Palestinian creation that will cut in front of any impostor. And as she said, when the Europeans talk about Geneva Initiative, we say that this doesn’t represent the real opinion of the people, which is the agreed opinion of all the Palestinians in the world and in Al-Shatat. Yet if the project has another agenda, I’d like to suppose that these questions and suspicions I talked about are logical and legitimate. If the project has another agenda, then I think that the awareness and strength of our people is enough to prevent any downfalls, because it’s our guarantee, and [attempts at our downfall] hasn’t work for 55 years and we were in much more difficult situations before. *(Participant, Meeting, Nablus, Palestine)*

In the situation the Palestinian refugees live in, we have noticed an increasing number of projects and institutions that work in this field, now that we are getting ready to hold discussions for the final solution, as part of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. We have demands concerning activating the PLO. Today, there are also institutions that work for the refugees, whether in Europe or Palestine. I think there is communication between these institutions, and I also think that there are practical projects conducted by these institutions to represent the refugees’ voice and convey the fair demands that they define wherever they are. These demands include return without concessions or nationalization. The attitude is very clear; whether to the European governments, America, Arab countries or the Palestinian Authority. If there are people who actually refuse the right of return, then they don’t represent the Palestinian people. I want to repeat a question asked by this colleague here: did you talk with institutions that care for the refugees in Europe and the Arab countries, or even here in Palestine about this project? There are representatives of the PLO who don’t have any idea about this issue, neither do the people. Why? Since when have Blair and Britain supported the refugee problem? Any suggested solutions related to the refugee problem should affirm the Right of Return. Everyone should be given the right to return first, and then he will decide what he shall do. After I return to my town, Jimzu, which I was forced to leave, I’ll be free to decide whether I’ll stay or not. The important thing is to affirm this right first. Thank you. *(Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)*

I was hoping that one of the participants would present the urgent issues more practically, including the issues related to the PLO, our legitimate representative, and to discuss this matter and demand to change the departments of the PLO. But when we gather this way and talk about the PLO, we say that it is a representative body, adding that there is no communications between us and those who live abroad, and that the efforts are too weak to achieve the goal or to cover the refugees inside and outside. *(Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)*

I wonder, if the European Parliament or the British parliaments are players in the Right of Return issue, how can I understand the contradiction of these two Parliaments’ representatives supporting dubious agreements and initiatives at the Palestinian and Arab Level? We, as Palestinians, don’t need this kind of European and British financial or political support! *(Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)*

I have two issues. The first is that all those who are here and in Al-Shatat emphasize the Right of Return and compensation. I am wondering whether this project worked in the same way and mechanism here as in Al-Shatat countries. Second, we went through a lot of projects and studies, but what is the result? *(Participant, Meeting, Ramallah, Palestine)*
Part II: Further Findings

II) Mobilization and Preparation for the Debates According to Moderators

“We utilized many methods in inviting people lest we forget anyone. The Association of the Palestinian Community assumed the task of inviting people, for we, in Britain, have a single community association headed by myself as an elected chair. We invited everyone on the basis that they are part of the community. We don’t treat people as a political party, because there aren’t any clear institutions”,

(Moderator, United Kingdom)
I. Mobilizing for the Debates

a. Preparation Meetings and Introductory Visits

Some people appeared at almost every meeting ever since the project began. Initial meetings were held with the Project Director with the presence of the most active people. More information and clarification were provided until we received some written statements. This project created a discussion and a dialogue between people. We faced some obstacles toward acceptance of project, perhaps logistical ones, i.e. obstacles that have to do with the geography and nature of the country, the long distance between cities, and coordinating the meetings and dates. (Moderator, Sweden)

The supervising team of the project in Syria decided to go through the planned steps, and to create more dialogue through holding discussion panels in which as many active people and teams in the Palestinian camps in Syria could participate. This was in order to discuss the project goals and the best methods to launch the project in a correct and scientific way in accordance with its mechanisms, goals, and methodology. The team work has indeed expanded to comprise a handful of groups working in the field of defending the Right of Return, such as the ‘48 Group to defend the Right of Return, the Federation of the Right of Return Committees, the Democratic Youth Federation, Bisan Club, the Women's Committee in Defence of the Right of Return, Al-Shaja’a Club, in addition to a number of intellectuals and active people in the field of defending the right of return. The new work team devised an instructive plan to present the project. This plan started with a number of meetings and seminars to explain the project dimensions and to raise questions. Unfortunately, we were rather surprised the day that followed the meeting [with groups opposed to the project], with the official decision prohibiting us from continuing the discussion of the project in Syria. After that, the project work team held a meeting to discuss the decision, and it was decided to freeze the work of the project until things were clarified and to wait for new developments that would allow the resumption of the work. (Moderator, Syria)

b. Dissemination and Explanation of the Project to the Community by Local activists

It is noticeable that there is no authority in Lebanon which can decide to forbid such meetings. Therefore we faced no problems in holding these meetings. Yet the basic problem is the authority of Palestinian society itself: the authority of active powers who opposed the project as individuals. What I mean is that we can’t implement the project in Lebanon without the main leading units in the existing fields in the camps. Therefore it mustn’t be thought that we could easily launch the project without starting an intensive and extensive discussion and debates campaign with the officials in the refugee camps. We achieved some success in this area. Yet we faced another basic problem. This time it wasn’t because of those who publicly oppose the project, for their influence is weak and they are unorganized in our social reality in camps. Instead, their conversations and discussions about the necessity of being cautious affected others, and so did the campaign aimed to raise questions about the project’s goals. So the problem was not with those who oppose the project, but with those who were inclined to suspect the project. In fact, this made us develop our working techniques. This was the first stage of the project in Lebanon. (Moderator, Lebanon)

As for existing structures, there were several attempts to establish structures and associations for the community, but they didn’t last long. Four years ago, we managed to form a Palestinian community on a national Norwegian level, based in Oslo, and chaired by [Palestinian Activist in Norway]. It was effective until last year. One year and two months ago, a conference was held for the community, and a new leadership for the community was elected. Yet the community is not happy with it, because it has not done anything that would benefit the Palestinian community. As for the other structures on the Norwegian scene, there is the Right of Return committee, which is an alternate member in the Confederation of the Right of Return in Europe. The members of the administrative body have union, organizational, and national experience. They were selected as members because some of them lived for a long period with the Palestinian community, and some are among the founders of the Palestinian community in Norway. Civitas was first suggested at this conference.

[A senior Palestinian activist] gave a positive idea about the project which encouraged us, and what encouraged us to work and cooperate to achieve success for the project was the attendance of a member of the Civitas team to our networking conference last year, which was held in Denmark. He suggested a Confederation for the Right of Return in Europe, after that people were convinced that the project is positive and can promote all the Palestinian entities, sectors, and institutions, which work for the refugees’ rights. We agreed that he should come and present the project, and host it in Norway as a preliminary visit so that he can personally explain it to the
Norwegian senior activists and coordinate with the Right of Return committees. The Civitas team member came to Norway, and we held a meeting for the members of the Palestinian senior activists who live in Norway. (Moderator, Norway)

The main difficulty we faced was the problem of accepting the project since it is financed by a foreign body- the European Union- and therefore suspicious. The President of the Community, who was recently elected, attacked the project although we invited him when the Civitas team came for the first time and he discussed it with us. There was also the problem of the wide area of the country and the difficulty of communicating with people, for you have to contact every person individually. Time was also a problem in terms of holding the qualitative and general meetings and booking the halls. And in order to explain the issue and the practices made, special bulletins were distributed by mail for all the relevant areas. We explained the project to many senior activists and community leaders in the main cities on the phone, and we made personal consultations. Nine preparatory meetings and four general meetings were held. (Moderator, Norway)

We faced some difficulties in Toronto. The Palestinian community is scattered in the big city. Its members are not connected with each other. But some people who’ve lived together for more than 20 years founded associations as a means of communication for the community. Those people were against the project and they were like a barrier separating us from the community. We call them the old guard. It is almost impossible to know the number. And we faced a difficulty in talking to the women. The women whom we were able to communicate with were less likely to participate in the project than the men who were invited to the meetings. The youth are active in the Right of Return committee in Toronto, and the response from the older people was relatively cold because they were invited by young men. (Moderator, Canada)

In America, we had five preliminary meetings. A lot of questions were raised in the meetings in Washington and Michigan. I saw the importance of raising these questions, because the majority of the attendants don’t know about the project and its goals. While organizing the public meetings the Civitas project was attacked furiously, not like during the preliminary meetings where only questions were posed. Some attendants who came to the preliminary meetings in New York and other areas approved of the Civitas project, and they were among those who first suggested to hold Civitas meetings and who made the preliminary meetings successful. But later, they didn’t say that they support Civitas and they didn’t show their approval, rather they remained silent. So the problem emerged of how to satisfy people. What happened later [after the preliminary meetings] was a sensitive issue. Civitas and the credibility, goals, and intentions of the project were attacked. They questioned the project’s patriotism and said that it aims to cancel the Right of Return for the Palestinian refugees and to create alternatives to the PLO. They wondered why the European Union would support such a project, and said that the EU has never offered anything to support the right of the Palestinian refugees to return, so why would it suggest such a project now, and they questioned the intentions of the European Union. The point I want to say is that at the beginning of the preliminary meetings, all the preliminary meetings were positive I think. What I am saying here is a personal analysis and it is not necessarily 100% correct. This is my analysis, and perhaps others would have another analysis [of what happened].

Maybe the problem emerged because there were people who didn’t suggest or initiate the idea of the Civitas project, or the idea of finding out what the Palestinian communities abroad want or how to contact the others, and what are the structures they want to achieve communication. So maybe they opposed the project and tried to thwart its meetings because they hadn’t thought of it themselves.

As for the statement of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine that was issued from Syria and which you must have heard of, I think that the refusal that came from Syria was under pressure from those who opposed the project in the United States after the Washington [preliminary] meeting. This was not at all expected. The people who live in America are a minority, and maybe two or three exercised pressures on Syria to issue a statement condemning Civitas. (Moderator, USA)

In Denmark we devised a work plan to make the project a success and to present it to the community, and hold meetings, along with communicating with the rest of the community members to tell them about the project and its goals. We created a small work team which was composed of three people. And we conducted a demographic survey of Denmark to locate the concentrations of the Palestinian community in Denmark and know where most of them live. We also distinguished large Palestinian areas from small ones.

According to this demographic survey, we devised a plan to hold eleven meetings. We decided that it was necessary to hold these eleven meetings, and we decided that if we have time we should hold secondary meetings for the community to inform it in a more extended
b. Dissemination and Explanation of the Project to the Community by Local activists

We would go the nearby cities one day before the meeting date, or one week before the meeting to hold a preliminary meeting. We talked honestly and concisely about the project and its goals to the attendees, and we asked them to hold a public extended meeting for the community members in the city.

We prepared all the necessary papers in order not to face any problems. Even the invitational flyers for the public meeting would be made ready; with all that remained to fill in the name and the date in the mailings.

We didn’t face problems in holding such meetings because there are a lot of associations and committees in Denmark. I want to say that they are small associations and clubs limited to a few of the community members and don’t include all the community members in this or that city. You can see this all over the Denmark. We also didn’t face any problems in terms of the meetings’ places, for all the halls were all available to hold the meetings at the time we sought. We rented a hall just once, but the rest of the meetings were held in the community clubs and associations.

Many people mentioned the mosques. We also used the mosques and we used to go to the Friday prayer and ask the Imam to talk to the people for two minutes after the prayer to tell them about the project and to invite them to attend the meeting the next day. The people responded positively, but we didn’t go to certain political bodies. We went to the people, and we didn’t care about Fateh or Hamas. This is not important in Denmark.

It wasn’t important who dominates this association or that club, or to which political or organizational trend you are affiliated. We went to all the people and to all the categories which attended the meetings. What was important to us is that there are Palestinian gatherings for the Palestinian community, and we didn’t care much about the background of the club or the political community. This is our way of work. (Moderator, Denmark)

We started the implementation of the project early. We held three meetings in July 2004 with the presence of our colleagues after the Cyprus consultation meeting last November [in 2004], and we devised a plan for holding more than 25 meetings differing in their size and type according to their aims. The plan was to be implemented in the gathering places of the Palestinian refugees. We were supposed to bring them to Amman. We applied to the Jordanian government to have its permission to implement this project, but we have not received an answer yet. Until now, two meetings were held with our efforts. We held two meetings, one for men and the other for women.

Our approach for categorizing the meetings before the five preliminary meetings in July, or the meetings held last month, depended on our direct relations with the Palestinian gatherings, not on the effective political powers in the Palestinian society. We haven’t contacted Hamas or Fateh or any popular or democratic front. There were merely direct contacts between the study team and Palestinian society with its associations and with the neglected individuals in it. We hope to get the permission to start implementing this ambitious plan which we devised several months ago. We don’t expect to face trouble after the approval of the Jordanian government to implement the project as a result of our strategy which depends on direct relations with the refugees. (Moderator, Jordan)

I found out about the Civitas project during a conference in 2004 organized by an alternative centre in Haifa about the Palestinian immigrants and refugees. I met the Project Director who talked about the project and I agreed with her to embrace the project in the Netherlands. I talked several times on the phone with the Civitas team and we organized three preliminary meetings with some brothers in the Netherlands, one of the meetings was attended by the Project Director and the Project Coordinator. This was with the aim of organizing a large and extensive meeting for the community, where three questions we put in last November were to be discussed. We didn’t face any problems or difficulties like those that our brothers faced in the other European countries. In the Netherlands, we have a group from Hamas and Fateh, but we decided not to ask any of them when organizing this meeting, because both fronts have no influence in the Palestinian community. Hamas prevails among the Turkish and Moroccan communities, and has a weak influence on the Palestinian one. ..Fateh is weak and insignificant and has no influence on the community. Therefore we decided to invite them for the meeting on the basis of having the choice to come or not. They came without objections and contributed in the discussion and asked the Project Director and the Project Coordinator some questions. (Moderator, Netherlands)
We utilized many methods in inviting people lest we forget anyone. The Association of the Palestinian Community assumed the task of inviting people, for we, in Britain, have a single community association headed by myself as an elected chair. We invited everyone on the basis that they are part of the community. We don’t treat people as a political party, because there aren’t any clear institutions, but I felt that they are trying to find excuses not to come, they didn’t bother to invite people whom they know. I wish that they have done that, for we [in the APC] are known for having national credentials, and we wouldn’t work on a suspicious project. To invite people, we used mail, website, e-mails, messages, and phones. The community members were not great in spreading the word. The problem does not lie in the institutions, but in the people themselves. We faced a problem in mobilizing for this project: there was no food, and this is the first thing people asked about! This doesn’t mean that we had a small number of attendants; on the contrary, there were about 60 active people who are always on the front line. There is an important matter; there were women present, and also some from the upper classes of the Palestinian community. (Moderator, United Kingdom)

Gaza first heard about the project from some who criticized it, and some of them were concerned about the refugees. We met a group from those who were interested and we discussed all aspects of the project. A senior activist in the West Bank called us saying that they would like to implement the Civitas project in Gaza, and we said that it is a good idea. We invited the public and the activists and the refugees. There are some people in Gaza, the West Bank, or abroad who don’t like anyone but themselves to speak about the refugees – and if they do talk, they talk about restructuring and about betrayal. We are still obsessed with the idea of the leadership and the father figure. We held a meeting with people from the effective powers. The discussion was objective, and almost all of us had the same opinions, except for two of us. One of them raised the slogan “Islam is the solution”, and that Israel should be attacked with missiles. The other gave a rhetorical speech and walked out of the meeting. (Moderator, Gaza)

c. Debates and Community Meetings

The work team in Lebanon chose to implement the maximum model, by holding extensive meetings and discussion panels in different regions, and to return again to hold more extensive second meetings.

We started the preparations, and advertised heavily and pushed towards discussions before holding the extensive meetings. In Lebanon, there are five main regions; each of them includes smaller gatherings. We started with the South, and an extensive public meeting attended by more than 225 participants was held. It included all the political powers, parties, youth and women unions, and the intellectual categories. This meeting was carefully and quietly prepared, was a great success. And it led to the success of the rest of the meetings, since the project attained its legitimacy from the first meeting, through the representatives of the unions, popular committees and political powers. Even those powers which officially opposed the project were forced to come and participate in these meetings because of its activity. We had our method, which was holding workshops about the project goals whenever we finished an extensive meeting in a certain region. These workshops addressed workers, women, and youth. We also held public meetings.

This method of holding workshops and meetings proved later to be a big success. Three workshops were held for these diverse groups and spheres. We did the same in Tripoli, where the general meeting was bigger and more extensive and attended by more people. The political groups, unions, and public participation were far larger. The number of attendants was between 350-400 participants, such that we even faced a big problem in trying to end the discussion in the same meeting. This was followed by six workshops, and three more in Al-Beddawi camp, and in Nahr el-Bared camp. All the work techniques previously agreed upon were also approved in these meetings, in terms of the questions [to be asked at the meetings] and the classification of groups for the workshops, in addition to questioning the conclusions and re-discussing them again. All this was documented through video and by the minutes of the sessions.

After Tripoli, we held the same meetings in Baalbek itself as well as Baalbek [Wavel] camp. The general meeting was attended by about 120 people, and was followed by two discussion panels. Things went relatively well in Baalbek, where not only the Palestinian powers in Baalbek [Wavel] camp were involved, but also those outside the camp, which are in the surrounding villages of the Baalbek region, within a range of nearly 45 km. There are Palestinian gatherings scattered in a number of small villages in Al-Beqaa area. This was the first meeting to include all the effective and active people who work in this wide area where many Palestinian people live.
The work then shifted to Beirut. An extensive meeting was held in Burj el-Barajneh camp attended by about 70 people. Some preparatory and technical mistakes which related to the location of the meeting and contacts took place. It was supposed to be attended by at least 200 figures. These mistakes limited holding such extensive meetings. We were able to obtain this number of attendants through workshops that were later held in Burj Al-Barajneh and Mar Elias camp. These meetings went in the same direction as the ones outlined before, so it is needless to discuss them again.

The last region is Sidon. Following the general progress of the project, and the wide and dynamic response that the project launched, as well as its relations with the Palestinian society, we noticed that some centers and Palestinian political powers and organizations in Sidon region were preparing and waiting for such an extensive meeting to be held in order to attack the project. Hence it was decided not to hold an extensive meeting in Sidon, because the provocation level in Ein el-Hilweh camp resulted in physical fighting. That’s why we decided that the small syndicate meetings could abort the provocation. This is why the extensive meeting in Sidon was cancelled, and was the reason behind moving towards holding workshops on women, students, and worker levels. These were good workshops in which a controlled, limited opposition participated. This means that those who came in the aim of spoiling this extensive meeting did not succeed in achieving their goal in this frame.

There is another thing. The institutions of the people with special needs asked for their own workshop to discuss the project. Of course, this was not planned in the framework, and the response was quick, where representatives from all such institutions attended the workshop. I think that when we review the recorded video about this workshop, we will find it perhaps the most important one, with a specialized nature to discuss their problems, needs and demands, despite the fact that it wasn’t equally taken into consideration like all the other workshops.

There were two ideas in the final stage: holding an extensive meeting upon completion of the project, or replacing it with an extensive workshop attended by two or three of the most active people from each meeting held in Lebanon. When carefully studying the status of the project, and the fieldwork carried out, it was thought to be easy to hold an extensive meeting attended by 400 Palestinians on Lebanon level. However, viewing it from the angle of any practical advantage that could be obtained; this would be a boring repetition of the four extended meetings previously held in the regions. Therefore we suggested nominating two or three people who attended the 22 workshops and syndicate meetings to participate in an extensive discussion panel with the aim of exchanging expertise and attitudes and concluding results from all these panels and meetings held in Lebanon.

(Moderator, Lebanon)

There are many precautions you should take when implementing the project. Saudi Arabia is not the ideal country in which to implement such a project. First, you should have a clear permission. Second, how would women be involved in discussions in such a conservative society? Third, there is a gap as well as mistrust between the community and our Embassy for many reasons. Also a Palestinian may not go to the Palestinian Embassy if he has a Jordanian passport; he goes to the Jordanian Embassy, for he would be questioned if he went to the Palestinian Embassy if carrying a Jordanian passport.

(Moderator, Saudi Arabia)

In May, people travel for holidays. We made important preparations during this period. We went to the Embassy and got permission because it supervises the work of Al-Quds Open University, and we need to involve its professors and lecture rooms. We also contacted the popular committees chaired by [Royal Official]. People wanted to contact [highly respected senior Palestinian community member], rather than the Ambassador; because he is more friendly and useful. Four preliminary meetings were held in Dammam and Jeddah, and two were held in Riyadh with the objective of answering questions, and thus reassuring those who support the project. We were asked, why did the European Union finance the project? Why is there a need for civic committees with the presence of the PLO, and why it is being raised now? We concentrated our efforts on answering these questions. Some expressed their willingness to cooperate with the project, and some did not show up. All the questions were answered. Interests ranged between politics and other concerns. Among the political concerns was the issue of the Right of Return. In Jeddah the discussion focused on local concerns like the prevention of Palestinians from owning property, and prevention of girls from going to universities. (Moderator, Saudi Arabia)

The majority of the community lives in Montreal, Ottawa, Halifax and Vancouver. We held preliminary meetings with the Project Director and the relevant associations at the community level in Ottawa. We held several meetings in one day, among these were public meetings, women’s meetings, men’s meetings, and children’s meetings (aged between 10-14 years old). In Montreal, they gathered a group of Palestinian asylum-seekers in Canada, most of them coming from the Lebanon camps. Women participated and they raised...
the issues that concern them. It was clear that everyone was eager and able to discuss, and they want to continue the work. (Moderator: Canada)

There are some effective existing civic structures in Sudan, for example a council for the Palestinian community. At first, there was some sort of balance in the council between different political frameworks, but then it turned almost completely towards being part of the Hamas movement. The Palestinian Students’ Union and the Palestinian Women’s Association also leans towards Hamas. In this way, political weight in the Palestinian community was for Hamas and for the Islamic trend in general. Because of this, I had to deal with these structures directly. Therefore, I met with the Palestinian Ambassador in Sudan, and I talked with Hamas’s representative, Fateh’s representative, and a representative of the Islamic Jihad in Sudan. I also met with some independent bodies who are respected in the community, and who have influence among the community, albeit to a lesser extent than the other sides.

The only opposition I faced in the beginning of my work in the project was from Hamas. Before finishing my discussion with the Hamas representative, he interrupted me saying: “As our grandmothers say, you can’t be happy with something that comes from the West.” I told him that I don’t need him to remind me of what grandmothers say. I need real participation from him in an official way. I asked him to give me an answer after a thoughtful reflection and after consultation with the political office of Hamas, but he kept postponing the answer. The rest of the organizations participated immediately after they agreed on the project. Some independents, respected ones, also opposed the project but they said that they won’t hinder it or incite people against it, although they have their reservations.

Unfortunately, the project continued to be postponed while awaiting Hamas’s final opinion — for more than two months in the first instance. Then, I met with them, with the presence of the members of the political office in Sudan, and they agreed not to oppose the project, and said that they will participate like the other Palestinian powers since they are part of the national Palestinian powers in Sudan.

After setting the meetings dates — we were planning to hold a meeting for the students, and another for the women, and a third for the community in general — we were surprised to find out that the Hamas representative in Sudan broke the agreement and told us that he would personally try to thwart the project if he can, and he would get back to us after we discussed with him more.

We established a good relationship with the Palestinian Ambassador in Sudan who approved the project, especially after knowing that Abu Mazen had agreed as PLO chairman. But he also personally didn’t have any objection. So, we discovered that the Hamas representative broke the agreement and we were forced to postpone the meetings again, until he answered us. The members of the political office of Hamas came and we held another meeting with them, which lasted for two hours, in which we discussed the project, and its articles and goals. The Hamas representative attended the meeting, but he didn’t speak at all.

The result of the meeting was that they agreed to work on it within the national context. A representative was then chosen to form a work team from the existing national Palestinian frameworks in Sudan to continue work on the project and to hold the meetings. Invitations were distributed and handed out to the existing structures and figures that currently represent the community. More than forty invitations were distributed.

Also the embassy distributed lots of invitations to people. The Islamic Jihad movement and the General Union for Palestinian Students received these invitations. After distributing about forty invitations, the Hamas representative in Sudan asked for an additional 200 invitations to distribute, so I copied additional invitations. But two days before reserving the meeting hall, I was surprised to receive a phone call from Hamas representative telling me that something had happened and that he wanted to talk to me in this regard. And I was surprised that the 200 additional invitations that he asked for were not distributed, and he apologized saying that Hamas will not participate in the meetings dedicated to this project.

Of course, the other Palestinian structures and powers and community follow him, because he promised to arrange the meeting to make the project meetings a success, and he said that a meeting for the community’s council will be held to tell them about the project and its goals, and that a meeting for the General Union of Palestinian Students will also be held, and another one for the Women’s Association to tell them about the project and its goals.

After the Hamas representative refused to participate, I started to study the issue to prove my case and challenge the excuses of the Hamas representative in Sudan. I did that among the community members, and the General Union of Palestinian Students and the Women’s Association. I personally talked with the leadership of the General Union of Palestinian Students who refused at first, but approved principally later. But after the Hamas refusal, I was surprised to learn that the leadership of the Union started to postpone its approval, and then the Union’s President refused to participate.
Mobilization and Preparation for the Debates According to Moderators

c. Debates and Community Meetings

1) Mobilizing for the Debates

As for the Association of Palestinian Women, after giving their approval, they told us that they won't participate just one day before the meeting's date, and after we reserved the meeting hall. This happened while we were discussing with them the details of transporting the women to the meeting hall, and taking them from their homes and returning them.

The Women's Association called us and apologized, and we knew that they took their instructions from the Hamas representative and its political office and preferred not to participate in the project, as did the Union [of Palestinian Students].

Worse still, on the morning of the meeting date, he [the Hamas representative] sent mobile messages inciting people to not participate in the project because it is “suspicious!”

I personally and quickly started to call some students and the leaders of the Palestinians student movement in Sudan, and eventually they provided us with some students, and we managed to gather 20-30 from the community members who represented all the categories in the community. Some embassy's employees, and people from Fateh, and some students attended the meeting. (Moderator, Sudan).

As for the meeting that was held in Detroit, it was moderated by Hassan Nawash. He played an important role in supporting the Civitas project, and his attitude was positive, describing the project as a positive one which helps serve the issues of the Palestinian community and the refugees including the Right of Return, and he explained that it helped in creating the civic structures to enable the Palestinian community in America to communicate with its national representative, the PLO, and with the Palestinian communities in America, and between the communities and the state governments in America and the concerned institutions that work for the refugees and the right of return.

We managed to hold a meeting in Detroit which was attended by 30-35 people. The meeting wasn’t extensive, but I think that it was positive and very different from the meetings that were held before, because it seems that the people that attended the meeting were different, and they included Americans from Palestinian origin; their points of view were different, and we want to gather as many opinions as we can.

The important thing was that the political line remained constant. Everyone demanded the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their country and properties and everyone agreed with the basic axis which we consider very important as Palestinians and that we can’t renounce whatever the price is. It is very important to hold another meeting in Detroit because if a meeting is held with the support of the mosque in Detroit, it will be attended by far more people than this first meeting. (Moderator, USA)

[Local Palestinian Activist], who lives in Chicago, played an effective role in holding the Civitas meetings and activities. She insisted on working despite the problems she faced. The problem we faced was that people did not tell us that they don’t want this project or that they oppose it. The problem is that there are certain people who say to you that they will work with you to make Civitas meetings successful but in fact they don’t perform any activities. Also, some of them are, as I previously mentioned, connected to the opposition in Washington from the Popular Front.

The results concluded by this meeting had not been addressed in any previous meetings. Some people presented what they want to do in Chicago and the way to communicate with all the community members in Chicago and with the Palestinian communities in the United States. They talked about their fears after September 11th and how have fears gotten worse.

In America, the events of September 11th became a reality that was imposed on people, and on all the Palestinian communities in America. These events caused fear for everyone without exception, whether Palestinians, Arabs or Muslims in general. The events of September 11th created a new reality and conditions in America that are different than those lived before. (Moderator, USA)

In the 1990s, political activity, whether at the Greek level which supported the Palestinian cause, or the active Palestinian level, were greatly reduced. After the Oslo agreements, issues on the Palestinian scene in Greece were confused. Activists did not know what to do after the Oslo agreements. There had been always activities, but big differences emerged between the activists themselves, and also between the Palestinian community in Greece, and these differences were bigger than the previous political and national activities.

At this time, the Civitas project was presented to the Palestinian community in Greece. I heard about the Civitas project from the internet and from other people, and I was interested, so I called the Project Director and the Project Coordinator, and contact between us became constant in order to start working on the project in Greece. At first, the Project Coordinator wanted to come to Greece to explain the project’s goals, and he came indeed. But before that, I discussed the project and paved the way. At first, he talked with the Palestinian ambassador in Greece who didn’t have any objections at all, on the contrary he encouraged the project and wanted to see the Project Director.
So the Project Coordinator came and met with the Palestinian Ambassador and talked with the Palestinian community and met with them. The main activists in the Palestinian community in Greece approved of the Civitas project.

We held a [preliminary] meeting for the community, which was attended by representatives of the Palestinian parties and factions, and by the popular committees like the students and labour committees. It was also attended by Fateh, Hamas, the Popular Front, and the Democratic Front which had a distinct presence. After this meeting, those representatives of the unions, doctors, students and workers were supposed to tell the rest of the community members about the project. We gave them booklets issued by Civitas. What happened was that they tried to tell the people, but things did not work the way we want. We put great effort into the issue of holding the meetings and telling the community. Within the community, some supported the project and others opposed it. But those who opposed it did not incite people against the project and did not resist it. They were distributing articles that were written against the project by fax. But no one openly opposed the project.

Most of the organizations were happy with the project, and they attended the meetings and did not oppose it. The Popular and Democratic Fronts supported the project and attended the meetings. Therefore we held the first meetings, and an extensive meeting which was held for the first time for the community without having a factional goal or without being based on the call of a certain Palestinian party. Everyone said that it was the first time that all the people from all the trends gathered together without any political goals or differences; just sitting there and discussing things.

Attendants wanted to talk about the secondary disagreements they have, and the disputes between the political organizations and parties. Others valued the meeting and expressed their wish to participate in the activities to support the project. Some criticized the project, but within logical limits, and there was no chaos.

Then some figures wanted to have a bigger role than just attending the meetings; so they formed a committee. They wanted to lecture people about the project and its goals. There was a discussion about the project and they told people that it is not what they think, and wanted to explain things to them. This was one of the problems we faced. People didn’t understand that the project’s goal is to listen to the refugees and ordinary people, and all the social categories of the refugees. We didn’t want to listen only to those who are active on the political or union level, or only those who form the factions, unions, or parties as if they already know all the problems of the community members.

Our idea was not to limit the meetings on the parties and unions representatives or the political activists and leader; but to listen to everyone and to the public in order to know their needs and priorities.

We then called for the [public] meeting. There were people who wanted to come, but who didn’t want to help or make any effort in telling the people or invite them to attend the Civitas meeting. But most of those who attended the second meeting of Civitas were activists, and the number of attendants was fairly good.

The first [syndicate] meeting of Civitas was for the youth and the activists who wanted to attend. In this meeting, they discussed their problems. The second meeting was for women; they were very excited and didn’t expect people to feel such enthusiasm. They were very happy to attend and participate in the discussion. They suggested mechanisms of communication and presented the needs and priorities of the community and of the refugees in Al-Shatat.

Women started to think what to do. And they wondered why they don’t have Women’s Committees. They said that it was the first time for them to meet in such numbers in Greece. They said that this meeting should have been held twenty years ago, and they were very happy.

Regardless of the project’s goals, women wanted to form a Women’s Committee on their own; some even suggested forming an independent one. They wanted this Committee to convey the issues of the Palestinian community and discuss its problems, in addition to devising methods of communication with the national representative, the PLO, and the Palestinian Authority. They agreed to form a Women’s Committee in the community.

The third meeting was then held in Salonica where the community is very active and where the members bond more closely with each other. Perhaps because the city is smaller than the capital, Athens, people feel closer to each other; they always meet together.

A good discussion was held in this meeting. There was only one member from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Before the meetings had begun, he started to distribute an article to those attending about the Civitas project warning people from participating in it because it is suspicious and because it aims to manipulate the Right of Return and create alternatives for the PLO. When people came to the meeting hall, they were confused and afraid because of this article distributed by the Popular Front. During the meeting, people started to discuss all the dreadful points mentioned in the article. They said that the project wants to create alternatives for the PLO and that it opposes the right of the refugees to...
return. The important thing is that as soon as the discussion about the project and its goals began, the discussion took a constructive turn, and fears began to vanish. By the end of the meeting, they offered a lot of suggestions. (Moderator, Greece)

There is one city, Vlaardigen, which contains 1500 Palestinians who know each other. The main seminar was held there under the patronage of the Network of the Palestine Return Committees. Before inviting them, we called the mayor and asked him to participate with us in inviting Palestinians so that they would not be afraid, and he agreed, and we put his name on the brochure, distributing thirty thousand brochures on every house in the name of the mayor and the committee. A large number of Palestinians, as well as between 50 to 80 Dutch guests attended the meeting, and more than two thirds of the city council, in addition to the Project Director and the Project Coordinator. (Moderator, Netherlands)

We demanded to incorporate the West Bank and Gaza in addition to the ‘48 territories in the projects’ meetings if we are to look at the refugee problem as one indivisible issue, for we have the same cause and the same goal. Our demand was approved, and they agreed to hold the meetings. The West Bank is divided into three regions: the north, the centre, and the south. Gaza is divided into two regions: the south and the north. Five meetings were held in the West Bank and Gaza, and the Project Director was asked to hold meetings for certain people not for the masses, i.e. not public meetings. The focus was only on the political and union leadership, and the Right of Return committees, in addition to the Popular Committees in the camps. In Nablus, we held a meeting in Balata camp to which 22 members from the associations and institutions were invited. This meeting was attended by 24 active people during which a very important dialogue took place. And despite the attitude of the Popular Front, the ideas discussed were positively received. Several [other] meetings were held in Balata Camp for the youth, children, women, and institutions, attended by sixty people. And we invited two people to talk about the project, one of them supported the project and the other opposed it. And we discussed with them in front of the attendants. The ideas and goals of the project were also discussed. Mr. Husam Khader [well-known political prisoner] sent a letter addressed to the Project Director. He was hoping from the Hadari prison to be among us, because he has participated in this issue from the beginning. (Moderator, Nablus, Palestine)

2. Concerns and Priorities

a. Relationships within the Community

In short, except for the problems concerning providing people with their daily living needs, we don’t suffer from the problems which the Palestinian gatherings in other countries suffer from, and which were raised in the meetings, such as economic problems. Rather, the focus was on political issues, such as our legitimate representative, and the channels of communication with the host countries and with other Palestinian gatherings. The focus in general was on political issues and problems. Some of the discussions focused on the simple social problems of the community. These problems exist in all the European countries. In this community, there aren’t many problems. (Moderator, Sweden)

A lot of effort was made based on personal relations between the community and the work team. The Right of Return is demanded by every Palestinian living abroad. The obstacles lie in the problems and the slow pace of life. Even the Palestinian Ambassador complains of this issue. Only 20-30 people from Fateh would participate in celebrations. People are desperate. Palestinian villages are socially isolated, and there are no utilities, or schools, or a health centre in the village. The Kuwait Real Estate Company tried to take this area [the Palestinian Village in Sana’a], but it is illegal to re-build anything in the village or invest in it. We organized four meetings. The first was a syndicate meeting; the group consisted of 18 people. The second was a meeting for students. The third was a teachers’ meeting and was held in Hamas headquarters. Bad weather was such an obstacle that even Hamas asked the Embassy to hold the meeting in its headquarters with the presence of the Palestinian Ambassador in the public meeting. People have a general impression that the Palestinian Embassy is a bad model of representing the Palestinians, and a place where nepotism and favouritism is exercised, in addition to missing documents. The new ambassador promised to solve all the problems and to build a health centre. The results [from the meeting] are: the opening of a dialogue channel for the first time between the residents and the Embassy. The discussion lasted for one hour, and it was clear and open. The ambassador revealed that there are Palestinians who invest their money in Yemeni institutions, while not investing in creating jobs for the members of the Palestinian community who are unemployed. There is also the problem of the lack of the work contracts between the teachers and the Yemeni government. Consequently when they finish their term, they don’t get any compensation or pension like the other communities. In other countries, the embassy is requested to do that. The problems of the community are indeed bigger than its size. We formed a preliminary committee for the Palestinian community, and it wouldn’t
be possible for us to do that were it not for the discussion with the community members. Second, there is the teacher’s union which faces elections. The Palestinian community asked for an ID card from the United Nations. People are seeking solutions. Yemen granted travel documents that were considered suspicious by some people. (Moderator, Yemen)

I want to say that Civitas project is a chance for people to express themselves and their suffering, problems, needs and demands. They also expressed their problems between the Palestinian Embassy and the Palestinian community in Greece. What was noticeable was that there wasn’t a certain factional attitude towards these problems. The problem was between the Embassy and the community members, and also at the level of relations between the community members themselves. There are concerns related to interests; everyone were concerned that his own group would not be brought into the light.

The Islamic trend in Greece didn’t have any problems with the project and its goals; on the contrary, its members came to the meeting. But perhaps their conditions didn’t allow them to attend the other meetings, and the conditions in Athens are not favourable and it is difficult to set a date in the desired time. We faced a time problem in arranging the meetings. The Islamic trend as well as all the other political trends was represented in the meetings that Civitas held. The active women from the Islamic, national, left and independent trends attended the women’s meetings. (Moderator, Greece)

There was also the issue of the second generation, who was born later. They are very important because they are like a bridge connecting the Palestinians with the European nations, because they can deal with western society in a more active way, and present the Palestinian cause in a different manner. We, the first generation, are overwhelmed with emotions, while the second generation engages with logic and places human rights and international law as a base for discussions. This has its effect in extending the circle of support and understanding for the benefit of the Palestinian cause. These are the results of this meeting, and we haven’t faced any criticism for Civitas project and its meetings. (Moderator, Netherlands)

The struggle to have a place in the executive committee in the PLO is still going on. What happened in the workshop, and the emphasis on communication and Resolution 194 is very important, for we are now being surrounded by the Popular Committees in Gaza and the West Bank. No one wants to work, and we are trying to activate the Department of Refugee Affairs in any possible way. We want to work and are trying to revive the issue. The budgets have not been released yet, and we are depending on our resources; we build centres instead of renting them and we are trying to be independent by recruiting volunteers. (Moderator, Gaza)

b. Relationships with the PLO

There are a lot of lessons that can be extracted from working in the Civitas project. But we think that the Palestinian scene needs reforming and a rebuiling of the PLO, along with its institutions, and those of the Palestinian National Movement in general, on real nationalist democratic terms. In addition, people [have to] participate in political life, while abandoning organizational tribalism; also, granting Palestinians in Al-Shatat the right to exercise their political, social, nationalist, and cultural activities without interfering in their lives by the Palestinian political powers. In general, interacting and connecting the organizations of the Palestinian people wherever they exist in the world. The Civitas project unveiled many pressing needs and wants which were boldly articulated and stressed. The project also allowed Palestinian institutions to progress democratically among the refugees and controversially among the Palestinian political movement, in a way guaranteeing the unity of the Palestinian people in Al-Shatat, in order to achieve ratification of the project. (Moderator, Syria)

The communities demanded to play an active role in political decision-making and in designing the political map. (Moderator, Chicago)

There is lack of information about what has remained of the PLO’s structures and who represents us in Canada. Among the issues that were discussed in the meeting were the Right of Return, reviving the PLO, clean elections for the National Council and to have a representative in the Council and establishing a national fund with clear and transparent accounts. There were also the issues of the unregistered refugees and the displaced persons in the territories of 1948 in Palestine. They demanded the removal of all the Palestinian factions from the list of terrorist groups, cut relations between Canada and Israel, and to form a higher education committee for the native inhabitants of North America, the Native americans, and three meetings. (Moderator, Canada)

The office of the PLO, which is in Ottawa, did not have a positive role. The relationship between the Embassy and the community in Ottawa is low. The ambassador was against the project, and it was the first time for him to be involved in the community’s affairs. (Moderator, Canada)
We called the Palestinian Embassy in Denmark out of courtesy. One should call his Embassy first and tell it about the project, because it would be shameful to perform any activity without its knowledge, although I didn’t need its help especially that I know that the communication between the community members in Denmark and the Palestinian embassy is nearly cut off. But after this project, the relationship between the Embassy and the community was a lot better; thanks to the Project Director, and to this project. The communication between the Palestinian embassy and the community in Denmark is a lot better now. Things worked out at the end. Frankly I was forced to show the community the letter of Abu Mazen, and the ambassador saw it, and the Embassy decided to be neither with nor against anyone, so that it won’t call Abu Mazen saying that it opposes and create a problem. But the ambassador in Denmark understood the situation eventually and tried to help. (Moderator, Denmark)

Let’s start with the situation in Iraq. During this period the situation is critical, as a result of the security threats that community members currently face. Therefore, although we would have liked to hold general extended meetings discussing the issue of Iraq, this was nearly impossible because of the security conditions. Consequently, the meetings were limited to some Palestinian activists in some of the Palestinian neighbourhoods. These meetings were distributed as follows: two meetings in the university, and five meetings in different neighbourhoods for the refugees living in Iraq. It should be mentioned that it wouldn’t have been possible to hold these meetings without coordination with the Palestinian Embassy, which played a positive role in organizing these meetings and in contacting people to hold a meeting in the municipality neighbourhoods. The issues discussed in the meetings focused on the problems the community suffers concerning the relationship with the PLO and the host country, and the relationship with international organizations. The role of the PLO was not praised in any meeting. Let’s be realistic in wondering why this role seemed so bad and ineffectual. It is because after the sanctions were imposed on Iraq, the Palestinians became neglected and forgotten. The only channel of communication between the Palestinians and the PLO was through the Palestinian Ambassador. Therefore, this relationship is important and isn’t established as it should be. The PLO was heavily criticized for its absence and for neglecting the conditions of the Palestinians, which are real, even in the days of the old regime…The Palestinians demanded through these meeting that the PLO should play an effective role in this context, and to create coordination between the leadership of the PLO and the leadership of the National Authority in their contacts with Iraq. There should be contact, whether they accept it or not, in order to ease the suffering of our people in Iraq because of the relationship with the host country….Some of the brothers demanded to create coordination between the PLO and the host country to organize this relationship. It is true that our number is small here, but that does not mean that we are to be cancelled from the map. (Moderator, Iraq)

The discussion focused on two points: the Right of Return, because it is a national issue, and people have this right. Second, the PLO, because it is absent from the scene, whether on the political and media levels, or in its relationship with the Palestinian community. The Palestinian delegation has not had a relationship with the Palestinian community for the past 10-15 years. The PLO office has not invited any Palestinians to attend any seminar or to talk with them. 90-95% of Palestinians don’t know the location of the PLO office except those who need something from the office. There isn’t any type of political activity whether by the office manager or his staff. Fifteen years ago, there was some activity with the presence of [the previous Ambassador], but when he went, this activity stopped. I don’t recall anyone from the PLO talking about the Palestinian community; even the media does not remember that there is an office to interview Palestinians. In terms of the community, the important issue for the community is having Palestinian civic bodies with democratic associations. This was the core of the discussion, whether in the preliminary meetings or the general one. (Moderator, Netherlands)

In Frankfurt, we held two meetings; the first failed because the administrative body for the Palestinian community didn’t care for the invitation because those in it are lazy in this area. [Nonetheless], almost 40 people attended the meeting, and everyone said that the PLO is the legitimate representative and that they won’t accept an alternative to it, and that the Right of Return is a sacred right that can’t be renounced. But, of course, some demands were suggested one way or another; one of them was the possibility of helping establish a federation for Palestinian women, or helping in building bridges between the Palestinians abroad and the PLO, and working on activating the existing institutions or the Palestinian community and the PLO. Another demand was connecting the Palestinian communities in the host countries of Europe and America, excluding the countries surrounding Israel, to create some sort of coordination so that they can succeed in their mission. (Moderator, Germany)
The institutions of the PLO are dead; the question is how to revive them. Discussing this issue is very important. We realize the importance of the PLO’s role, but its structures and its National Council must be activated. The articles and readings I received [against the project] were criticizing the PLO and the Authority rather than attacking the project. The PLO was attacked because it didn’t assume its role properly in representing the people it should represent. The attack was from people who thought the project would discharge them from their positions, but the Right of Return belongs to us, and we are to decide if the PLO represents us or not. The project does not offer solutions or provide answers… The results that were concluded related to the role of the Legislative Council. For example, it didn’t assume its duty in defending the Right of Return. The role of the Right of Return institutions is insignificant. The Right of Return committees became more like a service institution than a political one…. They became concerned with helping the refugees and creating job opportunities for them. There are no pressures on the Authority to defend the Right of Return. The reliance was on the institutions’ role. We must organize our efforts to educate the Palestinian citizen for make our institutions become more important. We realize the importance of the PLO’s role, but its structures and its National Council must be activated. The articles and readings I received [against the project] were criticizing the PLO and the Authority rather than attacking the project. The PLO was attacked because it didn’t assume its role properly in representing the people it should represent. The attack was from people who thought the project would discharge them from their positions, but the Right of Return belongs to us, and we are to decide if the PLO represents us or not. The project does not offer solutions or provide answers… The results that were concluded related to the role of the Legislative Council. For example, it didn’t assume its duty in defending the Right of Return. The role of the Right of Return institutions is insignificant. The Right of Return committees became more like a service institution than a political one…. They became concerned with helping the refugees and creating job opportunities for them. There are no pressures on the Authority to defend the Right of Return. The reliance was on the institutions’ role. We must organize our efforts to educate the Palestinian citizen for make our institutions become more important.

For example, a meeting was supposed to be held in New Baghdad, but as a result of the security situation it was cancelled. (Moderator, Iraq)

When we first started the project, we tried to conduct a preliminary study in the camps, but we were prevented by the security. So we brought the camps to our office, and about 70-80 people came. Security services called us and asked us not to continue. After that, there came two governments, the governments of Al-Fayez and that of Badran, and three Prime Ministers and Royal Court Ministers and two Ministers for the Refugee Affairs department. We meet again with them [as they get appointed], but it is obvious that they don’t want to give a final answer; they don’t want to approve, and they don’t want to refuse, so that they won’t be considered against the project, but I think that failing to give an answer is an answer in itself. There was the idea of the Maximum Model in Jordan, because 40% of the refugees live in Jordan. We implemented the Minimum Model because it was too late to start the project as planned, that is to say 30-35 big and minor meetings; for the issue is very sensitive. (Moderator, Jordan)

We went to Egypt in the first half of September: Palestinians there have some privacy, because they have integrated to some extent into Egyptian society, and they are lost between 70 million Egyptians. In addition to this, there is no permission or governmental authorization to hold these meetings. We also faced constraints on freedom and people are scared of Egyptian Security, and they feel threatened from discussing their civic needs. There were four attempts to work in Egypt…. Working in Egypt in this area is like sacrificing one’s life, especially as everyone suspected and feared this issue. Even the Palestinian women who came from Egypt were afraid to work on this issue. That’s why I will not talk about things that I discussed in Egypt. Meetings shall be confidential without public invitations. (Moderator, Egypt)

d. Issues with Civitas and the European Union

People from all the cities where no meetings were held called us wanting to know about the project and its goals, because they heard the positive and negative things about it. They invited us to come to these cities to present the project; these cities were not on the list of the meetings’ agenda. I am proud to say that we have a small information bank about the Palestinian communities, associations, clubs and federations in Denmark. We have an archive about the areas of Palestinians there. (Moderator, Denmark)

We have a popular coalition which connects anyone who works with refugees, and doesn’t do anything for the refugees or those who seek to return. Let me say that the Popular Committees in Gaza and the West Bank forced the PLO and Abu Ammar to form a Department for Refugees’ Affairs, in order to exert pressure on the Authority and its leaders. This was the reason to accuse us of working with Syria or Israel. We might have been arrested were it not for our personal relations. Those who questioned the project were pursuing personal interests, for they thought that the project would replace them. And what is taking place against the project consist of people who have nothing to do with the refugees issue; they are people who are 70 years old or older and they obey one person in just about everything. (Moderator, Gaza)
3. Assessing the Project as a Mechanism and its Results

a. Assessment of Constraints

The Palestinian community in Yemen is relatively small. There was the problem of belonging—Jordanian or Palestinian. Palestinians would go to the institutional meetings of the Jordanian community and would not come to the meetings of the Palestinian community, for it would be suspicious if he did. There are no general battles within the community, and if there are Palestinian political organizations, they are not effective, especially Fateh and Hamas. Also, the Palestinian Embassy can’t be challenged, for all people have interests with it. Abu Mazen’s letter was a great help when Fateh tried to give a negative picture about the project by distributing articles attacking the project, hence indirectly adopting this attitude with [initial] coordination from the Ambassador. And Abu Mazen’s letter helped as I said. Hamas did not oppose nor take a negative attitude. The only precaution was the organizations; people dislike the idea of the PLO’s alternative, they still think of it as a sacred organization, but there were no demands to activate it. (Moderator, Yemen)

The most important difficulties that we faced while trying to hold the project meetings was the fear felt by the members of the Palestinian community in Sudan on the issue of resettlement. I think that this fear pervaded in all reservations. They were wondering whether this project aims to create an alternative for the Right of Return and promote resettlement attempts or is it promoting the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their country and properties.

The second difficulty that we faced is the factional structures which dominate the Palestinian community in Sudan. This was a problem for us because there was no real balance between the political organizations. In the past, Fateh movement was dominant among the Palestinian community, but in the last seven years this dominance turned in favor of Hamas and the Islamic trend in general.

Therefore, the imbalance between the Palestinian political powers among the Palestinian community was a big problem for us. Civitas team, because all the civic structures of the Palestinian community are affiliated to one political trend, which is Hamas. The weak influence of the Palestinian Embassy among the Palestinian community was also a problem, because the Embassy can’t organize the community. Rather, the Palestinian community for the past five years has felt disgust for the Palestinian Embassy. Some people promised to attend, but they didn’t, and some promised to bring their wives, but they didn’t. They lack political motivation within themselves and they are frustrated because of the embassy’s attitude towards them; it doesn’t offer them services, nor fulfill their demands. (Moderator, Sudan)

The price that the host or organizer of such an activity pays is criticisms and articles about him. But it is worth it, for he has a chance to meet the good people and feel that he is a Palestinian among others who think about Palestinian concerns, and who are willing to do anything for the Palestinian cause. The reason that prevented people to attend the meeting in large numbers is a clash of activities on that day. We felt that there should have been a committee to coordinate the work of the effective institutions and committees, but our brothers don’t participate in them. There are fourteen institutions that meet every month to perform activities. Second, the Islamists performed an activity [that day] and attracted many Palestinians and Arabs. Third, there was an administrative fault, for we were supposed to, as hosts, dedicate a special area for the kids to enable women to come with their children and participate. Fourth, the Palestinian community members lack the notion of participation. They loved the idea, but they didn’t visualize how important their role is in sharing their ideas and communication mechanisms with the Palestinians in Al-Shatat. Fifth, there are at least 40 thousand Palestinians distributed in three categories, part of them came in the 1970s, and most of those were students and are now part of the British social structure, and another part are from the camps; and there are five thousand from Lebanon, but they face residency and documentation problems, so it is hard for them to be a part of any activity, although it is not impossible. The cultural background played an important role, as well, for they didn’t realize the importance of being there. They may be an audience but not effective participants in the activity. (Moderator, United Kingdom)

b. Methods taken to Overcome Challenges

Finally, I can say that one of the most important reasons for the project’s success is not only holding meetings and workshops, but also to work according [to project principles]. We were working on another project, which is an instructive and educational conference for the Palestinians in Lebanon. We used the methodology and the mechanisms of the project to prepare the instructive and educational conference; we were moving the expertise and the method towards this direction. Connection between the two projects was as a factor in their success. (Moderator, Lebanon)
First, we held meetings for Palestinians in the cities of Frankfurt, Hamburg, Munich and Stuttgart. After these meetings, we settled in Berlin, and the first meeting afterwards was with the women, because the Palestinian woman represents half of society, and should have an effective role. This meeting was indeed bigger than the small meetings; it was organized by the centre of Arab women in Berlin. Then we held a meeting for the youth, and then we moved to the Palestinian community to take their opinions about this issue. The Palestinian community at first welcomed the project, and the Project Coordinator was there, and they were willing to participate. But when he left, they were told to stop their participation. The Palestinian community here is coloured with all the Palestinian factions. Some of them said that they will support it, and others refused to do that for reasons that everyone talked about. But we continued to invite them. Those who supported it came to the meetings, and those who were against it started to negatively talk about it. What I want to say is that this project is a new experience, and we don’t blame people for taking this attitude, for they are not used to participating in such projects and in such democracy. They demand democracy but they don’t correctly implement it in the Palestinian institutions, especially after Oslo. We all know that in Europe there are no longer any Palestinian institutions. The only existing institution is the Palestinian community, and we all know that these Palestinian communities were built on the debris of Palestinian institutions. Our first meeting was with women, and the second was with the youth, then we moved to the other cities and to Frankfurt, Stuttgart, and Munich. The response was good; I don’t want to say encouraging, because people did not know about the project. You need to give people information about the project and its goals. Yet people, especially neutral persons, didn’t have enough information. I don’t want to exaggerate and say that we can reach all people, but we managed to reach some people in Germany. Germany is a very big country, and it has too many people, and it is impossible to reach them all and tell them all the important details that concern every Palestinian person, especially the issue of democratizing Palestinian society and the meaning of the structures that the project is talking about, and this is a problem. Of course, those who opposed the project used the issues of the Right of Return and the PLO to convince people to oppose it, but they couldn’t do that. (Moderator, Germany)

c. Participatory Practices

I really like the idea of civic structures so much. A meeting for the teachers union [General Union of Palestinian Teachers] was held, and this is the only union that held a conference where a preliminary committee was registered for the Palestinian community, and it will now be registered in the country and will establish its internal organization. The community elections are supposed to be conducted near the end of October. The only problem we have in this project is that if Fateh is with it, Hamas would not participate, and vice versa. Also, we couldn’t avoid the problem of custodianship in Yemen; having one of the parties means that the country agrees on the project. (Moderator, Yemen)

d. Creating Public Space

As for the main conclusions related to needs, each camp has different needs in every region. The camps in the south focused on security concerns, and on communication with the surrounding Lebanese areas, because it is near to Israel. There is also fear of expected blockades. The camps in the north were interested in democratic needs, and reforming the leading entities in these camps. The needs of the Beirut camps focused on the health, environmental, and pressing economic needs. Consequently, priorities are different...
3. Assessing the Project as a Mechanism and its Results
d. Creating Public Space

Everyone agreed that they all need a way to develop democratic work in every aspect of the life of the Palestinians in the refugee camps, whether on the political, social or other level. This was very exceptional, and people were very grateful, because they said that this is the first time that they ever came to speak and demand instead of following orders! This shift was exceptional in all the meetings and workshops. (Moderator, Lebanon)

Still we will continue to work boldly to complete this project, because so many people supported it, and because it is the first time we have suggested a project to the political powers in Syria. Also because people are starting to talk and discuss, which is something that was frozen for some time. A lot of controversial issues on the national scene started to find a way to be discussed. (Moderator, Syria)

We liked the project because it will help the Palestinian community to come together and present their problems, needs, and priorities. This was necessary for the Palestinian areas in Denmark. Something had to be done to connect them together. We suffer from a big flaw in this area. We have people in universities and in activities, and we have many prominent figures active in Danish society and among the Palestinian community, but unfortunately we don’t have communication between each other. That’s why I felt that this project has satisfied one of my personal needs. When the project was first presented to me, I said that we have been demanding this for a long time, and that it is necessary for the community. (Moderator, Denmark)

For us who live in Britain, the timing of the project was perfect, for we badly needed this project in this time when the general Palestinian situation is so torn and lost. Therefore the project helped define things, and people were very interested and they enjoyed the project and participating in it. (Moderator, United Kingdom)
Annexe A

List of meetings
LIST OF MEETINGS

This is a partial list of meetings held through the duration of the Civitas project. Numerous preparatory meetings were held throughout Europe, the Middle East and North America that go unrecorded here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>City/Town/Camp</th>
<th>Type of meeting</th>
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<td>LONDON</td>
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### List of Meetings

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- **Sydney**
  - Syndicate: Students
  - August 15, 2005
- **Melbourne**
  - Syndicate: Students
  - August 24, 2005

#### PALESTINE

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<td>Ramallah region (Am’ari Camp)</td>
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<td>Bethlehem region (Badil Centre)</td>
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<td>Nazareth and Unrecognized Villages</td>
<td>Preparatory Meetings</td>
<td>Throughout 2005</td>
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Annexe B

Documents Distributed During Meetings
DOCUMENT I

Project Description
Civitas

Foundations for Participation: Civic Structures for the Palestinian Refugee Camps and Exile Communities.
Nuffield College, Oxford University

Aims
This collective research project, based at the University of Oxford, will assess how Palestinian refugee communities living in exile in the Middle East, Europe, and further afield can build civic structures and mechanisms to enable better communication with their national representative and institutions, the humanitarian agencies that serve them, and other refugee communities, both inside and outside of Palestine. It is almost entirely a volunteer project, run by the communities themselves, and is facilitated by a very small team who are co-ordinating the activities in order to carry forward the voices of the refugees themselves to the relevant bodies, and bring the urgent needs of the Palestinian refugees to the attention of the international community. This project will restore the vital links between all tiers of Palestinian civil society, and reconnect them with their national representative the PLO and national institutions that have suffered fragmentation in the past decade.

The Background
This research project was initiated following a recommendation by the British Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry's Report on Refugees in March 2001 entitled “Right of Return”, which recommended its establishment. The Report was aimed at encouraging the British Government and the European Union to take a stronger position on the representation of refugee rights, and was written after British MPs from the Middle East Councils went to the region in 1999 and talked to the Palestinian refugees themselves about their own views. The Report made a number of recommendations, urging the EU to strengthen UNRWA, to make sure the refugees were included in any process that concerns them, and help reconnect them to their legitimate representation in ways they choose for themselves. The Civitas project was proposed and developed based on the findings of this Parliamentary Report (the project director of Civitas, Dr Karma Nabulsi, Research Fellow at Nuffield, was its Specialist Advisor and originator), and relies upon oral evidence given by the refugees themselves. This research project will use a similar methodology to the original Commission Report (now in its 3rd edition 2004), by being based upon the voices of the refugee communities themselves, albeit on a much more comprehensive and inclusive scale.

The Approach
This project gives the Palestinian refugee and exile communities the chance to specify the structures and mechanisms for communication with concerned parties and identify their own priorities. This initiative does not seek to limit or specify the structures, mechanisms, and priorities articulated by the refugees. It provides a practical service to those communities, through which members of those communities can define their own needs, in their own voices. The task of the project team is to bring those voices forward. The project is based on the belief that opinion polls and surveys are not the most authentic way to discover the real needs and choices of Palestinian refugees. Participatory involvement where people are allowed to speak for themselves is a more valuable and trustworthy methodology. The Civitas project will run over the next 10 months until the summer of 2005, and will establish the precise types of channels needed by Palestinian refugees and exile communities outside the West Bank and Gaza in order that they might participate effectively, and contribute democratically, to the shaping of their future. When the project ends in August 2005 and the opinions, expectations and needs are gathered together into a Report, these findings will be brought to their national representative and its institutions, to the international community, as well as all concerned parties and international institutions in order to present the needs of the refugees to relevant bodies.

Millions of Palestinians across several generations live in refugee camps and exile communities outside of the West Bank and Gaza. Under the political
arrangements of the mid 1990s, these communities were excluded from the elections that took place inside the West Bank and Gaza, as well as from playing a part in the establishment of civic and institutional structures, all of which were largely funded by the European Union. The role of the refugees was left to be determined in ‘final status’ negotiations, which in the end never took place. The refugees outside the West Bank and Gaza have, so far, been systematically excluded from all political and civic aspects of both the state-building process and the civic society of which they are a part.

The Structure of the Project
The first crucial step - over July, August, September, and October 2004 – has been the establishment of a database map to gather information about the size, location, and structure of Palestinian communities across the world who will participate in making their voices heard, in order to better facilitate the needs assessment process. During the debates each community will run their own needs-assessment exercise through public meetings and workshops, where they will determine for themselves which structures and mechanisms they would like in order to engage more effectively with their political leaders, the host countries, other agencies, and other Palestinian refugee communities — for example by regular newsletters, delegations, monthly meetings, visits, organisations, and other means of communication, and thus ensure a more democratic involvement. These structures will be decided by series of publicly convened debates, each lasting two to three weeks, and will run within a period of three months within the communities and refugee camps, between March and May 2005.

The overall purpose of these civic structures and processes is to facilitate the involvement of Palestinian refugees and exile communities in the main issues that concern them. This project creates the steps required for an inclusion of the refugee voices in the decision making process according to democratic models of participation and consultation. By asking the refugee communities to design their own civic structures, mechanisms, and processes, this project conforms to best democratic practice, and will be run by the communities involved through popular participation. We hope that this project will provide the Palestinian refugee communities with the practical means in which to address, in a positive and constructive form, their rights and needs.

Key Questions for the Refugee Communities
The project takes into consideration that Palestinian refugee communities across the Arab world and further afield have extremely different conditions, expectations, and priorities. This project is based on the premise that it is the refugees themselves who are the best experts on what their needs are, not outside experts.

The needs and priorities of the refugee camps and exile communities will be established by introducing four questions on civic structures and processes which will be discussed by them, as communities. These questions will be disseminated to all communities between November 2004 and February 2005, and then debated between March and May 2005 through a series of public meetings and workshops.

1) As a refugee community, what structures and channels of communication would you like in order to communicate with the following bodies:
   i) Your national representative.
   ii) The host country where you currently reside.
   iii) Humanitarian agencies and other international institutions that provide services.
   iv) Other Palestinian refugee communities, including those inside Palestine
   v) Structures inside your own refugee community?

2) As a refugee community what are the civic structures and mechanisms you currently use to communicate with these various bodies?

3) What are the civic, legal, social, economic, and political issues that you would like to raise with these bodies?
4) As a community, what are your most urgent needs and priorities while you are refugees?

The small Civitas team will ensure the dissemination of the questions to the refugee communities. This will be done through the delegates and local partners, associations and institutions, and through other means, such as electronic email, website, and ordinary post. There will be a series of consultations and preparations to be convened by those organising the discussions on the ground, and the Civitas team will do everything to facilitate and assist these preparations. The discussions in the camps will be enacted through a variety of public events: meetings, discussion groups, distribution of the questions throughout community centres, and in areas of common association. These will rely largely upon grass-roots methods of debate and communication particular to each community, although some more formal meetings will be arranged at the beginning and the end of the two week long process in order to set out the questions, and at the end in order to record and transcribe the answers. This is a voluntary exercise, will be run by the communities for the communities themselves, and is inclusive of all strands of Palestinian political and civic society. All measures will be taken to ensure inclusivity of the political, social, and civic spectrum of Palestinian life.

Results
The results of the debates will be gathered together and then turned into two reports. The first report details the types of structures and mechanisms decided by the refugees, and presents the communities needs and priorities as they stated them. It will demonstrate how the project was carried out, and the discussions that went into choosing the structures and mechanisms needed, and the priorities of the communities. It will show the methods used to ensure inclusivity of all sectors of society, and the political and geographical challenges that were faced. This report will be for the benefit of the Palestinian communities themselves, their national representative the PLO and its institutions, for the wider international donor community and agencies, and the countries that host them. The second report will be written specifically for the international donor community in order to encourage the creation of the recommended civic structures and process at the end of this 18 month project, and bring the precise needs of the various communities to the attention of the relevant bodies.

The Future of the Project
Phase two establishes the necessary channels of communication for the Palestinian refugee communities outside of the West Bank and Gaza, in the host countries of Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, the Arab world, and in the large refugee and exile communities elsewhere, such as Europe and Latin America. The international donor community will be engaged in the project at the end of Phase One for the purposes of providing the funding for the structures recommended by the two reports for the refugee communities. The project’s team will lobby the international community in order to obtain the specified structures and mechanisms that were requested by the Palestinian refugee communities, but can not guarantee these can be secured.

The most important feature of this project is that it has no means or ambition to limit or specify the type of structures for the refugees. It is left entirely to them to discuss and determine what their needs are. We hope that this project can for the first time reach all of the refugee communities in the camps and exile communities outside of the West Bank and Gaza – over half the entire population of the Palestinians – and begin to link them together by a process of participatory deliberation within the Palestinian framework. It will be entirely democratic, and let the refugees speak for themselves about the issues and needs that most concern them. They can begin to participate more fully in their own future in ways that they determine for themselves, contribute to their common national goals, and provide assistance and support while they are engaged in this work.

Contact
For information about the project, please contact the Project Director, Dr Karma Nabulsi at director.civitas@nuffield.ox.ac.uk, or the Project Team and the Project Coordinator Dr Sufyan Alissa at office.civitas@nuffield.ox.ac.uk. The website www.civitas-online.org is interactive in Arabic and English.
DOCUMENT 2

PRINCIPLES AND PURPOSES OF THE CIVITAS PROJECT

The Civitas project is at an advanced stage as Palestinian refugees in large numbers have participated in series of meetings in the Arab world, Europe and further afield during the past months thanks to the hard work on the ground of Palestinian activists who serve in their communities. In these debates in many countries, Palestinian refugees have publicly raised the key issues of concern in a democratic fashion, foremost of which is the primacy and centrality of the right of return, and that the PLO is their sole legitimate representative. Further, they recommend methods and channels to improve the advancement of their rights and needs, as well as connections with their national leadership, international bodies, and other refugee communities, inside and outside of Palestine.

As many hundreds of Palestinians have been, and still are, working and participating in this project on the ground, and see it as an important tool to advance their rights and that of their people by raising their voices everywhere, the Civitas project would like to reaffirm and highlight the following principles of the project:

1. The Civitas project is based entirely on the central principle that the Palestine Liberation Organisation is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The project description says this clearly in written form, and has said this from its very beginning. The Civitas project reaffirms that this project is to strengthen the PLO, not suggest alternatives to it.

2. All of the international legal rights of the Palestinian people are affirmed through this project, by the work and in the outcomes of this project, and these basic rights are not contested in this project. The project aims to incorporate all of the rights of the Palestinian people. The sole purpose of this project is to affirm the rights of the people through the voices of the people speaking for themselves in public and open debate. Foremost of all these inalienable rights is the Palestinian refugees' right of return, as enshrined in UN General Assembly Resolution 194 of 1948.

This project goes further; as it also affirms all of the rights of the Palestinian people wherever they are: their right to self determination, their social, economic, and political rights, as expressed through the UN Declaration of Human Rights, countless UN security council and General Assembly Resolutions, as well as by the national will of the Palestinian people as expressed through their sole legitimate representative the PLO. This project will enhance the struggle for these rights.

3. This project provides a service to the refugee and exile communities all over the world wherever they are: in the Arab world, Europe and America, by providing facilitation to them so that they may raise their rights and their needs as refugees to the international community through a true and accurate record of their voices, as expressed in public meetings. The purpose of this project is to also bring these rights and needs to the attention of the international community, so that the international community can take up their responsibilities to the Palestinian people and the Palestinian refugees under international law. It is also a means to strengthen connections between refugee communities, inside and outside of Palestine.

4. This project is not an institution, party, faction, or NGO. Civitas is purely a facilitation service which has a limited mandate and limited time period, and relies entirely on the recommendations made by existing associations, activists, and ordinary people on the ground, raised through open discussion. These recommendations are accurately reflected through recorded transcription, and provide a platform to bring the rights and issues that concern Palestinians wherever they are to the urgent attention of the international community and other relevant bodies.
5. The basic principle of this project is to strengthen and enhance all existing institutions and associations on the ground which serve Palestinian refugee and exile communities, providing them with additional platforms and ways to connect to each other. It does not aim to replace existing grass-roots associations and other channels and structures that serve Palestinian civic and political society. The project itself is run by community activists, both in the right of return movement, and in other associational bodies.

6. This project asks Palestinians to suggest for themselves whether they need extra channels of communication to the ones they currently have. This question as a result of the refugees' own request, given the serious fragmentation in exile for decades. It is based upon the “Right of Return Report” of 2001 which was issued by the British Joint Parliamentary Middle East Councils Commission of Enquiry, after their visit to the Palestinian refugee camps and communities in Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon (the details of the report can be found on the project’s website). In it, the refugees recommended enhancing channels of communication with the bodies that represent and serve them, especially the PLO, the host countries, and the humanitarian agencies. It is up to the communities to voice their needs and assert their rights. In many of the Palestinian refugee communities, such as in Iraq, channels of communication have weakened and new ones are needed. In the discussions there, all refugees recommended the creation of channels of communication to the PLO and humanitarian agencies with great urgency.

7. The project extends to Palestinian refugee and exile communities outside of Palestine in around 25 countries, whatever their legal or civil status. The project seeks to empower the ongoing work of grass-roots Palestinian associations to strengthen the connection between refugee communities outside Palestine, and those within Palestine. Based on their own recommendations, it is for these communities, both inside and outside of Palestine, to decide on the ways to continue strengthening the connections themselves.

For further information about the project and the progress of the debates, all documentation can be found on the Civitas website www.cicitias-online.org
DOCUMENT 3

Existing channels of communication in Palestinian refugee and exile communities

This is a brief overview of civic structures that already exist in Palestinian refugee and exile communities in order to help the moderators and participants in the open debates to think about the channels of communication that serve their community. The desire may be to revive or strengthen existing structures - especially in countries where there are active Palestinian associations and unions - while in other areas these structures have broken down, become inactive, or have never existed, as Palestinian refugee communities move and change. Channels and structures may exist to communicate with certain bodies and institutes, and not to others.

To assist the discussions, below you will find examples which are already serving Palestinian refugee and exile communities in different ways. These examples are not recommendations, but illustrations from a wide range of existing structures in Palestinian refugee and exile communities in order to assist deliberations. Some of these examples might not be possible, practical, or desirable due to the local political, geographic and resource constraints of various communities. These examples provide basic information on the role and purpose of different structures, and provide a tool for discussion in the debates.

Examples of civic structures provided in this guide are divided into the following categories:

1. Delegations.
2. Committees and Unions.
3. Twinning and Linking.
4. Regular meetings and Conventions.
5. Magazines, newsletters, websites, email lists & e-newsletters
6. Activities and commemorative events.
7. Spaces for the community: centres and offices.

The civic structures in question relate to the establishment of links to the following bodies:

i. Your national representative.
ii. The host country where you currently reside.
iii. Humanitarian agencies and other international institutions that provide services.
iv. Other Palestinian refugee communities, including those inside Palestine.
v. Structures inside your own refugee community.
1. Delegations

Delegations are made up of community members in order to carry the will of that community forward in a formal or informal manner, on a single issue or on a variety of issues. Delegations can be mandated to reflect particular views, decisions or needs, as expressed by that community or a sector of that community, to national representatives, host countries, humanitarian agencies, and other bodies or communities that need to be reached. Delegations can be mandated in a variety of ways: through elections, volunteering, specialisation or through a profession that is relevant to the delegation in question.

For example, students, doctors, lawyers, women, human rights activists who may be serving legal, health, or other civic concerns of the community may form delegations to raise issues with the various bodies that need to be reached on a national and international level. Delegations are often formed for one meeting or purpose and dissolve as soon as the task is achieved.

2. Committees and Unions

Committees can be formed for single events, such as to prepare for an event or a large meeting, or it can be set up to serve on a more lasting basis. Committees exist in Palestinian refugee communities to provide a range of services, such as legal committees, media committees, political and civic rights committees, to work on twinning with other communities, or to raise money for students and for Palestinians in need, inside and outside of Palestine. In refugee camps inside Palestine and in exile there are camp committees - such as the popular committees, regional committees, local committees and specialized committees (economic, cultural, educational, social, financial, etc.) - that meet for a number of purposes, on a broad range of concerns. In some places these are elected and in others they are appointed.

Unions form a long tradition in Palestinian political life, and some were established before the creation of the PLO, which is itself partly composed of labour unions, student unions, teachers' unions, women's unions, workers' unions, doctors' unions, engineers' unions, etc. However, in many countries unions have become inactive, and in others unions have never been formed. In some places unions have stopped functioning simply due to insufficient numbers - for example when there is no longer a strong student population in a host country for a variety of reasons, GUUPS, the General Union of Palestinian Students, is no longer active. Unions can provide a central forum to regularly assist Palestinian civic society in a large variety of ways: social welfare, professional, political platforms and declarations, advocacy work, and serving the needs and reflecting the views of their members.

3. Twinning and Linking

Twinning can be established between refugee communities all over the world, to the refugee camps inside Palestine and to refugee communities in the Arab world and farther afield – in Europe, North America, Latin America. Twinning provides support and solidarity, and a networking of activities, including sharing of ideas and resources. Through twinning, regular associations can be developed and maintained between schools, hospitals, unions, youth summer camps, and other activities. As such, refugee and exile communities can support one another in a variety of ways: through fundraising, visits, donation of books and materials, inviting students and professionals, inviting public speakers, sharing resources to raise awareness on issues of concern, and through other means. Some European cities are twinned with Palestinian towns - such as Glasgow in Scotland to Nablus. But there are only a few towns linked to refugee communities - such as Oxford City in the United Kingdom with El-Amari refugee camp in Ramallah - or between the Palestinian refugee and exile communities themselves, inside and outside the refugee camps.

Linking is a more informal network which connects several refugee communities on certain issues common to them all, such as civic and political rights. Linking can also provide information and news on events, campaigns and projects to the communities and help them build strong coalitions. For instance, inside Palestine, the refugee camp committees and other refugee camp associations regularly organise platforms, declarations, and position papers on issues of common concern.
4. Regular meetings and Conventions
A number of community members and associations meet regularly, on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. Many associations possess a set of rules about elections for the board of the association, the time-length of such posts, and other organisational agreements. There are charters for these various exile community associations, with laws and by-laws, which can be made available to examine different examples of organisational development that might be suitable. Regular meetings are where discussions and debates occur; information is shared, decisions are made and actions are planned. Such regular Palestinian association meetings are predominant in Europe, with most European countries having elected boards, and which are run on formal or informal systems of organisation. Events are planned at such meetings, and regular speakers and guests are invited. Other types of meetings are held by different Palestinian groups within the community – youth, support, solidarity organisations, and organisations advocating for Palestine and Palestinian refugee rights. As a channel of communication, regular meetings also provide a way to receive various community representatives as well as national and international institutional representatives to speak and listen to the communities on a range of issues that concern them.

Conventions and conferences - some of which are organised on an annual basis on specific or general issues - are formal meetings that bring together members, representatives, or delegates, as well as members of communities, unions, institutions and associations for consultation or discussion, to exchange views, and in some cases take decisions on issues of common concern to the community as a whole, which could be expressed in the form of closing declarations or resolutions.

5. Magazines, newsletters, websites, email lists and email newsletters
Print material as a medium of communication: Magazines and Newsletters
Palestinian associations around the world use print material in the form of newsletters and magazines as a central method of communication and outreach, both within their community and outside it. Many are primarily used as a service within their community and not for communicating directly with humanitarian agencies, national representatives, host countries, or other refugee communities, although some magazines cover several countries, like in Latin America. Magazines and newsletters are used for one or all of the following objectives:
- To publicize upcoming community events and activities and to update the community on past activities and events.
- To inform community members of services and activities that may assist them.
- To build bridges and network with other communities in the same country or abroad by informing the local community of activities and services provided in other regions.
- To provide a public space for members, unions, and other groups in the community.
- To raise awareness on issues of concern (both locally in the host country and internationally), regarding the Palestinian cause and any social, political and economic issues.
- To raise awareness of members of the local Palestinian community about the situation of their own community.

One of the advantages of using print material as a mechanism of communication is that it is easier to read, and to manage and maintain compared to internet-based material. It also provides a more effective way of measuring the extent of its reach by assessing the distribution of the print material.

Electronic mediums of communication: Website, Email lists & E-newsletters
Sectors of the Palestinian refugee communities utilize the internet vary extensively in the form of websites, email lists and email newsletters (or E-newsletters). Email lists are lists on which people can subscribe in order to receive regular emails from a specific group or on a wide-variety of issues; or as a space for active members to discuss issues and organise events, activities and campaigns. E-Newsletters are web-based newsletters sent in the form of emails and formatted in a similar fashion as print magazines or newsletters. Many of the communities use these means more as a way to mobilise inside their community than to communicate directly with particular bodies or institutions.
Annexe B

Websites, Email lists and E-Newsletters are used for similar objectives to printed newsletters and magazines with the added advantage of ease of dissemination, without having to deal with the burdens attached to costs of printing and distribution. The drawback of these internet-based mechanisms, however, is the lack of human interaction, and the fact that in most countries only a small section of the communities use the internet on a regular basis, as the majority has limited access. Some advanced Websites may also be used as an interactive web-based mean of providing services to communities, towns, villages and camps.

6. Activities and commemorative events

Activities and commemorative events are commonly used in Palestinian refugee and exile communities as occasions to raise awareness of the Palestinian issue in the host country, advocate for issues of concern, bring community members together, network and build solidarity with other communities and associations. Such activities and commemorative events provide opportunities of communicating with national representatives, host countries, humanitarian agencies, and other refugee communities.

There are a wide variety of activities that take place in Palestinian refugee and exile communities around the world, such as: public meetings, cultural performances, vigils, demonstrations, panel discussions, guest speakers, etc. Such activities held on commemorative dates - such as Nakba day, commemoration of the Sabra and Shatila massacres, Declaration of Independence, the Deir Yassin massacre, Land Day, etc. - regularly take place all over the world where there are Palestinians in exile.

7. Creating a space for the community: centres and offices

Centres and offices for the Palestinian refugee and exile communities provide a public space for members, unions, and other groups in the community where meetings are held, activities are organised, social, cultural, and political programs and services are provided and a sense of unity for community members given. Additionally, maintaining a space provides a point of reference for community members and is an effective way to direct new members to the community at large. For example, in Europe and North America, many such centres provide a space, workshops, services and programs, which serve the local Palestinian community. In the refugee camps in the Middle East, centres and offices - such as youth centres, women's centres, union offices, NGO offices, etc. - provide a space, services and programs, for specific sectors of the Palestinian refugee community.


Radio/TV programs and stations are an effective mean for reaching out to the community and the general public, publicize activities and events, raise awareness on a wide variety of issues, advocate for issues of concern, as well as indirectly communicate with other refugee communities. In organizing and running Radio/TV programs and stations, the Palestinian refugee and exile communities bring together many sectors of their communities by creating a regular space for promoting discussion and debate within their own community and in the public arena on issues of concern to them. For example, in certain Arab countries, the Palestinian refugee communities have been able to run, at varying degrees in the past decades, their own Radio/TV programs as a way to reach out to their community and the public at large, and in some cases, have been able to start their own Radio or TV station. Some Palestinian exile communities in Europe and North America have their own regular weekly program on a specific radio station or TV station, generally on community-run or alternative radio and TV outlets.

Palestinian refugee and exile communities also often utilize existing Radio/TV programs and stations to get media coverage on issues that concern them as a mean of informing and raising the awareness of their own community and the public at large. This is usually done by organizing press conferences and/or sending press releases to the mainstream and alternative media programs and stations. Press releases and press conferences also create a space for the different Palestinian refugee and exile communities to come together and express their common concerns, and to invite guests and guest speakers for discussion programs.
DOCUMENT 4

Guidelines for Running the Debates:

Based on the Recommendation of Participants in Cyprus Consultation Meeting

AIMS
The objective of the debates is to establish how Palestinian refugee communities living in exile in the Middle East, Europe and further afield can build civic structures and mechanisms to enable better communication with their national representative the PLO, refugee communities, and agencies that serve their needs. These structures will be decided by a series of publicly convened debates run over a period of two months within the large Palestinian exile communities and refugee camps. Their needs and priorities will be determined by introducing four questions on civic structures and processes which will be discussed by them. These questions will be disseminated to all communities between November 2004 and February 2005, and then debated between March and May 2005 through a series of public meetings and workshops (in Latin America these will be done in June 2005).

1) As a refugee community, what structures and channels of communication would you like in order to communicate with the following bodies?
   i. Your national representative.
   ii. The host country where you currently reside.
   iii. Humanitarian agencies and other international institutions that provide services.
   iv. Other Palestinian refugee communities, including those inside Palestine.
   v. Structures inside your own refugee community?

2) As a refugee community what are the civic structures and mechanisms you currently use to communicate with these various bodies?

3) What are the civic, legal, social, economic, and political issues that you would like to raise with these bodies?

4) As a community, what are your most urgent needs and priorities while you are refugees?

• The small Civitas team will ensure the dissemination of the questions to the communities. This will be done through the facilitators, association heads, and refugee camp community leaders that attended the Cyprus meeting, through the web, email, and ordinary post.

• The deliberations in the camps and exile communities will be enacted through a variety of public events: meetings, syndicated or focus groups and workshops, and the distribution of these questions and information about the project throughout community centres and areas of common association.

Given the fact that the Palestinian refugee communities across the Arab world and further afield have extremely different conditions, expectations, and priorities, two models for running the debates have been recommended by the participants at the Cyprus consultation meeting held in November 2004: the “Maximum model” and the “Minimum model”. The Maximum model is the structure of debates and workshops that have been designed to be most participatory. It provides every means to be inclusive of all sectors and strands of the refugee community before addressing certain geographic and political challenges. The Minimum model takes into consideration these factors and challenges, and highlights the most important features of the debates that need to be used to obtain consistency in procedures and responses from the refugees’ voices.
MAXIMUM MODEL
In the absence of political and geographical constraints in the communities, the maxim model should ideally be used during the debate. This constitutes of a set of two public meetings and a minimum of 3 syndicate or focus group meetings or workshops for each debate held. These set of meetings are to be run within a period of two to three weeks (in some communities it might need more than two or three weeks – the time over which the entire process is held is eight weeks at the outside).

The case of Lebanon can serve to explain the type and number of meetings needed for the debate within the maximum model. In general the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon are concentrated in four main areas: the South, North, Beqa’ and Beirut areas. In every area a set of meetings will be held over the period of three weeks in March and April 2005.

• It is important to announce these meetings: the aims, the time, and the place where they will be held, and ensure this information is disseminated and promoted. This information will also need to be repeated at the end of each of the syndicate meetings

• The first should be a public meeting made up of a broad cross-section of refugees, to include workers and unemployed, those with political affiliations and those without, educated and non-educated, youth, women, and the elderly. The number of participants in this meeting should be unlimited, and as inclusive as possible.

• Following the public meeting, three to four syndicate meetings should be held. The number of participants in each meeting should be at least 25 people. The purpose of these are to explain, discuss, and talk through the four types of questions and ensure people have a good understanding of the possibilities of choice for structures. The meetings should be comprised of the following categories:-
  - Meeting number 1 is for women. A suitable time should be chosen to make sure that women are able to attend. For example, in some areas morning meetings might be better for women than an afternoon or evening meeting.
  - Meeting number 2 is for young people, especially students.
  - Meeting number 3 is for political elites, activists, and intellectuals. This includes people from popular committees, political parties, unions, clubs, refugee activists and representatives of institutions that serve the people in the camp.
  - Meeting number 4 is a workshop for all interested to discuss the questions and choices before the community.

• Following the syndicate meeting, another public meeting should be held for all participants in order to record their answers.
  - At this meeting people will already have had the chance to think about the issues discussed and questions asked at the first meeting. They will have articulated their views, needs and expectations and recommended possible structures. They will have had a chance to read literature about the project and structures of communication that might suit their community, and have been able to discuss these with each other and the facilitators of the project.
  - The number of participants at this final meeting should be unlimited. It should be taken into consideration that the number of participants who will attend this meeting might be higher or less than the first one. It might be the case that more people will know about the project or some of the people who have already attended but have not participated in the discussion or expressed their views in the first one will be more familiar with the project, and want to participate in the final one. Likewise, those that have put their views, ideas and recommendations to the syndicate meetings might not feel it important to attend the last meetings, as their views will be carried forward there.

MINIMUM MODEL
In the presence of certain political or geographical constraints in the community, a minimum model is to be applied. This model consists of a number of
syndicate or focus group meetings to be held in the communities. The number of the meetings is to be decided by the communities themselves in close coordination with the project team after discussing the challenges and ways to address them. It is important that these meetings include all strands of the society as in the maximum model. The number of participants at each meeting should be around 25 people. These meetings are also to be held within a period of two or three weeks - some communities might need more than two or three weeks. If there are political constraints in holding public meetings, then an adequate system of notification to the refugees are to be introduced so as to ensure maximum participation, and these guidelines will be devised in consultation with the project team and local conditions. It might be necessary to hold smaller sets of meetings in this case.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- All meetings (whether using the maximum or minimum) must be recorded with a simple cassette recorder. In addition, two note-takers should write the details of the debates in a very comprehensive way. There will be a form for them to use in order to organise the notes and the recommendations of the refugees.

- The tapes and notes must be sent directly after the meeting to the project team at Oxford.

- The capacity (size) and accessibility of the place where meetings will be held should be taken into consideration during the preparation for the meetings. They should be large enough to accommodate the expected number of participants and should be easily reached by the public.

- The handbook of the project description and a list of the questions should be available and distributed to the people before and during these meetings. The handbook of examples of existing structures of communication currently used by various Palestinian refugee communities across the world, and the handbook of examples of different types of structures and possibilities, should also be made available, to help the community think of recommendations that might suit their own needs.

- The moderators should promote, engage, and give equal chance to all the participants at the meetings, especially ordinary people, women, and youth.

- The project should be explained by the moderator in a very simple and clear way. Answers to the people's inquiries should also be made in a very patient, simple manner. Materials will be provided to assist the moderators in this task of moderating. Overhead slides, posters, and frequently asked question sheets (with answers) will be provided to all the moderators.

- The programme and timing of the meetings should be explained by the moderator at the beginning of the meeting.

- It is advisable that the duration of the meeting should not exceed 3 hours. However, this is subject to the moderator's assessment at every meeting.

- The meetings should be as inclusive and as democratic as possible. Therefore, the moderator should ensure ordinary people from a wide cross-section of the society – particularly at the public meetings – are attending, and more importantly, that they are given the chance to express their views and recommendations, and encouraged to do so.

PREPARING FOR THE DEBATES

- Preparations for the debates: Those facilitating the process of preparing the communities for the debates and moderating them will use an action plan they devise with the project team. They will be able to rely upon advice and experience of the moderators and plans being used in other regions and areas. In the weeks leading up to the debates, and during the debates themselves, the moderators and note-takers must keep careful notes of the issues that need
to be included in the final Report, to show the methods of inclusion that were used in every place, and the challenges to inclusion that were faced and how they were addressed.

1. How are the moderators engaging the community? Have they put ads in the local paper, an email list system, or other local means such as community events, and have they started to distribute the questions to various local institutions that are involved in Palestinian life? Have they approached all sectors of that society, especially Palestinian NGOs, unions, party leaders, institutional and charity heads, in order to ensure that the questions and ideas of the project are disseminated and understood before the first public meeting? Have they listened to community activists and other relevant people, and taken into account any concerns or ideas about the timings and place for the meetings, as well as explained the project to them? Have they engaged members of the community to think about ways to involve the different sectors of society to ensure inclusion of the Palestinian society as a whole?

2. During the debates the moderators and facilitators will need to keep a record of the ways in which the people were informed of the meetings, the numbers of people that attended, the practical and logistical challenges they had faced in getting attendance, and the ways that they promoted the meetings during the three week period from the first meeting to the last one.

3. If the meetings could be videoed this would add a unique historical record of the Palestinian refugee community, and would be welcomed by the project. However, the moderators need to take local concerns into account, and in certain countries consider voting for this procedure at the first public meeting, in order to ensure comfort and participation of the most people possible.
The Main Findings from the Refugees’ Testimony

The Commission of Enquiry asked the refugees several general questions as to how they viewed their past and their present situation, as well as what aspirations they had for a future settlement. We were particularly struck by several recurring themes, all of which emerged from the oral and written testimonies of the refugees themselves, and we would like to draw attention to them here. The examples given below are illustrative of views that were found throughout the trip.

The Commission finds these seven themes to be of some significance, since they were mentioned consistently by all of the refugees with whom we spoke. We believe this to have further relevance given the diffuse, difficult and diverse nature of the Palestinian refugees’ predicament. Physical locations, generational gaps, financial and social situations, and host relations in various Arab countries are all exceptionally dissimilar. Yet in spite of these variations, the following themes were constantly and consistently raised as central issues by all Palestinian refugees we met.

I. Core of the Conflict

The first common opinion voiced was the understanding that the issue of the refugees themselves was the core of the conflict between the Arabs and Israel. Evaluating the refugee issue as the most relevant and urgent may seem an obvious point to those directly victimised; however, the delegation feels that this simple fact has often been overlooked by those parties involved in resolving the conflict.

The manner in which this is understood by refugees is extremely important. As Muhammad Nawfal (Saffuría, north Palestine), from Ain al-Hilwa Refugee Camp, told us:

The major issue for our Palestinian people is the issue of refugees. It is more sacred than the issue of Jerusalem, and if the issue of the refugees’ return to their lands and properties of 1948 is not solved, the Palestinian issue is not solved; the Palestinian issue will never be solved. We are now addressing Palestinian representatives, Arab representatives and Arab countries, asking them not to manipulate the issue of the Palestinian refugees. There is no substitute for return to Palestine, neither compensation and staying here, nor resettlement. We refuse the whole issue of emigration as well. There is no substitute for return.

This understanding of refugees as the core of the conflict comes for reasons of the length of the problem, and because of its complexity. According to Bassam Naim (Yazur, Jaffa):
The issue of the refugees is significant because it is the only issue that started in consequence of the war of 1948, whereas the issue of Jerusalem started after the war of 1967. The issues of water, borders, etc., started after 1967. Since the issue of the refugees is the only one that started in consequence of 1948, it is the most complicated one and the one to insist on the most strongly...

Yet this view is not restricted to those who suffered directly as refugees. In our conversations with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza who were not themselves refugees, the same point was made continually. One such typical remark was made by Muhammad Jaradat:

I am the coordinator of this programme, specialising in fieldwork. I am not a refugee, and this is an important point. I believe 100% that the Palestine question is mainly a refugee question. If you look at the program of the Palestinian liberation movement, it was return, liberation, and then Jerusalem. This has not changed. Seventy two percent of the Palestinian people are refugees. And if you make peace, then according to democratic values and universal values you must make peace with the majority and not the minority. As a resident of Bethlehem or Hebron, it means that for me I cannot live in peace and security if my own people do not return and have their free choice as well as the international guarantee to return, for those who chose return.

II. Danger of Exclusion

All refugees, without exception, wanted to communicate directly with us the fact that they felt completely excluded from the peace process. They also wanted us to understand that a peaceful solution could only emerge with the inclusion of the refugee issue, as well as the refugees’ participation in some manner. Finally, they told us that unless the refugees’ concerns were incorporated into the process of decision-making on a final settlement, they were convinced that this agreement would not have the capacity to bring peace. These three distinct concerns were clearly articulated.

On exclusion from the peace process, Haifa Jamal told us in Beirut:

I don’t feel that it is a peace process. Myself, I am eager to live in peace. We hope to live in peace. But real peace. Not what is happening now. When we follow and listen to what they are discussing about our situation and our rights in the negotiations, we don’t consider this to be a peace process.

They were thus deeply suspicious about Oslo and the Camp David meetings that had taken place in July 2000. “I feel that this peace process has been enforced upon us,” said Hussein Qasem, also in Beirut. All the refugees we spoke to were unanimous about the implications of this exclusion from the peace process: no peace would be attainable without their legitimate concerns being addressed. In a Gaza refugee centre, Khamis al-Turk (Bir al-Sab’a) told us:

We, the people of Palestine, want to bring peace and security again into the world. However, there will be no peace without giving the sacred right of return to the people of Palestine.

This last comment was reiterated, in many formulations, by all those we met at the various refugee camps in the region.
III. Representativeness

There were several distinct aspects concerning the complex subject of representation. This issue is the most complicated of all, but it is also perhaps the most understudied and misunderstood part of Palestinian refugee life.

We learnt that over different sets of rights and concerns there were different responses to the question of representativeness. The Commission learnt that representation involves different understandings depending on the issue at hand: individual property rights, civil rights and collective rights as a people to self-determination. For the collective will and as to the rights of the Palestinian people as a people, the Commission was told without exception that their representative was the PLO. Khaled Mansur (Um al-Zaynat) put it quite simply, as did all Palestinians when this issue was raised:

As a Palestinian, I consider the PLO to be the only legitimate representative of the Palestinians and the leadership of our struggle to achieve the right of return. The strategy of the PLO is to push the international community and the United Nations to work for an implementation of the right of return through diplomatic and political channels.

Refugees repeatedly told us, however; that representation was needed at several levels, not just one: political, legal, individual and civil. However, all were explicit about the limits of national representation over individual rights. In Gaza, we were told that it was the refugees’ right to make decisions about their individual claims to their property. Abdullah Arabid (Hirbiya, Gaza) said:

My personal private rights state that nobody, whoever he is, is entitled to take a decision on my behalf. I am from the occupied village of Hirbiya. Nobody is entitled to sell, to let, to rent or to relinquish Hirbiya to anybody, on my behalf.

They all believed popular sovereignty and democracy was crucial to a representation over their rights, and that “no group has the right to challenge” the right of return. “Furthermore,” Arabid said, “we consider any bargain or concession concerning these national essentials, which were ratified by international law, to be treason. The main authority to decide on such issues is people themselves, not some individuals.”

The Commission notes that there was wide disparity between those who were fortunate in having active representation at a grassroots level in the camps, and places where there was no such adequate representation. Finally, the Commission noted that the groups able to make direct representations to their elected leadership were only those refugees in close physical proximity to them; those living in the Occupied Territories. Indeed the only group that the Commission met who mentioned petitioning the leadership were in Gaza. There was a deep concern amongst refugees in the Arab countries that they were not in a physical position or situation which would allow their voices to be heard by their chosen representatives, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and they were seeking for means to correct this. This problem had developed, in their eyes, as a result of a protracted period of dispossession and dislocation, which indeed they are still suffering at this time. This was reflected in the then current negotiations. Musa Abu Hashash of Fawwar Camp told us:

We as refugees feel that the right of return is underestimated against the issue of Jerusalem. This is what we feel when we listen to the media, and to the official visitors who come to the region. We feel that they will apply some bizarre solution that will disregard the right of return and all the Palestinian fundamentals, including the issue of Jerusalem. However, we are certain that they are going to disregard the right of return.
IV. Land and People

One of the features we learnt most quickly about the refugees was their direct and profound identification and attachment to land, and their self-identification with it as a people. This relationship was multi-tiered and multi-dimensional. The most obvious way it manifested itself was in how every Palestinian refugee we met introduced themselves to us as being from a specific village or locale. According to Dr. Adnan Shahada (Yasur, Gaza):

“For some of you, or for European logic in general, it is difficult to understand why some people have this strong attachment to a certain place. In Western culture, people move from one country to another, where they settle down and live their life. However, homeland has a great significance in Arab culture. It means belonging, self-esteem and history for the generations who live in that part of the earth.”

Many of the refugees know about the homes they lived in and have managed to visit them, and taken their children to see them. In Bethlehem, at Aida refugee camp, we met Isa Qaraq’a (al-Biq’a). He, like many of the refugees we met, came from a village that was nearby, in his case not 7km away:

“We went back to our villages one or two months ago. In one return visit to some Palestinian villages we met Israelis living in our houses, the houses of our fathers and grandfathers. We were shocked to discover that some Israelis still keep some belongings of our fathers and grandfathers. And they had to admit: “This is your house”. The features of the house were still as they were. In one of the houses there was still an amount of olive oil that was kept for more than 50 years in a well inside the house.”

We remarked on the number of refugees who had their property records with them. They also showed us their identity cards, and other documents some had thought to carry with them on what they had believed would be a short absence from their homes during the heat of the fighting, 52 years ago. Ismail Abu Hashash (Iraq al-Manshiya, Gaza) told us about the closeness to the land even now:

“There are five million Palestinian refugees in exile but not far from their land (the majority of them are living in countries neighbouring their homeland). They left and their dream was to go back when the war was over after two or three weeks. Yet a week became more than 50 years. More than 80% of Palestinians are still living in the region, a fact that speaks for itself. This is the biggest referendum confirming that their preference is the right of return.”

V. British Role, Israeli and International Responsibility

From the start of the Commission’s trip to the region, it quickly became apparent that being British had a special resonance amongst all refugees. In Lebanon, Jamal Khaddura (Suqmata, Acre) said:

“The main responsibility for our catastrophe lies with the British Mandate... I think that it is not difficult for you to understand the main root of Palestine’s problem... Ten years after Balfour’s promise in 1917, in 1927, the King sent a committee to go to Palestine to investigate the reasons for the disturbances there. The committee came to Palestine and met Arabs and Jews. They wrote a report on the main causes of the disturbances. So Britain knew what was happening in Palestine. You must convey our opinion that the British are responsible for the Palestinian Catastrophe. And you should call for another conference to help Palestinians to return to their homeland and live with Israelis peacefully.”
They would begin with something like this, as put by Isa al-Azza (Tal al-Safi, Hebron):

The first point I want to make concerns the concept of this committee, which is the investigation of facts, and about this committee being British. If Britain, after 52 years, is still forming committees to investigate the crime of the expulsion of a whole people from their country, then what is there to say?

They also had a very detailed knowledge and understanding of the historical role Britain had played in the lead-up to the creation of the refugees’ plight, even including specific dates of treaties, White Papers and Commissions of the Mandate Era. Al-Azza went on to say here:

I think if the world wants to investigate facts, then the world should be referred to the files of Britain; to the men who investigated facts in 1936, 1939, 1942 and 1945; to the White Book in Britain which Britain used to issue; to all committees that have been established in Britain; and to the round-table conferences that took place in London. They should be referred to the board of arbitration that was established between 1948 and 1950.

Thus we were seen to have both a special role and a special responsibility by Palestinian refugees; yet we were welcomed with a generosity of spirit considering the strength of feeling. Taysir Nasrallah (Qaqun) said to us:

Regardless of this revival of the Palestinian memory now in front of a British parliamentary delegation — about the tragedy which Britain created for the people of Palestine when it contributed effectively to what happened in that period — regardless of that, I would like to welcome this delegation, who came here in order to conduct an enquiry into Resolution 194.

Key to the subject of responsibility for refugees for their situation was the unqualified conviction that nothing of substance could be discussed, or negotiated, or agreed, before an essential step was taken by the State of Israel. This was a recognition of the right of return of Palestinian refugees, and of their responsibility in the creation of what is commonly referred to as the “Catastrophe.” This was expressed by virtually every Palestinian refugee group and individual met, from Nablus to Beirut to Damascus.

Isa Qaraq’a again:

Before we speak about compensation and things related, we speak of the right of return. We have to speak about it in an emotional way, and moreover we have to speak about it as part of the Palestinian identity and the Palestinian existence. There is the starting point. Do not try to wipe out our memory by pretending we are starting here only. We have gone through much pain and a long history.

Shaher Badawi of Balata camp said:

The first step is recognition of the right of return, by Israel and the international community, as the right of Palestinian refugees. When this is accomplished, then I can begin to look at the details, then it would not be a problem.
Ismail Abu Hashash said:

I would like to mention that acknowledging historical responsibility is an essential condition and starting point of this matter. The Israelis should admit what they have done, and the British should admit that they smoothed the way to this catastrophe.

However, the refugees also believed that, such was the international balance of power; the overall situation of the refugees’ rights and their future was not to be left to the parties to the conflict themselves, as their rights would be ignored. The refugees also expressed the belief that this was important since the responsibility for their situation was international in character. One said to us:

With regard to international credibility, we consider international law as our point of reference and we want to prove that the law is fair and to stop breaches of the law with respect to our problem. We need more active involvement from the world, particularly from the UK, as it was aware of all the issues before the occupation.

The framework for a viable solution had to be international in structure, an international body, which was based on a system of laws, and that there needed to be a number of states involved as well.

VI. UNRWA

There was a real fear amongst Palestinian refugees that the legitimate role of UNRWA as a basic defender of the minimal rights of refugees was being undermined. UNRWA’s identity was perceived to be threatened and its international legal character challenged by the current peace process, with no replacement as to its function on the horizon. Pressure of change to both its function and its role is seen by refugees as reflecting a receding commitment to the basic political, civil and social requirements of refugees. The mandate of UNRWA is understood by Palestinian refugees to cover merely part of their urgent problems, and it was well understood by the refugees we spoke to that this humanitarian relief organisation was not created to resolve the larger substantive political and civil issues of self-determination, sovereignty, or political and civil rights.

Ismail Abu Hashash told us:

First I want to mention that UNRWA was established on the basis of the legitimacy and the worthiness of the Palestinian refugees’ issue in the first place. The Palestinian refugees’ issue is a political reality and not only a humanitarian situation.

Others spoke to us of the changing role of UNRWA. Haifa Jamal said:

The international community established UNRWA to support the Palestinians with basic services. Now UNRWA has started to reduce these services. We are suffering more and more... since Oslo, all the European countries, all the donor countries, have reduced their contributions, and sometimes they don’t make their contributions at all. We are afraid now that UNRWA may leave.
Haifa Jamal went on to make another point that was often mentioned by refugees concerning UNRWA: its special place for refugees in the absence of any political resolution to their situation. “UNRWA doesn’t just mean the services we need, but UNRWA is also related to our right of return.” Thus the distinction between the humanitarian and limited aspect of UNRWA’s role and their larger political plight in no way diminishes its importance in refugees’ eyes. Indeed, given the lack of movement over these political rights, refugees saw UNRWA as having an increased symbolic importance.

Ismail Abu Hashash again:

“We insist on the continuation of UNRWA — not because we like UNRWA, but because it represents the recognition of the international community for the issue of the Palestinian refugees.”

VII. Cohesion and Consistency amongst Refugees Views.
Most remarkable was the cohesion and consistency amongst refugees. Given the prominence certain refugees (like those of Lebanon) had been given over others in both the media, among experts and by those involved in the Oslo peace process, as well as the wide diversity of situations Palestinians found themselves in, the Commission was surprised and impressed by the unity of views on almost every issue of note for the refugees. Certain positions that could be seen to divide the refugees, since they involved a possible enhancement of their personal interests over other groups of refugees, were confronted outright by the refugees themselves.

Refugees all saw this commitment extending from generation to generation:

Camps were called shelters, and refugees still call them shelters until the right of return is achieved. I am holding on to my homeland for which there is no substitute. This right is inherited, from one generation to another. Therefore, I teach my children the geography and history of Palestine, and encourage them continuously to visit their home village...The right of return is an individual and a collective right.

Everywhere we went, refugees shared the view that the right of return must apply to all refugees, no matter what their current physical or financial position, wherever they were. Now living in Ain al-Hilwa camp in Lebanon, Hassan Abu Ali Hassan (al-Khalisa, Safad), said:

A few months ago some Palestinians, people of Palestinian origin living in Canada, came to see what was happening on the border, in the south of Lebanon (Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000). This reflects the adherence of the Palestinians, wherever they exist, to their right of return to Palestine. The Palestinians are suffering since more than 50 years.

Further, the refugees all described their tragedy in the same way: it had a humanitarian dimension, but it was political in nature. They spoke of and understood themselves as a people, no matter where they were now living, and showed an intense solidarity with the Palestinian refugees elsewhere.
Khalid al-Azza:

The main principle is that all Palestinians want this resolution to be implemented; that is the resolution of the right of refugees to return and to compensation for the 52 years passed since they left their land, houses and factories.

Isa al-Azza added:

I would like to tell the British team here that the right of return is not a dream, we are not dreaming. It is a right which is held by 5.6 million Palestinians.

Commission Secretariat
www.Lmec.org.uk
Distributed by: Civitas
Foundations for Participation: Civic Structures for the Palestinian Refugee Camps and Exile Communities.
Nuffield College, University of Oxford
### ACTION PLAN FORM

<table>
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<tr>
<th>COUNTRY:</th>
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<tr>
<td>City/Town/Camp:</td>
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<td>Meeting # :</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting Type:</td>
<td>○ Public ○ Syndicate ○ Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a Syndicate or Focus Group: what will be the make-up of the meeting?</td>
<td>○ Women ○ Youth/Students ○ Ordinary Citizens ○ Prominent Individuals in Community ○ Other: ___________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting Date:</td>
<td>Meeting Time:</td>
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# DOCUMENT 2

**Notes on the Debate Procedures and Arrangements**

To be completed by the Moderator with the assistance of the Note-takers.

## Section one

General information to be completed before the meeting takes place. This should be done by the moderator with the assistance of one or two associates, in order to ensure that all the information is as complete as possible.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Moderator:</td>
<td>Note Taker 1:</td>
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<td>Note Taker 2:</td>
<td>Type of Meeting:</td>
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<td>If a Syndicate or Focus Group: what was the make-up of the meeting:</td>
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<td>Meeting Location:</td>
<td>Meeting Date:</td>
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| Meeting Time: | }


Section two

The procedures that were carried out to publicise the project and the meeting to the public, and to secure the participation and inclusiveness of all strands of society. To be completed by the moderator before the meeting takes place. Please explain all issues in details.

2.1 - What procedures were followed to publicise the project, both in the community and the area where the meeting to be held? What was done to prepare the community for the debates?

2.2 - What procedures were followed to announce the meeting and to invite people to it?

2.3 - What was done to ensure that the place where the meeting is held is accessible to people, and that the size of the room is enough to accommodate the expected number of people?

2.4 - What procedures were made to ensure people’s access to the project description and other project literature before and during the meeting? Did you set up the tape recorder and inform people that the meetings would be taped? Did you ask if people mind if the meetings are videoed? (and vote on it)

2.5 - Have you faced any political, geographical, and logistical problems and constraints during the preparation for the meeting?

a) Political problems and constraints:

b) Geographical problems and constraints

c) Logistical and practical problems and constraints:

d) Other issues that should be mentioned:
Section three
Process of the meetings and the outcomes of the discussions. To be completed by the moderator after the meeting takes place. Please be as detailed as possible.

3.1 - How many people attended the meeting?

3.2 - How did the meeting progress in general? Was it dominated by a few people? Did everyone get a chance to speak that wanted to? Was more time needed?

3.3 - Did people understand the main objectives of the project and the issues that have been discussed in the meeting? Were they able to discuss their needs fully?

3.4 - Did they identify the important issues to be raised with relevant bodies? Did they distinguish between the different bodies they might want to communicate with, and what these bodies can do for them? Did they understand all the different types of channels possible to communicate with these bodies?

3.5 - Did you feel any constraints on peoples’ ability to discuss certain issues?

3.6 - What procedures did you take in order to ensure an equal chance for people to participate in the discussion and express their views? Did you put posters up that list the questions for discussions so that people can refer to them during the meeting?

3.7 - Other notes and comments:
Roles of Moderator and Note-takers

The role of the moderator in facilitating the debates and discussions

During the debate period, once a meeting has been arranged (whether it is public, syndicate, or focus group meeting), the role of moderator becomes essential. It is to be able to provide clear explanations of the purpose of the project, run the meetings properly, help people feel at ease, and facilitate discussion and interaction between the participants in the meeting so they can make the decisions of what they need after discussing the issues fully. The role of the moderator is a demanding and challenging one. Many issues need to be taken in consideration before and during the meetings, and here are some points to assist you. In addition, the moderator should always remember qualities that are crucial for running the debate effectively, and lead to a truly open debate. These qualities help in promoting the participants’ trust in the moderator and the project, and increase the likelihood of open and interactive discussions.

The key outcome of these debates is for the public to think about what they wish to communicate, the issues most important to them, who they need to communicate these issues to, and finally, to choose the mechanisms to communicate to these various bodies. Some of these mechanisms may already exist in your particular community, but perhaps are not being used adequately. Others will have to be thought about and chosen from a range of possibilities. Accordingly, the main role of the moderator is to lead the groups through a process where they have enough time to think and consider; so they may identify needs. This must happen before they can talk about specific structures to raise these needs through. Accordingly, it is a process of deliberation and reflection, and takes time. The moderator must above all pay attention to this process, and give people adequate the time to air their views and determine their needs before being able to identify the bodies that will be responsible for dealing with these issues. Only then can they finally come to a useful discussion of the structures and channels they might need to connect to these bodies. Here are some notes to assist you.

1. The moderator needs to demonstrate an understanding of the project, its history and background, the objectives, and the main issues to be discussed in the meeting. In addition, he/she should be a good listener, non-judgmental about peoples’ views, and be adaptable to the situation and the environment.

2. Since the main objective for the debate is to give the people the chance to express their own views about issues that are important to them, the moderator need to promote this debate by asking open questions and illustrating the main issues to be discussed in a very clear and simple way in order to make sure that people understood the objective of the meeting and to avoid any misunderstandings.

3. Given the complexity and sensitivity of the issues to be discussed in the meetings, and that people have different ways of speaking about issues, the moderator may occasionally need to challenge participants, especially to draw out people’s differences on a diverse range of views on the issues under discussion. They must ensure those that disagree or are confused are not silenced, but that all issues are raised, and people can see the process is inclusive and respectful. But this engagement by the moderator should never interfere with the flow of the discussion. It is in order to facilitate the debate, if the discussion becomes stuck or too far away from the main themes.

4. When very general issues are raised by the participants, the moderator needs to probe for details, or move things forward when the conversation is drifting or has reached a conclusion on a particular subject. Always refer to the poster that highlights the areas to be discussed as a focus point to take people back to the issues.

5. It may be that some people will only want to make political speeches and declarations. In this case, the moderator has to keep the discussion focused, and sometimes he/she may deliberately have to steer the conversation back to the main issues. This should be done gently and with courtesy.

6. It is important for the moderator to ensure that all participants get an equal chance to speak and to express their views. They should be aware and look
out for all different types of people attending, especially those who are silent or shy, but may have important things to contribute if encouraged.

7. Given the main role of the moderator is to facilitate the discussion and not to interfere in the type of views which people express, it is important for the moderator to avoid showing approval with certain issues and favouring particular participants. It is important also for the moderator to avoid giving their own personal views and opinions on the issues under discussion in the meeting so as not to influence the discussion towards any particular view or opinion or choice in structure.

8. Below is some background information that moderators, facilitators, and note-takers need to know about their community before the debates take place. This information will help explain the project whenever there is need for clarification, to answer questions that arise accurately, to ensure full discussions, and to assist the meetings when people are trying to make decisions about their choices for structures and identify their needs in a helpful and impartial way:

a. What types of structures and mechanisms exist in your community to communicate with the following bodies: national; host country; humanitarian agencies; within the refugee community; other refugee communities including inside Palestine? Which ones are missing? Which ones work?

b. Are there unions, associations, committees, newsletters, email lists, NGOs already doing this job? Or were there previously some which are not so active anymore? What structures do Palestinian refugees use in other countries which could provide examples of useful possibilities?

c. What are main issues affecting your community that need communicating to outside bodies for action and improvement and urgent attention? Is it political issues such as lack of identity papers and travel documents; problems with humanitarian services by international agencies; discrimination or inadequate education provision; legal issues such as right of return, and property; issues with unemployment and work?

**The Role of Note-takers in the Meetings:**

There should be two note-takers for the meetings. Each note-taker should make sure they are covering the following issues during discussions. They should ensure they make note of the person speaking, the issues the speaker discussed while focusing on recommendations they suggested by the speaker. The notes should be typed using a computer within 24 hours of the meeting. At the top of their notes they should clearly indicate:

1. Date, Time and Location

2. Name of moderator

3. Name of note-taker

4. Type of meeting that was held.
# DOCUMENT 3

Palestinian Community Mapping Form

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<th><strong>Residence Locations (Name of the City, Town or Village)</strong></th>
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<td>ORGANISATIONS THAT SERVE THE COMMUNITY</td>
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<td>I  Palestinian</td>
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<td>II  Non-Palestinian</td>
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<tr>
<td>III The Relationship Between These Organisations &amp; The Palestinian People</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| RELATIONSHIP WITH HOST COUNTRY         |

| RELATIONSHIP WITH PLO                  |
### People To Be Contacted In The Community (With Their Contact Details)

- **I** Advantages
- **II** Disadvantages

### Problems And Obstacles That Might Face Us During The Implementation Of The Project

### Ways To Solve These Problems And Obstacles

### Media Organisations And Networks (Details And Contacts)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This body of work involved the participation of thousands of people over a period of several years. Most individuals cannot be thanked because they contributed as members of a collective, working anonymously in order to serve their people by bringing forward their voices. This report is a tribute to all of those who participated in its construction. It is also a heartfelt tribute to the late President Yasser Arafat, who understood, encouraged, and supported this project from its inception.

From the start, in light of the Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry’s recommendations, the Commission of External Relations of the European Union – instead of slamming the door shut on such a complex request – demonstrated an admirable sense of openness and flexibility, allowing a Palestinian researcher to suggest particular mechanisms and methods hitherto untried and untested. Most important, the Commission agreed to fund the research carried out in this project, which took some courage. Here, the former Commissioner of External Relations, Chris Patten, and especially the remarkable Christian Berger are both to be thanked. Indeed, without the latter’s commitment, resolve, and steady nerve, this project would never have seen the light of day.

Nuffield College as host to the project was the ideal environment in which to run an international project involving creative research of such methodological complexity. The institution’s uniqueness made it the only place on earth that could have absorbed a Palestinian Diaspora civic needs assessment exercise where the technical experts and facilitators included activists in refugee camps and representatives from exile communities in over 20 countries. In this regard, the role of two Fellows – the Warden, Sir Tony Atkinson, and the Bursar, Gwilym Hughes – were pivotal in both the launching and maintenance of the project, never blinking in the face of seeming insuperable hurdles, and offering encouragement and practical advice, sometimes on a daily basis. The Fellows and staff of the College provided an astonishing level of support throughout, entering into the spirit of the enterprise on intellectual, practical, and administrative levels, and dealing with every challenge presented to them with the self-possessed authority and confidence which that extraordinary institution never ceases to exude.

The project gained its initial funding from the EU but as it developed in scope more assistance was required. The Department for International Development (DFID), through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), provided additional funding for the mobilisation and debates process, and we are very grateful to them for this. Other institutions and individuals donated additional assistance at critical moments in the implementation phase: Lucy Astor and the Astor Fund; Mr. AM Qattan; the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (particular thanks to the Master of Balliol, Andrew Graham); Jemima Khan; Oxfam (particular thanks to Adam Leach), and Sawsan Asfari. Right at the end, HRH Prince Salman bin Abdul-Aziz (through the good offices of HRH Prince Mohammed bin Nawwaf) came to the rescue for the printing, distribution, and promotion of the report; all these individuals and institutions generously made sure this project was completed.

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“We want to convey our voice to the whole world so that all people can know our cause, and so that we can claim our rights.”

(Participant, Women’s meeting, Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon)