

The Humanitarian Forum

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Virtual Dialogue with Gaza

Background to the dialogue:

The Humanitarian Forum visited the Gaza strip in November 2009 to assess the needs of local organizations. Representatives of the civil society sector expressed the need to be heard and seen by the international community. To allow for greater communication, the Humanitarian Forum organized a two hour video conference, bringing organizations based in Gaza, Qatar, and the UK together.

Report of the dialogue:

The local organizations commenced the discussion by describing some of the main challenges they face. These included:

- The damage to the infrastructure
- Lack of access to raw materials
- Unemployment (especially youth unemployment)
- Absence of strong coordination mechanism between local and international organizations operational in Gaza
- The focus of international agencies on relief, rather than development and reconstruction projects
- Failure to include local expertise in the design, as well as the implementation stages of projects
- Mismatch between international expertise and local needs (In many cases, international aid agencies employ consultants, who have work experience in conflict countries, such as Sudan, Somalia, etc. However the situation and needs of Gaza are very different from other African or Asian contexts).
- Political division between Gaza and the West Bank

Following this, participants discussed the current situation, and the importance of identifying local needs. UNOCHA representative, Christian Visnes, explained that although the overall situation remained unchanged, slight progress has been attained. While 85 trucks of glass were allowed entry into the Gaza strip, between 45 and 50 trucks of flowers and strawberries were allowed out.

Our colleagues in Qatar expressed the importance of learning more about local needs, the priorities of the people of Gaza, and partnerships. Hamid, from Qatar Red Crescent, explained that while coordination and partnerships between local and international agencies are important, a stronger relationship among the local NGOs and the international agencies (as separate groups) must also be developed.

Mr Amjad Al-Shawoa of PNGO confirmed the need for entrepreneurial innovation to tackle youth unemployment, and the need to create new opportunities.

Suggestions and Recommendations:

- Needs assessments should be done by local organizations, specified by sector. A stronger mechanism that brings local, international and UN agencies together should be devised.
- The local organizations have requested greater support from the international group. Advocacy represents an important means of support, and remains at the centre of international agencies' support to Gaza. For example, PNGO has launched two campaigns, which international agencies could support. The first campaign is related to the siege, and the second is related to the internal conflict and the need for political unity.
- Regular exchange of information and updates from Gaza are necessary. Representatives of the Dialogue Café presented the concept of their project, as an important means to enhance communication and exchange of information. The Dialogue Cafes provide the physical and virtual space for exchange of information. The Cafes will be equipped with telepresence, specifically designed to encourage civic engagement. There are plans for partnership between Dialogue Café and The Humanitarian Forum. While the technology is still being piloted, the Humanitarian Forum will continue to provide alternative means of virtual conferencing.
- It was agreed that the Humanitarian Forum (together with feedback from Gaza) would use its online forum, as a means of allowing for ongoing exchange of information, updates on projects and expression of needs and priorities. The discussion forum is already present on the website; participants are welcome to set up profiles and start discussions on any subject they choose.

List of Participating Organizations

- Qatar Charity and
- Qatar Red Crescent
- Crisis Action
- Eid Foundation
- UNOCHA
- Interpal
- CAFOD
- Muslim Charities Forum (MCF)
- Oxfam GB
- Dialogue Cafe
- Islamic Relief Gaza
- PNGO Network
- Al Dameer for Human Rights (Gaza)
- Palestinian Medical Relief Society
- The Council for Women's Affairs (Gaza)
- Centre for Democracy and Labour Rights (Gaza)
- Palestinian Red Crescent in Gaza
- MAAN Development Centre
- Agricultural Development Centre (Gaza)
- Palestinian Hydrology Group