

Speak at CEMOFPSC Conference  
International Conference Middle East, fragmented societies, What future?  
Ms. Dina Awwad Intervention  
Public Relations and Development Officer at Bethlehem University

## Palestine – Fragmented Societies

Before talking about fragmentation in the Palestinian community, I would like to note that fragmentation does not happen in one day and nights for no reason; it has many political roots that go back to many years ago.

Therefore, allow me to begin from the twentieth century. Before the twentieth century, Palestine, as many other Arab countries, was under the Ottoman Empire. During that period, the Palestinians and the Arabs were one state, one nation and they all cared about their Arab nationalism. They were all Arabs who wanted to get rid of the Ottoman Empire. However, the First World War took place and the Ottomans lost in this war. The result of this war was many agreements signed between the winning European countries such as San Remo, Sykes Pico and Belfour Declaration which all resulted to the division of the Arab nations. We began to have different Arab states, different Arab nations based on different colonial interest and consequently the Arabs began to have an emphasis on their national identities as Syrians, as Lebanese etc. This was the first stage through which the Palestinians were divided from their other Arab brothers and from which they had to begin thinking of how to free themselves as Palestinians not as Arabs from the British Mandate.

The second stage was in the year 1948 when the state of Israel was established. The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 as the only Jewish state resulted in having the refugee problems. We began to have different *labels* to name the different groupings of the Palestinians. We began to have Arabs 48, Palestinians in the West Bank under the Jordanian rule, Palestinians of Gaza under the Egyptian rule, refugees in the West Bank, refugees in Gaza and refugees in the neighboring Arab countries. All of these groups began to have diverse interest based on their problems. The refugees in the neighboring Arab countries wanted to come back to their original homes while the Arabs 48 began to struggle with the state of Israel about their rights of existence and survival under the rules and regulations of the Israeli government. Additionally the establishment of the state of Israel resulted in the creation of different political and religious rivals such as Fateh, the Mennonites and the Druze who were fighting against different colonial powers in Palestine and Lebanon.

Of course, the establishment of the state of Israel and the beginning of the refugee problem resulted in separating families from each other as well.

The third stage which resulted in more fragmentation among the Palestinians was the 1967 war. This war resulted in the dislocation of the Palestinian families and we began to have more labeling of the Palestinians; Arabs 48, Palestinians in the West Bank, Palestinians of Gaza, refugees in the West Bank, refugees in Gaza, refugees in the neighboring Arab countries, refugees of 67 and refugees of 48. This created new challenges to each category which they needed to deal with.

The most significant fragmentation was the signature of the Oslo Accords in 1993. It had different levels of impacts on the fragmentation of the Palestinians. The content of the agreement was the first impact. The agreement resulted in dividing the West Bank into areas A, B and C. Israel was supposed to build a road to connect the West Bank and Gaza; something which was never done and now we the Palestinians of the West Bank are not allowed to go to Gaza. I have never been to

Gaza. I only know about it from what I read and hear in the news. And the agreement also resulted in the division of Jerusalem into East and West Jerusalem.

The agreement had also impacts on the internal Palestinian affairs. Edward Said once said; "The Oslo Accords affected the Palestinian moral unity." The Oslo Accords demoralized people. It enhanced the concept that national struggle should be rewarded by giving power and positions to people whether they are suitable for this position or not. This resulted into having corruption among the Palestinian leadership. It promoted the concept of establishing Authority in order to have statehood. It also convinced people that now we should accept the low fruits to be able to make a state. It divided the Palestinians around the world. The Palestinians began to feel that their sacrifice went for nothing leading to frustration among the Palestinian community.

In fact, after the Oslo Accords, the number of settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem has highly increased. The number of checkpoints has also increased. According to a recent OCHA report the physical impediments imposed by the state of Israel against the Palestinians is more than 600.

The fifth stage which led to the fragmentation of the Palestinians was the building of the Apartheid Wall in the year 2002. The wall resulted in dividing the West Bank cities into small separated ghettos. Between the years 2000-2007 land confiscation increased by 31%; those land were confiscated to build roads especially for the use of the settlers, the building of the settlements and the wall. 85% of the lands the wall is built upon are owned by Palestinians. Israel did not buy those lands nor did it ask the permission of the Palestinians to build the wall on their lands.

I will give one example on how the wall affects the life of the Palestinians which is the city of Bethlehem. According to a very recent report by OCHA which was published a few weeks ago in the local newspapers and on their website, if the wall is finished around the city of Bethlehem 28,000 Palestinians will be dislocated and will have very limited access to the city. Bethlehem district is 660 km<sup>2</sup>; 66% is a C area while only 7.5 % is area A. There are 86,000 Israelis living in 19 settlements and 16 settler posts around Bethlehem. According to the same report, Israel intends to add more 10% of Bethlehem District to Jerusalem. Bethlehem is surrounded by all sides by settlements expect from the East but there are intentions to build one.

We may say that the last stage of the fragmentation of the Palestinians is the Fateh/Hamas conflict. One important thing which people should know that this conflict did not begin in the year 2006; it has roots from the past which resulted to have this conflict.

First in Palestine we have many political parties and they are all diverse. For many years the strongest and most influential party has been Fateh. Fateh was the leading party in signing the Oslo Accords with the state of Israel and for many years Fateh was the winning party for the presidential and legislative council elections. During the ten years through which Fateh was in control of the Palestinian Authority, it proved to be corrupted.

First, the Oslo Accords made life more difficult for the Palestinians and despite that Fateh kept into going into negotiations with the state of Israel. Second, many Fateh leaders stole the money which was supposed to be spent to the people. After the Oslo Accords, poverty increased and corruption increased. Unfortunately, the other Palestinian political parties were weak and they did not play any role to stop this while Hamas did.

Hamas filled the gap which Fateh left; they helped the poor families, they built mosques and charity organizations. They were there for the people when they needed them. They clearly and publicly criticized the agreements with Israel. So it began to become stronger and stronger among the Palestinian community. When the legislative council elections were close to beginning in the year

2006, everybody expected that Fateh will be the winning party and Hamas will be the next winning one. However, the results were surprising even to Hamas itself when it won the elections. Now the problem was after the elections.

The Palestinians did not vote for Hamas because they were extreme Islamists. In fact there were some Fateh members who voted for Hamas. Why? Because people had only two options either Hamas or Fateh. The other Palestinian parties were weak. So they tried Fateh and they were fed up with it and now they wanted to try Hamas. They wanted to make a change in their political life. Unfortunately, they were punished for trying to make a change in their political life.

Unfortunately, although the elections were very honest; all the Palestinian political parties boycotted Hamas except for the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine Party. Hamas offered to Fateh that they establish a unitary government but Fateh refused. Then of course, the international community, which considers itself democratic, boycotted the new government and stopped the donations to the Palestinians. Of course there were many other complications that followed which I think both Hamas and Fateh did wrong in the way they dealt with the whole situation but at the end the victims were the people.

At the end, may be we need to try to find ways how we can end or overcome this fragmentation in Palestine. First, occupation has to end. In order the occupation to end, justice has to take place and the Palestinians should have their basic rights of free movement, ownership of land and water etc. Second, the Palestinian government has to put the interest of the people first before any other interests. We need new Palestinian leadership who is well educated and honest and who will be able to lead the Palestinians towards peace and justice. We need to have free press, rule of law and transparency. I am not sure how all of these will be achieved but these are some ideas of how could the situation in Palestine could change and at the end it will change but I am not sure when and how it will change.

Thank you

Madrid, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2009