

5 November

Roundtable discussion with a presentation by Dr. Mustafa Hamarneh, Director of the Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, Amman

Topic: The Palestinian Component in Jordanian Politics

Participants: PASSIA Staff; Mr. Walid Assali, Lawyer; HE Afif Safieh, Palestinian General Delegate in the UK and the Vatican; Dr. Musa Budeiri, Lecturer, Al-Quds University; Sahar Barghouti-Gaerber, Research Manager, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Jerusalem; Martin Kobler, Head of the German Representative Office, Jericho; Dr. Riad Malki, Panorama, Jerusalem; Dr. Mohammed Jadallah, Physician, Jerusalem; and Pinhas Inbari, Journalist.

SUMMARY

Dr. Hamarneh began his presentation by saying that there has been mistrust between the Palestinians and the Jordanians since the experience of 1970 and after Jordan's implementation of its Jordanization policies. This mistrust was re-enforced by the outcome of the 1974 Rabat Conference.

The society in Jordan is now divided. While 82% of the private sector is in Palestinian hands, the bureaucracy - and particularly the higher level bureaucracy - is dominated by Jordanians. Statistics show that not one refugee moved up in this sector.

The Palestinians generally do not interfere in politics. For example, they stayed out of the riots of 1989 and 1996. While Jordanian scholars from the left attribute this to Palestinians being from a better class, Dr. Hamarneh explained that they actually fear being disenfranchised by the government. He added that the Palestinians in Jordan feel that any form of expression would bring a very suppressive response.

Dr. Hamarneh said that while the Palestinian Authority or the PLO have shown intentions to tackle this dichotomy of the Palestinians in Jordan, neither has a clear set of possibilities. They want the Palestinians in Jordan to hold Palestinian citizenship and remain in Jordan. Jordan considers any overt link between the PLO and the Palestinians inside the kingdom as a threat to its sovereignty. Dr. Hamarneh added that no one has come up with a mechanism to solve this problem.

It was hoped that the Jordanian-Palestinian dichotomy within Jordanian society could be solved as a result of the King's stand in the Gulf War. Jordanian-Palestinian relations improved as the Palestinian outlook towards the King changed for the better. Many Palestinians who fled the Gulf to Jordan felt they had come home. Dr. Hamarneh said that Jordan had missed an historic opportunity to resolve the dichotomy. However, subsequent events did not improve the situation either.

Dr. Hamarneh said that people from the middle of the political spectrum in Jordan, including himself, tried to address the situation of the Palestinians. The Center for Strategic Studies conducted a study and

measured a high level of Palestinian integration in Jordanian society. There was, however, inward polarization. The Center's study showed that feelings about the bureaucracy were accurate and that the Jordanians were apprehensive about becoming a minority in Jordan. The study also showed that while 82% of the private sector is owned by Palestinians, this could be misleading since street vendors were also categorized under private enterprise.

Dr. Hamarneh said that business enterprise - such as the Dead Sea example - created a healthy debate which strongly attached the Jordanian state's citizenship and citizenry. He added that people need to move towards policies which Jordanianize. This requires novel approaches to solve issues of minority status in Jordan; this entails settling concepts such as federation and confederation in order to address the fears.

Discussion:

Participant: What percentage of the population in Jordan is Palestinian?

Dr. Hamarneh: There are no conclusive statistics available, but studies which are representative indicate that the Palestinians make up about 50% of the population. At least 6-7% of the Palestinians in Jordan consider themselves Jordanians.

Participant: How do the Jordanians' fears of becoming marginalized fit in with the structural adjustment programs?

Dr. Hamarneh: This contradiction will hurt in the future but not now. The move is to hire and promote on the basis of merit in any areas which are open to Palestinians, for example, in the Ministry of Health. Other areas such as security, the army and the foreign service remain accessible only to families with a historic allegiance to the King.

Participant: The basic problem in Jordan of having another population is not unique, and Jordan cannot expect the PNA to absorb all the Palestinians in Palestine, Jordan and Syria. Why not a confederation then?

Dr. Hamarneh: One in every two Jordanians has real fears. The case of Jordan is unlike that of Syria, where the Palestinians are integrated. With regard to confederation there has to be first a fully-fledged Palestinian state, independent from Israel.

Participant: What interest do the Hashemites have in a confederation?

Dr. Hamarneh: They wish to create a contradiction between the nationalists and the anti-Hashemites. The Jordanian majority feels the relationship between the Palestinians and the Jordanian communities. Intermarriage is very high and it is very difficult to dismantle the two communities.

