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The Israeli Bulldozers Assassinate the Middle East Peace Process

A position paper

submitted by the

Palestinian Delegation

to

The Conference of the Mediterranean Parliaments

***“The strengthening of cooperation between the Mediterranean parliaments
within the framework of the Barcelona Declaration”***

Athens

6 and 7 April 1997

On behalf of the Palestinian people, we express our deep gratitude for the sponsors and organizers of this important Euro-Mediterranean partnership program. Despite the extremely severe conditions which our people is facing, we decided to come here seeking your understanding of our grievances and asking for your assistance in stopping the progressive aggression committed against our land and people at the hands of the Israeli government. We are still determined to pursue our quest for peace despite the flagrant Israeli measures against our people and its repeated defiance of the international legitimacy. The Barcelona declaration highlighted the principles upon which a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East should be based upon, which are the implementation of UN resolutions and the principle of land for peace . In the next few pages, we shall outline Israel’s violations of these principles.

Soon after its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in June 1967, Israel seized absolute control over the West Bank and Gaza Strip’s land and natural resources. From that time until today, Palestinians are permitted to use less than



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15 % of the total amount of their water resources. Vast areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip have been confiscated or closed off to Palestinians. Israeli colonies continue to be built on illegally confiscated Palestinian (mainly agricultural) land. A devastated Palestinian economy is still controlled largely by Israel. Also, a dangerously dilapidated infrastructure has been nearly completely ignored.

The Palestinian people, by and large, supports the current peace negotiations with Israel and sincerely hope to revert the current inequitable and unjust allocation of land and water resources. They, of course, prefer to develop their community within a framework of sustainability, political stability, and sovereignty. However, the actual outcome of the current peace process has not yet ensured Palestinian sovereignty over their land and water resources. To the contrary, Israel has manipulated the standing agreements, specifically the Oslo Accords, to legitimize its control over the natural resources of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, carving Palestine into disconnected cantons. The Palestinian struggle after the Oslo II Interim Agreement has become, to a large degree, rooted in the fear of losing a most basic human right, that is, the right to live in a clean, safe and sustainable environment.

The Oslo II Interim Agreement was accepted by the Palestinian Authority as an interim step towards the establishment of a Palestinian state. It is interim in nature and should therefore be applied as such by the concerned parties. That is, “neither sides shall initiate or take any step that will change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip pending the outcome of the permanent status negotiations.”¹ Yet, in reality, Israel is currently orchestrating the Oslo II Interim Agreement into a permanent arrangement by creating *de facto* realities on the ground that will undoubtedly affect the outcome of the final status negotiations. These realities include:

- The building of a comprehensive network of by-pass roads for the exclusive use of Israeli settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip;
- The expansion of Israeli colonies in the Palestinian territories;
- The physical and demographic re-structuring of East Jerusalem;
- The confiscation of Palestinian land and demolition of Palestinian houses; and
- The partial Israeli implementation and noncompliance with over 27 items in the Oslo II Interim Agreement especially the refusal to re-deploy the Israeli military from the Palestinian territories according to the agreed upon timetable (Chapter two, Article 10, item 1-3).



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- Stalling in implementing the safe passage way between Gaza and the West Bank
- Hindering the operation of the Gaza port and airport
- The release of Palestinian detainees and prisoners

Areas A, B, C

According to the Oslo II Interim Agreement, the West Bank has been divided into three main areas (Figure 2):

- **Areas A**, in which the Palestinian Authority has full control except on matters to be discussed in the final status negotiations, such as water and territory. This area is presently limited to main parts of the eight major cities of the West Bank, namely Jenin, Nablus, Tulkarm, Qalqilia, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Jericho, and Hebron. It covers a total area of 160.2 km², comprising approximately 3% of the total West Bank land which was occupied by Israel in 1967.
- **Areas B**, in which the Palestinian Authority has partial control, limited to land and providing civil services such as education and health, while all security issues are under the sole control of Israel. These areas comprise 400 Palestinian villages and hamlets. They cover a total area of 1,334.2 km² and constitute almost 23% of the West Bank lands which were occupied by Israel in 1967.
- **Areas C**, in which the Palestinian Authority provides civil services, however, Israel retains full control over land, security, people and natural resources. Areas C cover a total area of 4,327.9 km², comprising the remaining 74% of the West Bank land which was occupied by Israel in 1967. All currently existing Israeli colonies in the West Bank lie within these areas.

In addition, a small area of the city of Hebron, which houses the major Israeli settlement of Qariyat Arba', is identified as Area H2. This area remains under the Israeli control where Israel will retain all powers and responsibilities for internal security and public order.

In practice, the Oslo II land classification scheme of the Palestinian territories translates into the physical fragmentation of Palestinians. This jagged distribution of areas A, B, and C has partitioned the West Bank into isolated cantons of Areas A and B which are physically separated from each other by Areas C. Several



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Palestinian built-up areas were assigned as Areas A or B, yet portions of their community lie in Area C. One clear example is in the Bethlehem District. Several neighborhoods in the towns of Beit Sahour and Beit Jala are excluded from Area A and classified as Area C. The borders of the city of Beit-Jala in area A are less than half of the pre 1967 city boundary because of Israeli policies. The settlement of Gilo was constructed on the lands of Beit-Jala that were expropriated by Israel and incorporated unilaterally in the Jerusalem municipality boundary. Another settlement, Har Gilo was established on the top of the Beit-Jala Western mountain. Two tunnels 400 and 850 meters long were built on land from Beit-Jala to serve the settlements. As a result, Beit-Jala is currently fragmented into four cantons.

A cross examination of the overall geographic extension of both the existing and planned by-pass roads in the West Bank with the various previously prepared plans for the separation lines between Israel and the West Bank uncovers the true nature and actual purpose behind the construction of these roads. These are as follows:

- Enabling Israel to divide the West Bank into small isolated cantons where geographic unity and integrity is impossible. Therefore, the creation of a Palestinian state on Palestinian land becomes physically unattainable.
- Creating *de facto* new physical borders for the West Bank and isolating uninhabited but Palestinian owned border areas to facilitate their annexation to Israel proper. Thus Israel is using by-pass roads to unilaterally re-draw the geopolitical map of the region, and further deprive Palestinians of areas of their homeland.
- Providing the means to reserve large stretches of Palestinian land for the expansion of Israeli colonies. The main clusters of Israeli colonies in the West Bank continue to be surrounded by by-pass roads in a manner which allows the encircling of Palestinian lands where houses have not yet been built. This objective is consistent with the current Israeli Likud government's political platform which calls for the consolidation and development of Israeli colonies in the West Bank.

It is worth mentioning that the by-pass roads so far built in the West Bank exceed 276 kilometers in length while the planned roads are estimated at 452 kilometers. With the safety buffer zone they enjoy, the construction of these by-pass roads requires the confiscation and destruction of approximately 109,200 hectares of Palestinian land, mostly of which is agricultural. Many farm lands were totally



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destroyed by the construction of by-pass roads, depriving owners of their main source of income. Other farm lands were split into several pieces, rendering it impossible to cross from one side of the land to another.

The lack of geographical continuity in the lands under Palestinian control has created a major physical impediment towards accomplishing sustainable national development in Palestine. Such fragmentation of the Palestinian community makes it impossible to construct an effective and resourcefully efficient national infrastructure, such as building a national electric grid and water supply network, or formulating an integrated national policy for the agricultural and water sectors. If such a situation is to continue beyond the intended interim period, maintaining the stability and the environmentally sustainable and progressive economy required for an independent Palestinian entity (state) will be doomed. This would not only be a direct blow to Palestinian self-determination, but also sharply contradict international resolutions, namely United Nations Resolution 242 and 338 which are the essence of the peace process begun in Madrid in 1991.

The Judaization of Jerusalem

Soon after its occupation of Palestinian East Jerusalem in 1967, the Israeli government enforced several measures which changed the geopolitical boundaries of the city, and its legal and physical status, in an effort to facilitate the Israeli subsequent illegal annexation of Jerusalem. The first measure was the application of the Israeli law and administration on the city of Jerusalem. Following this, Israel unilaterally expanded the municipal boundaries of the city in a jagged manner, enabling it to include as much land as possible while excluding as much of the Palestinian population as possible. The boundaries of the East Jerusalem were enlarged from 6.5 km² to 70.5 km², which enveloped land from 28 Palestinian villages and towns in the West Bank. Even with this expansion to 10.8 times its original size, only 22,000 Palestinian inhabitants were added to the population of East Jerusalem. Lands from Beit Hanina, A'nata, Abu Dies, and five other villages, for example, were absorbed into the new extended East Jerusalem but their populations of approximately 80,000 people were excluded. To enable this expansion, 16.33 and 0.68 Km² of land were included from the Bethlehem and Ramallah District respectively.



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In 30 July 1980, the Israeli Knesset passed a law declaring East Jerusalem part of “United Jerusalem, the capital of Israel” and officially annexed the city to Israel. Regardless of the many international and United Nations resolutions condemning this annexation, particularly 298, Israel continued with its policies and, moreover, proceeded to Judaize the city. Many Palestinian lands within the new municipal boundaries were confiscated, closed or assigned for ‘public use’. ‘Public use’ traditionally implies building housing neighborhoods for exclusively Israeli Jews. Presently, only 13.5% of Palestinian East Jerusalem is available for Palestinians to live on or develop. The remaining land is left under the Israeli control. Such policies changed the population demography of the city from just a few hundreds Jews in 1967 to over than 160,000 at the present. This number is almost close to the number of Palestinians now living in the Palestinian East Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the crux of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Among all the cities in historic Palestine, Jerusalem possesses a special political, economic and religious status for people around the world, especially its residents --Palestinians and Israelis. Upon Israeli obstinacy, the issue of Jerusalem was postponed for the final status negotiations which have been stalled since their initiation in May 1996. However, in the meantime, the Israeli government has not stopped its unilateral practices in Jerusalem by which it creates *de facto* realities on the ground. These *de facto* realities are clearly affecting the outcome of the negotiations on the final status of Jerusalem, to favor Israel, an action that is in total violation to United Nations’ resolutions, particularly 298 and 242, as well as standing Palestinian-Israeli Oslo Agreements.

Measures leading to strong demographic shifts have been staged by Israel in order to create an exclusive Jewish population in Jerusalem. De-development strategies have been adopted to restrict expansion of the city’s Palestinian community. In this process, infrastructure and services for this group of residents, by the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality, have become inadequate and do not provide a healthy living environment. Overcrowding has become the norm and the pressure on Jerusalem’s land and natural resources has been devastating as well. The denial of access for Palestinians to their spiritual, cultural, economic and historic capital has delivered a harsh blow to the economy of Palestinians in Jerusalem causing a massive wave of migration. In addition, Israel is threatening to cancel the legitimate rights of residency for Palestinian Jerusalemites who were forced to seek housing in areas around Jerusalem due to the lack of housing and building permits in Jerusalem.



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Severe restrictions are placed upon the development of Palestinian built-up areas in East Jerusalem. As of today, and for the last 28 years of Israeli occupation, not a single new Palestinian neighborhood has been built in East Jerusalem, while more than 15 large Jewish colonies have been built and several more are planned. These restrictions have been approved under the pretext of the Town Planning Scheme (TPS) for East Jerusalem. Israel is continuing its policies of digging tunnels beneath and around Al Aqsa mosque which may spark another explosion like that of last September.

Soon after the 1967 war, Israel prevented Palestinians from building in East Jerusalem areas which lacked approved TPS. The process for approving TPS for a Palestinian community however has been made extremely complicated and requires several stages of paperwork and numerous signatures. Presently, less than 25% of the Palestinian neighborhoods have had town planning schemes approved. Moreover, in those few lucky" neighborhoods, major parts of the land were designated as a 'Green Areas': an area designated for public open space or for the preservation of unhindered views of the landscape. Palestinians simply can not be built on them. The 'green areas' predominate Palestinian town plans in East Jerusalem and occupy 44% of the land. This land classification of East Jerusalem has left only 13.5% of the land available for Palestinians to live on and develop .In practical terms, this classification translates to an average living density of 17,245 people per square kilometers in the Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem, which is considered unhealthy by international standards. Accordingly, building houses for Palestinians in East Jerusalem has been extremely difficult and has therefore led to drastic overcrowding. Over 30% of the East Jerusalem Palestinian families live in a density of more than 3 people per room .

Palestinian houses built without a license have been or are threatened to be demolished by the Israeli government. As Reported by the Palestine Human Right Information Center (PHRIC) in mid-1994, the Israeli government policy of denying Palestinians building permits, its demolition of unlicensed Palestinian houses, and its continued land expropriation has rendered approximately 21,000 Palestinian families either homeless or has forced them to live in caves, sub-standard housing, or to double and triple-up with other families. PHRIC has documented over 210 Palestinian homes demolished by the Israeli authorities in East Jerusalem since mid-1986 for licensing reasons.

Furthermore, most of the lands designated as 'Green Areas' in East Jerusalem, which are supposedly left to conserve the beauty of the nature, are neither planted, developed into gardens or parks, nor are they green. Obviously these 'Green



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Areas' were selected in places where Israel would like to save the land until the time is ready to build Israeli colonies on them. In this respect, Teddy Kollek, the previous mayor of Jerusalem, was quoted saying "when asked to defend the loss of 1,262 dunums of public open space in Reches Shu'fat, Mr. Kollek stated that the green paint was originally applied to the map of Reches Shu'fat in order to prevent Palestinian construction on the land until the time was ripe to build a new neighborhood for Jews."

The settlement of Reches Shua'fat is not the only one to be built on a pre-designated green area . A forested mountain located at the southern end of the 1967 extended East Jerusalem municipal boundary is another example. Abu Ghnaim, with an area of approximately 2 km², has been forested by both the Jordanians pre 1967 and the Israelis after 1967. It currently hosts around 60,000 pine trees and provides an oasis for several hundred precious wild animals and plants. A few years ago, the forest, although largely privately owned Palestinian land, was confiscated for the purpose of building an Israeli settlement to host 6,500 housing units for Israeli Jews.

In order to tighten its control over East Jerusalem, Israel is proceeding with its plans of building new Israeli settlements and expanding existing ones in and the city. The range of these settlement activities is far further than the present Israeli declared borders of Jerusalem. Behind these activities is the Israeli intention to widen the area of Jerusalem and to envelop further lands of the West Bank into its domain. In order to create facts on the ground that will affect the outcome of the final status negotiations on Jerusalem, multiple belts of Israeli settlements have and are being built around Jerusalem Among others, are the expansion of Ma'ale Adumim settlement to a settlement bloc of 30 square kilometers; the addition of 2,650 housing units to the Givat Ze'ev settlement; the building of the new settlement of Ras el-'Amoud; and the building of the new settlement of Abu Ghnaim (Har Homa).The Abu Ghnaim mountain is located less than two kilometers north of the city of Bethlehem. The mountain has been historically owned by Palestinians from Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, as well as from the villages of Um Tuba and Sur Baher. The geographical location of the mountain gave it such importance that Israel decided in 1967 to unilaterally carve it out of the Bethlehem District, extending the Jerusalem Municipal boundaries in such a jagged manner as to include Abu Ghnaim within its scope. For many years Abu Ghnaim and its surrounding areas have been designated by the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality as a 'Green Area': an area in which development is restricted. The Israeli government planning scheme of this settlement includes the construction of at least 6,500 housing units in high-rise structures with standard infrastructure



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such as roads, schools, and shops, in addition to hotels, a tourist village, and industrial zones . The new settlement is expected to accommodate thirty to forty thousands Jewish settlers. The Israeli government has already begun construction on Abu Ghnaim defying the will of the whole world. The building of this settlement will create a new reality in the Bethlehem and Jerusalem area which will have detrimental consequences on the welfare of Palestinian community and on the peace process. The main reasons why the construction of this settlement should be opposed are as follows:

- The Suffocation of Bethlehem and its neighboring areas. The tri-cities Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and Beit Sahour will be left with little land to accommodate natural population growth if this settlement is constructed. Whereas, the new settlement would draw the northern boundary of the Bethlehem area, the Gush Etzion bloc of settlements limits Bethlehem's southern expansion. From the west, Bethlehem is surrounded by Bitar Ilite settlement as well as two by-pass roads, from the East by Taqoa settlement and a third by-pass road. The building of Abu Ghnaim (Har Homa) and the fenced military by-pass road which will connect it with the neighboring Gilo settlement will deprive Bethlehem of the only land left for its future development. This by-pass road will also shift the border of Jerusalem further south and deeper into the Bethlehem area. The Elimination of Territorial Continuity between Bethlehem and Palestinian East Jerusalem and the Northern from the Southern governates.
- The new settlement will ensure that Israel deprives the Palestinians of Bethlehem of their main source of income: tourism. The project includes the building of a tourist village, Bethlehem Israel, to attract the Christian tourists who come to visit the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem. These pilgrims coming on Israeli tours, who are mostly guided by Israeli tour guides, will be taken to the settlement tourist village without being given the opportunity to shop in Bethlehem or pray with the local Palestinian Christians. For this purpose, Israel is working hard to complete the settlement before the year 2000. In 2000, it is expected that far over 5 million Christians from all over the world will visit Bethlehem to celebrate with the local Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem, the 2000th anniversary of Christianity and the Christ. Thus, Israel, rather than the local Palestinian community, would benefit from the potential development of the tourism sector. It is worth mentioning here that Paris economic protocol between Israelis and Palestinians stipulate that both sides should allow free movement of tourist buses and vehicles between the two sides. However, Israel



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is denying access for Palestinian tourist buses and vehicles to Jerusalem and Israel .

- If the settlement is built, it will complete a ring of Jewish settlements around Jerusalem, most of which is in the still-occupied West Bank. By building the settlement, Israel will seal off Jerusalem and dismiss any Palestinian efforts to negotiate on the final status of the city.

We have repeatedly warned that Israel’s unilateral moves will spark a wave of discontent among Palestinians and the Arab and the Moslem worlds that will have serious repercussions on the peace process. Israel ignored our warnings and went ahead with its aggressions. A turmoil has been created and the achievements of the past four years appear to be vanishing. One martyr has already lost his life as a result of Israeli bullets and more than 200 of our youth have already been wounded. It is rather ironic to see the Israeli leadership resorting to its old rhetoric of accusing Palestinians of using violence and we regret that the US administration has complied with such allegations. The Palestinian reply as announced by President Arafat is that we should look at the causes and not the symptoms. As partners in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, we simply ask you:

What would you call the following Israeli practices ?

- Building settlements which are illegal and violation of the international legitimacy
- Confiscation of Palestinian land
- Uprooting of Palestinian trees
- Destruction of our economy
- Imposing a closure on the Palestinian population
- Depriving Palestinians from their religious rights in Jerusalem while Jerusalem has always been open to the believers
- Demolition of Palestinian homes

We believe that the peace process cannot continue while such actions are occurring. We also believe that security does not provide peace, whereas a just peace is the best guarantee for security. We feel that you have a major role to play in putting the peace process back into the right track. We are confident that you, as our partners, subscribe to our believes that ” **There can be no peace with settlements. There can be no peace without Jerusalem.**” We are deeply appreciative of the role of Europe in supporting the peace process both financially and politically. As a people who strives for a just and comprehensive peace in the



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Middle East in which we will join our efforts to promote economic development and prosperity to all the region, we feel obliged to seek your intervention to stop Israel from proceeding with its settlements policy and comply with what was agreed upon. We joined the peace process carrying the olive branch and we call upon you to assist us in keeping it raised. We invite you to be true partners in building peace in the region and we look forward to your active involvement in the development of Palestine including our preparation for the year 2000.

Thank you.