



PRESS RELEASE

The Government of Ireland and UNDP form partnership to provide assistance to communities affected by the Separation Barrier

While a great deal has been said and written about the separation barrier constructed by the Government of Israel, and its horrendous effects on the lives of many Palestinians, the Government of Ireland has formed a partnership with UNDP's Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (PAPP) to do something about it.

The Government of Israel began construction of the barrier a year ago, composed of a complex series of concrete walls, trenches, and fences within the western border of the occupied West Bank. The barrier has encircled and isolated many Palestinian cities and villages.

The impact of the barrier on agriculture is of particular concern in the governorates of Jenin, Tulkarm and Qalqiliya, where the first phase is being constructed. These three governorates account for just 18 percent of the West Bank's overall territory, but produced 45 percent of the West Bank's total agricultural output, with an estimated value of \$220 million in 2000.

A particularly significant problem created by the barrier is the isolation of many small villages from the seats of their governorates, resulting in their neglect. A total of 238,350 dunums of land (238.3 sq km) are being isolated between the Green Line and the barrier, 57 percent of which is cultivated, mostly with olive trees and field crops.

To find immediate solutions to the immense difficulties facing the communities affected by the barrier, UNDP proposed a multi-faceted emergency assistance programme that aims to address immediate employment needs, while improving vital social, municipal and agricultural infrastructure necessary for sustaining the livelihoods of Palestinian residing in areas affected by the barrier.

Through its Local and Rural Development Programme (LRDP), PAPP attempted to ease the isolation of these small villages by empowering them to create micro regional planning committees, which in turn become a driving force for coordinating projects for all the villages and attaining international aid.



Composed of representatives of each of the member villages, these joint councils and planning committees are often grouped by new economic and geographic realities such as the separation barrier and their contiguity.

The assistance from the Government of Ireland of one million Euros has allowed PAPP to assist in the creation of the Jenin Joint Council for Services, Planning and Development (called Jenin 1), which is a council comprising 10 deprived and isolated villages with a total population of 18,700.

Covering many areas of the West Bank and Gaza, LRDP is a flagship project of UNDP that is helping countless rural communities in capacity building, institutional development, and infrastructure with the overall purpose of sustainable reductions in their collective poverty.

“We are very grateful to the Government of Ireland for seizing this opportunity to assist in the development of this council which will serve as the main vehicle for the development of these afflicted villages. This is what development ought to be about: empowering people to take control of their own destinies and work for their own progress” said Timothy Rothermel, the Special Representative of the UNDP.

The fund will allow Jenin 1 Council to carryout a number of rural development projects that improve the basic infrastructure of the villages in agriculture, education, health, and water sanitation, whilst creating the maximum number of jobs possible. In an area where in some villages unemployment reaches 90%, such assistance can go a long way in alleviating poverty and addressing emergency needs.

In a signing ceremony held this week, the Representative of Ireland to the PA, Dr. Niall Holohan suggested that the economic difficulties facing Palestinians are similar in many ways to those which the Irish people have managed to overcome in the past fifty years. “In Ireland we witnessed how rural development and agriculture can be a real driving force in the way they stimulate development in other sectors. This is where the focus ought to be, and this where much can be learned from the Irish experience” added Holohan.

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