



PRESS RELEASE

Ambassador Chamberlin and UNDP visit Wadi Gaza Nature Park

Jerusalem, September 17th 2003: Ambassador Chamberlin, USAID Assistant Administrator for Asia and the Near East, accompanied by Mr. Larry Garber, USAID's Mission Director, H.E. Yousif Abu Safieh, Minister of Environmental Affairs and Mr. Khaled Abdel Shafi, the Head of the UNDP/PAPP Gaza Office, visited the location of Wadi Gaza Nature Park.

The project for the development of the Wadi Gaza is generously funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People in Collaboration with the Palestinian Ministry of Environmental Affairs with USAID's estimated contribution of \$3,388,920, making it one of the largest development projects currently underway in the region.

Wadi Gaza is considered to be the first protected nature park in Palestine with rich biodiversity and ecological value. The project aims to ensure the sustainable utilization of the Wadi's natural resources and enhance the living conditions for the local population in the Wadi Gaza area. The ravine was once a beautiful nature site which was then turned into a dumping ground for liquid and solid waste.

"We are pleased to have the opportunity to participate in such an important endeavor, the benefits of which are multifaceted. Not only does the project attempt to address the humanitarian emergency needs of Gazan's through the generation of 60,000 employment days, but it also has the long term impact of restoring the environment". Said Ambassador Chamberlin. "We also take pride that we have helped in creating the first Palestinian national park". Added Ms. Chamberlin

Wadi Gaza, the only contiguous Green Zone in the densely populated Gaza Strip, besides its high environmental value, plays a crucial role with regard to the socio-economic situation of the local population. Besides its function as a valuable recreational area in the densely populated Gaza Strip (1.2 Mio. inhabitants), the wetland forms the basis for various socio-economic activities. It can also be mentioned that the high number of bird and other animal species in the Wadi on one hand, and the relative rarity and uniqueness of the habitats on the other, make the site an excellent location for raising public awareness as well as research activities.



On-going UNDP initiatives and projects have addressed both levels of concern. The range of its outcomes reach from developing of ecological and legislative interventions aiming at the conservation of the site, towards the direct supporting of the local economy, mainly through employment-generation activities.

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