

# **FIRST PLENARY SESSION**

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### **A Vision for Higher Education in Palestine: Education for National Integration and Development**

#### **1. Introduction**

The state of Palestinian higher education and the problems it suffers from are accountable to the fact that, since 1967, there has been no legitimate national authority, capable of directly supervising this aspect of Palestinian education as a whole. The Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza have gained a great deal of experience and skill in organising their educational affairs generally, and in overseeing the activities of institutes of higher education specifically. This explains how the Palestinian universities currently in existence and the Council for Higher Education were created by popular initiative.

By way of mutual co-operation between the universities and itself, in addition to support from the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the Council for Higher Education was able to fully assert its steering authority and direction over the institutions of higher education in Palestine. Such a feat came in the absence of any kind of political authority co-operating with it in this task.

Despite the accomplishments of the system of higher education, which allowed the Palestinian people to retain their national identity and develop under the exceptional circumstances of adverse military occupation, there is clearly a need for a radical change in the present system. Therefore, we might allude to another important achievement, which proves to be useful as background information to this report: the fact is that the Palestinian people gained important skills in the fields of establishing, administrating, and developing educational institutions. One of the main results of this experience was the evolution of people's understanding of higher education, its effectiveness and drawbacks. They learned how to better take into consideration social, cultural, and geographical factors in organising and administrating higher education in this day and age. In order to more clearly illustrate this point, consider that several universities were formed out of institutions which formerly served as high schools. Universities were created in areas which are geographically difficult to reach, as well as a result of regional competition between the inhabitants of different areas of Palestine. The Palestinians were subsequently able to overcome many of the impediments to study created by the occupation. Those who oversaw higher education understood the particulars of Palestinian society and managed to effectively administer it, despite both their limited resources and the collective punishment measures of the occupation authorities.

## **2. Basic Legislation for Higher Education**

Presently, we are beginning a new era, one which sees a national authority striving to enact its and the people's sovereignty over Palestine and its public institutions. As this authority's main concern is fulfilling the will of the people, the true indicator of its legitimacy, it has formed a legislative council by holding elections. This body is the sole, legitimate legal authority charged with governing and safeguarding the Palestinian people. We have no doubt that the legislative council will succeed in this task. As for higher education, it is absolutely necessary for the legislative council to issue a law in this regard, dealing with a) the definition of higher education in an institution and b) what such a definition entails, as far as rights and duties are concerned. The following is a conceptualisation of what we believe the goals of this basic law should be:

1. The law will determine the philosophy and aims of Palestinian higher education as well as serving as a reference for those who work in this field.
2. The law will determine the type of institution that will present the educational programs leading to the awarding of advanced (i.e. post high school) degrees in all fields of study. These include all university-level studies: humanities, sciences, social sciences, fine arts, as well as all professional and technology studies such as law, engineering, medicine, pharmacology, agriculture, technical science and other studies which culminate in the awarding of a BA or BSc degree. This institution will also be responsible for certifying all masters' degrees and PhD's in all fields, in addition to vocational degrees, pharmacists licenses, and medical degrees.
3. The law will also legislate the organisation of institutions so as to best serve the interests of the Palestinian people, wherever they might be. Thus the State of Palestine, along with public sector agencies, institutions, and non-profit groups will be able to form institutes for higher education - junior colleges, universities, vocational and training centres, etc. All those institutes will be subject to the rules and regulations issued by the general institution for higher education, as designated by law.
4. It is also necessary for the Palestine state, or a committee directly empowered by the state, to be able to create Palestinian colleges, universities, or institutes outside of Palestine, in accordance with the laws of the host country. So if we wanted to found a Palestinian university for Palestinians living abroad, such a university would have to be open to all without prejudice. The Palestinian law for higher education must deem this step legal firstly, so as to facilitate the institution responsible for higher education's compliance with the laws of the host country. The case of the Arab University in Beirut is applicable here. It is legally an Egyptian university (a branch of Alexandria University), and was established as a university for all the Arab peoples, in accordance with Lebanese law which allows for the creation of foreign universities on its soil. The same is true for the two American universities in Beirut and Cairo, which are not branches of any universities in America, but are chartered in the US.

5. The law will also determine the tasks and special powers of the Ministry of Higher Education and its relationship with the various institutions of higher learning.
6. Finally, the law will determine the tasks, special powers, and framework of the Council for Higher Education and its relationship with the Ministry of Higher Education, and the Palestinian colleges and universities.

### **3. The Dependence of Universities and Academic Institutions**

If this general and complete legislative law is successful, then the Palestinian state apparatus will be able to oversee a public university or universities which the PLO had helped establish and support such as Al-Quds Open University and Al-Azhar. As for the other private universities, they will remain so, whether or not they consider themselves profit making institutions. If a university is privately run, yet non-profit, it can be considered public and private at the same time. The same is true for research centres under this law, which we will classify them as private or public.

What is meant by a public/private, non-profit institution are those universities, research centres, or colleges registered as public institutions, run by a Board of Trustees. The ownership of the university/centre/college can be public or private, registered in the name of the Board of Trustees or supervisory group, such as the Islamic or Christian waqf agencies, or in the name of any charitable outfit. The one common characteristic is that the university research centre/college charter must declare that the institution is non-profit in order to enjoy this special dual status.

### **4. Private Institutions: Profit Making Companies**

The basic question here is: should the creation of institutions of higher education as a financial investment by individuals be made legal, as is the case in Jordan? This type of higher education institution, which awards university - level degrees in numerous fields of learning, is practically non-existent in developed nations, Western and Eastern. Such a type, which has become popular recently in countries like Jordan, sprung forth from the concept of private ownership of primary and secondary schools, which developed under extraordinary circumstances in this particular age.

The idea of creating private, profit making higher education institutions must be approached with caution. At this crucial stage of development, when there are eight different non-profit universities in Palestine, and general studies are being carried out to improve the level of higher education, the establishment of such institutions could be allowed in exceptional circumstances, and under strict guidelines which guarantee a high standard of achievement.

The establishment of private, profit making arts, technological, and vocational institutes (flight training school, auto-mechanics schools, etc.) should be permitted. It should be clear, however, that this type of institution cannot grant legitimate university degrees, and different types of guidelines need to be placed on these types of institutions than on academic ones.

## **5. The Objectives of Palestinian Higher Education**

### *A. The General Objective and Defining Priorities*

Palestinian higher education must be committed to a wide variety of goals which seek to increase the student's level of knowledge in the arts, sciences, literature, social studies, etc. and allow them to develop and grow. These goals will also allow for the student to think and be inquisitive at a high level, while at the same time encouraging independent thought and creativity. The student will thus learn how to be productive, while benefiting from all the educational sources he/she encounters. The goals of higher education will stress the importance of Arab and Islamic civilisation and strive to instil its value system. Respecting democracy, objectivity, and others' opinions will be an aim of higher education as well. The overall desired result of these goals is to meet the educational needs of Palestinian society, while taking into account its unique culture, history, social values, and civilisation.

On the practical level, however, our society presently lacks the necessary studies which could determine and define what the needs of our society are to sufficiently grow and develop. Such studies would enable institutes of higher education to successfully address these needs by developing relevant educational programs, i.e. general and specialised curricula and courses of study. Those who have made a somewhat serious attempt to define these needs do not disagree about certain pressing priorities that need to be addressed. It is widely recognised that there is a lack of competent and capable individuals in technology, media, education, medicine, and law, administration, etc. Accordingly, there is a general agreement that higher education must contribute to the achievement of Palestinian cultural and national identity and this constitutes an important priority.

### *B. The Specific Objective*

In theory and on a practical basis, we believe that the top priorities of higher education are those that help, culturally, scientifically, and practically in realising national integration and development. Institutes of higher education fully realise the importance of this goal because in the immediate future, it will be their duty to deal with all the negative effects of the past, stemming from British and Israeli expansionist colonialism. The years of foreign domination seriously damaged the fabric of Palestinian society, leading to the expulsion of a large number of the population, and the fragmentation of an entire nation. These educational institutions must now correctly harness the energy and skills of the Palestinian people to pave the way for progress. In our view, these institutes of higher education have an important role to play in promoting national integration and development, the task which will reunite a fragmented people - from

the Palestinians occupied in 1948, to the citizens of the West Bank and Gaza, and those Palestinians living in the Diaspora. A united and integrated Palestine will be able to grow economically and technologically. Moreover, these educational institutes will also have to find the most suitable way to strengthen and support the process of integration with the entire Arab world, since the higher education curricula will be sensitive to the special relationship of Palestine with Arab society as a whole.

A specific section of the education curriculum needs to be set aside specifically in accordance with this goal of integration, so as to let this concept develop (we have to distinguish between the concepts of integration and unity). It can be expressed through different educational and cultural media shaped by the surrounding environment, but it mainly helps crystallise an integrative force.

Integration also covers societal integration, the phenomenon which helps close the gap which separates Christian and Muslim, allows men and women to be treated as equals, reconciles town and country folks, secularises, and lets close-minded tribalism and family loyalty become a non-issue. Societal integration creates a society harmoniously functioning in a practical manner at all levels.

If the national system of higher education accepts the principle of stressing national integration as the basis for the revival of Palestinian society, then implementation of this concept demands that two important concerns be taken into consideration:

1. The Palestinian curriculum, on all levels, should comply with this goal without reverting to authoritarian tactics or infringing on academic freedoms, so as not to become a sort of brainwashing tool.
2. For the national system of higher education to comply with this goal and help achieve it, it should organise and distribute institutes of higher education in a logical manner geographically, economically, and with respect to social concerns. The fulfilment of this goal also demands shaping a policy which would positively affect its implementation. Palestinian educational institutes outside of Palestine would also have to comply with this policy. In conclusion, we can safely summarise the objective of this type of education by the motto "Education for National Integration and Development", a formula which meets all educational goals in all stages of learning.

## **6. Short and Long Term Needs: Priorities of Higher Education**

Our evaluation of what the priorities of higher education are and will be in the coming stages stems from what we see and logically understand to be lacking in Palestinian society. There are no detailed studies on societal needs in the numerous social and economic sectors, such as industry, agriculture, commerce, construction, education, production, services etc. which the field of higher education requires to function properly. Despite this fact, Palestinian society is in the process of facing up to this

challenge across the educational spectrum. Therefore, we can divide these priorities into two groups:

*A. Completing the Initial Set-up of Higher Education on the Structural Level and for the Future.*

Despite the fact that there are 8 universities in Palestine, none has developed programs in all fields of specialisation. On account of this, it is necessary to conduct exhaustive studies on the needs of these institutions in order to immediately allocate whatever is possible in terms of human resources. This is the first step in meeting the needs of higher education and serving the community. For example, there is presently no program for studies in communications in its various forms in any Palestinian university. They could all try to start a program in this field right away, although it would be insufficient as far as equipment and training go. It would be preferable to designate one university to make an all-out effort in this regard, while other universities would specialise in different types of other, badly needed programs. This kind of strategy would allow for the identification of the needs of society, how and what educational programs can serve those needs, and then designate such programs within a given university.

Another important consideration is Palestinian society's need for technical and practical expertise in the short, medium and long range. We need medical schools and centres, as well as science institutes. As we are at the beginning of the process of building a state which will be based on a constitution and the sovereignty of law, we also must realise the importance of having our own law school. Such an institution will flesh out the various laws remaining from the decades of foreign rule and clear up what the law in Palestine is and requires of all citizens.

*B. A New Structure*

There is a need for advanced professional and technology colleges which can combine undergraduate and graduate studies such as public management colleges and others which employ the most modern management and organisational techniques. Scientific and technical research centres are also in demand in Palestine.

Founding a medical school in Palestine is easily one of the pressing priorities of higher education. The establishment of a regular medical school whose main aim is to train and graduate capable doctors to treat the Palestinian people is very feasible and probable. The general state of the Palestinians in this field could allow for much more, i.e. a complete medical training facility and hospital, with medical facilities, and training in veterinary care, dentistry, pharmacology, and nursing. At the same time, this type of medical facility could also have an extensive research centre, one that specialises in diseases prevalent in the Arab world, and receives the necessary financial support to perform such research. This complete medical university would become a main centre

for scientific research in the region (similar to Hadassah or the specialised clinics in America like the Mayo Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio).

Our society is developing and looks to interact positively with the rest of the world in the 21st century, free from dependence on others. The only secure way of assuring this is to actively build schools, institutes, and universities which fulfil societal requirements. We must then create academic institutes and an academic system which will realise this national ambition quickly and effectively. The present situation in Palestine makes the completion of the educational infrastructure possible alongside the building of advanced study centres.

In order to remain highly qualified and creative in the realm of sciences, we must also discuss the necessity of creating a specialised university like California Institute of Technology (CALTECH) or Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which concentrate on the study of theoretical and applied science and technology. This type of university will also ideally offer students a well-rounded education by giving courses in the humanities and social sciences.

In addition to what was previously discussed, serious thought must be given to finding a formula which accommodates the present institutions and supports them in their areas of distinction. For example, if a university has a program for training those who would work in the tourist industry, an important sector of the Palestinian economy, then that university should be considered the chief institute for training future restaurateurs, hotel managers, tour guides, etc. The university should therefore receive sufficient funding to expand its programs and better train its students, so as to reach a high level of aptitude in this field. Therefore, we will evaluate all universities in Palestine to see which ones stand out in which fields, in order to better develop high-level programs of study in universities which prove themselves capable of such a task.

## **7. Number, Type and Geographical Distribution of Universities**

Owing to the fact that our future vision of higher education's primary objective is to bring about the aforementioned development and integration, it is therefore important to consider the number of universities in Palestine and their geographical distribution.

There are currently eight institutes of higher education in Palestine, a number that will most certainly increase. It has become clear, however, that all these universities, without exception and whether in spite or because of their important achievements, suffer from a number of problems. In addition to their financial difficulties, there is an urgent need for improving teaching and management techniques, as well as the quality of teaching materials, laboratories, and libraries.

All real solutions to these type of problems can only find answers in the long term. An easier way to begin searching for a long term solution is to take measures that provide for a sound, well organised operational structure for higher education, which allows the greatest number of students to benefit. Considering that there are

already universities functioning despite the difficulties they face, how can we effectively address these universities' common problems?

If we are to accept the generally accepted premise according to which a truly distinguished, complete university requires a population base of one million people, then the Palestinian people, who number over six million, form the basis for six major universities in Palestine. Though this population is scattered all over Palestine and the various Arab countries, the future promises to herald the return of a large number of refugees and displaced persons to their homeland. With the return of a sizeable portion of our people to Palestine, it is more than plausible to assume there will exist here 4 comprehensive distinguished universities in only a decade. These 4 institutes of higher learning will serve the educational needs of four million Palestinians.\*

The current Palestinian universities do not offer a wide range of educational programs and specialisations, and changing the present situation is a tall order, one that requires a complete overhaul of the existing university system. We suggest a decision be made designating three universities in the West Bank and Gaza as comprehensive, while a fourth institution of this type would be built for the Palestinians inside Israel. This fourth university would work towards integrating this particular sector of the Palestinian people into the national consciousness. The remaining universities would then specialise, i.e. one would become an institute for the study of science and technology in a particular city, while another would offer only programs that deal with the life sciences, etc. The aims of this kind of organisation and structure are a) to ensure the centralisation of higher education, b) to make higher education available to the largest number of qualified students, c) to allow students to be able to study wherever they like, be it near or far from home. A critical component of this plan is qualified and capable teaching, which will enable those qualified students enrolled to substantially benefit from higher education in accordance with the goal of national integration. This plan would also facilitate the establishment of smaller colleges and technical institutes in areas in which no large universities exist. Subsequently, the principle of centralisation and decentralisation would apply to these smaller, specialised institutes of higher learning, in disciplines such as law, administration, communications, etc.

After completing detailed studies on what needs to be done in this respect, we can then begin to refigure the process of higher education and ease the collective pressure on Palestinian universities. One method of easing this pressure and democratising higher education would be through the establishment of junior colleges. This type of college would offer a two-year introductory program in a given number of concentrations, and would be spread throughout all areas of the country. Those students who successfully complete this course of study with a sufficient grade point average will be allowed to continue towards a bachelor's degree in one of the major universities. Such a scheme would afford institutes of higher learning the opportunity

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\*The figure of 4 million is based on the estimated 3 million people living in the West Bank and Gaza and the 1 million Palestinians living inside Israel.

to reach a higher number of students on a more personal level, as well as easing the collective pressure on the larger four-year colleges and universities. Likewise, higher education will become available to a greater portion of society, a fact that will likely bring about a more qualified cadre of people in all regions and facilitate the realisation of the desired goal of national integration.

Now, we must make reference to another aspect of higher education which demands a different kind of treatment altogether. The reference here is to the concept of the open university, specifically, Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Open University, an institution only recently established. We believe that this university should receive the necessary support in order to successfully carry out its educational and cultural mission within Palestinian society. The open university system allows students to study at home while adhering to university guidelines and course materials. The university offers an open form of education, one that allows the greatest number of qualified students from all over Palestine to make use of its resources. The style, structure, and method of teaching in the open university system are unique and the potential educational role in society it plays may be even more important than that of traditional universities. No matter how many traditional colleges and universities there are, there should always be opportunities afforded to those who cannot study on campus in a collegiate atmosphere. Al-Quds Open University embodies this concept and is making higher education available to all the socio-economic groups in Palestinian society. As it is not a full comprehensive university, we can classify it in the same category as those specialised universities such as a life science college, a college of science and technology etc.

## **8. Graduate Studies**

Palestinian society, culture, and scientific capability have progressed and developed greatly, a fact which stems from the large amount of research and scientific output attained by the Palestinian people in all fields of knowledge: the humanities, social, natural, and physical sciences, technology, etc. This progress did not come about randomly, but rather by way of establishing and supporting graduate studies and research centres which are still in their developmental stages in Palestinian universities. Perhaps the best method for encouraging the development of graduate studies in Palestine is to have one university which has sufficient financial and human resources to establish the graduate studies program of its choice, after consulting with the Council for Higher Education. Now is high time to get started on such a project in Palestine. We hasten to add, however, that such a project should not get off the ground before careful planning which will guarantee its success in the long run.

## **9. Accessibility of Higher Education**

Based on the proposed framework for education contained in this report and the hypotheses surrounding it vis-à-vis the number of universities and their function, Palestinian universities and colleges should be able to accommodate 40,000 students in

approximately one decade. This number is not arbitrary, but rather based on the population base in Palestine with which we are dealing. In other words, when Palestine begins to enjoy a greater degree of stability, the Palestinian Authority needs to prepare all institutes of higher learning on all levels to increase their capacity for absorbing students by 50%. This of course assumes that we work towards national integration and making the system of higher education more accessible to both the Palestinians returning from abroad and those inside Israel. In order for these different groups of our scattered people to be able to study successfully in Palestinian universities and colleges, we need to adequately prepare the necessary faculty, as well as provide the proper classroom space, books and study materials. We estimate that we need to make available 250,000 square metres of building space for classrooms, lecture halls, desks, locker rooms, physical education facilities (gymnasiums, playing fields, swimming pools, etc.). These figures are in keeping with UNESCO estimates as well as those mentioned in the initial reports prepared by members of this committee.

As for qualified personnel, considering that the instructor/student ratio should be around 1/22 (according to UNESCO reports), there should be no less than two thousand instructors with advanced degrees employed in the education of the desired 40,000 students. Obviously, instructors with doctoral degrees or the equivalent would be preferable. In accordance with this goal, we must plan to incorporate 1,000 additional instructors to the existing educational system. A possible way of meeting this need would be to hire competent internationals and Palestinians, currently working or studying at universities in the Arab world and elsewhere. In preparing a practical program intended to benefit the development and growth of Palestinian universities and research centres, we hope that our system of higher education will be acceptable by international standards within 10 years.

## **10. Enrolment of Students in Institutes of Higher Education**

We expect that a large number of Palestinian high-school students, currently studying abroad, will want to enrol in universities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. If the peace process continues on its current path, we can expect a great deal more contact with the Palestinians made homeless in 1948. At this juncture, the higher education system must lay down the bases for acceptance for first-year university students as well as the bases for changing from a foreign or Arab university to a Palestinian one.

As for students who wish to matriculate in institutes of higher learning, we must lay down certain guidelines for determining whether or not they will be accepted for study on this level. The possession of a high school diploma (altawjihi) or its equivalent should be mandatory for acceptance into one of these institutions.

Such a condition does not at all preclude other specialised and prestigious universities from laying down additional conditions for acceptance. We should also note that in our projected vision of the framework of institutes of higher education, we stated that students in junior colleges should be allowed to move to a college or university which offers a bachelor's degree. Thus, we realise the importance of a merit-

based system of acceptance for all high-school students applying to study in colleges and universities.

## **11. The Responsibility of the State towards Higher Education and Research**

The state must understand its important responsibility towards higher education and guarantee that the skills of qualified personnel are channelled into preserving and developing Palestinian society. At the same time, it does not hold this responsibility by itself, and while the state cannot afford to stay on the sidelines as far as higher education is concerned, the private sector also has a significant role to play. For numerous reasons, social, political, and ideological, citizens in the private sector will have to bear a part of the burden.

On the practical level, assuming such responsibility touches on two crucial points:

1. The state has the right to create public institutes of higher education in any and all fields along the lines drawn up by the authority charged with running higher education, namely the Ministry of Higher Education. The state also reserves the right to administer such colleges and universities as it sees fit or appoint a board of trustees to perform that task. Such a system will allow for the proper running and funding of these institutes, and represents what is meant by the term 'state universities'.
2. Higher education legislation should allow for the establishment of registered public/private universities, i.e. universities which are not owned by the state but are registered by a non-profit public association, so who will be responsible, especially for funding, for these types of universities and scientific institutes? It is clear that these institutions will be licensed by the Ministry of Higher Education to offer educational degrees, and so a great deal of the responsibility lies with the institution itself. The stipulations of receiving a license should require the college/university to cover most of its expenses, meaning that the state is not charged with covering all expenses. The state, however, should be required to assist these institutions for national reasons, by employing the following two methods:
  - i. Agreeing with the university administration what part of the operational budget can be covered by the state. For example, the state could decide to give a grant which covers half the expenses of each student at this type of institution. If we assume that a university spends 2000 Jordanian Dinars (JD) on each enrolled student per year, then the state would supply the university with 1000 JD for each enrolled student. This sort of agreement can also apply to how much the university needs to build and develop. In any case, this is a hypothetical scenario and any such agreement between the state and a university would need to be carefully studied.

- ii. Having the Ministry of Higher Education run detailed studies to determine how much the system of higher education and all its institutions need to properly function and grow, and have the Ministry request a specific amount from the state for this purpose. The Ministry can then make grants to the universities on the basis of certain, agreed-upon criteria. In this case the universities and colleges would be completely free to teach, educate, and operate as they wish.

The state will not be expected to cover the expenses of those private, profit-making universities, permitted legally by the law of higher education to exist.

Higher education is a co-operative process in which both the state and the private sector take part. Private universities also have to assume responsibility for their expenses in order to be less of a burden on the state's coffers and to keep their independence and freedom to operate as they may choose.

The supervision of institutes of higher learning and research centres is a pressing concern. The state must effectively support this kind of supervision, and perhaps the best method is the aforementioned second one. By having the Ministry of Higher Education determine and administer what the higher education sector's financial needs are, it allows universities to remain independent in operation and forces them to find additional sources of funding.