

## **Opening Ceremony**

The Opening Ceremony was held in the Thafir El-Masri Auditorium, a donation of the El-Masri Foundation, which was officially inaugurated on the occasion of the opening of the Conference. It was attended by a large audience of over 600 persons and took place in the presence of Mr **Yasser Arafat**, President of the Palestinian National Authority. Several members of the Palestinian Cabinet of Ministers and of the Legislative Council, representatives of the municipalities and local communities of Nablus and of other localities in the Palestinian Territories were present. Numerous diplomatic missions, agencies and foundations, with Headquarters in Jerusalem and Ramallah, were also present. A large number of Palestinian university teachers and students, particularly from An-Najah National University, and leading personalities of the town of Nablus attended the official opening ceremony.

The Conference was opened by **Dr. Rami Hamdallah**, Vice President for Academic Affairs of An-Najah National University, who served as master of ceremonies for the Opening Session. Following the National anthem, a minute of silence was kept in memory of the martyrs of Palestine. On behalf of all participants, Prof. Hamdallah welcomed President Arafat and the other officials present at the Conference.

Welcome Address by

**Professor Dr. Munther Salah**, President, An-Najah National University

Your Excellency, President Yasser Arafat  
Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation Executive Committee  
President of the Palestinian National Authority  
President of the State of Palestine

Venerable guests and participants,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you today in the State of Palestine, in the steadfast city of Nablus, on the campus of An-Najah National University, the striving castle, on the occasion of the Second International Conference on the European-Palestinian Academic Co-operation Programme in Education. It is indeed a great honour for An-Najah to host this Second International Conference on its campus at a time when it has become crystal clear to the world over the Palestinian people's sincere desire for peace and their strenuous, honest work so that a just and comprehensive peace become deeply rooted in the land. This has been despite all the difficulties, obstacles, and frustrations created by the enemies of peace and those who claim their desire for peace, but who only preach it and do not practice it.

Your Excellency President Arafat,

We thank you first for your sponsorship and participation in the conference despite your intensive schedule and your persistent pursuit of our people's concerns and problems - at the top of which is the withdrawal and redeployment of Israeli military army from the city of Hebron. Undoubtedly, your presence today is a clear sign of your interest in higher education issues in Palestine. This has been your custom even during the darkest circumstances through which the Palestinian people passed. Higher education has been given a high position on the list of your priorities.

Second, we thank you for your inauguration of the late Thafer Al-Masri auditoriums. The Mærtyr Thafer AI-Masri worked sincerely for the welfare of his fellow countrymen. This occasion is a reminder for all of us not to forget our martyrs who have sacrificed their lives for the sake of land, liberation, and national identity.

Today we miss our brothers in the Palestinian universities in Gaza who are unable to join us because of the Israeli closure of the Gaza Strip. Their absence deprives us of benefiting from their experiences which would have enriched this Conference. The Israeli practices are not limited to closures and sieges of Palestinian cities. The Israelis have also closed four institutions of higher education in Jerusalem and Hebron for more than six months under the pretext that the Palestinian educational institutions and the deprivation of students of their natural rights in education would provide a security threat to the Israeli citizens.

Your Excellency, Mr. President, allow me to depart from the tradition of routine welcomes in order to survey - for a few minutes - the state of higher education in Palestine since the beginning of this Century. This brief outlook provides a beneficial factor and a general background for the participating colleagues in this important qualitative conference.

After the British assumed control of Palestine after the First World War, in 1924, the British Mandate authorities agreed to establish the Hebrew University in Jerusalem as a unicultural, Jewish institution. The Palestinian Arabs, based on the general sense of coexistence with other minorities and allowing for their integration in the society, regardless of their race or origin, had applied for the establishment of a multi-cultural university in Palestine for Arabs, Jews and Britons. However, the Palestinians received a categorical rejection from the British Mandate authorities to their request.

Soon after the establishment of a Higher Education Council in the early 1930s, the Palestinian Arabs welcomed it, thinking that through the Council it would be possible to establish higher education institutions which had been previously rejected. However, again their request, unfortunately, was rejected. Despite these rejections, the Palestinian Arabs - which represented 95% of Palestine's population at the time - did not lose hope. They initiated the establishment of a two-year Arab College in Jerusalem. The College was also linked with the University of London through the

university's external examination programme, as an early form of education at a distance. The development of similar colleges continued. Several teacher training and community colleges, in various fields, were established to meet the growing demand for higher education.

In the 1970s, after the Israeli occupation of the rest of Palestine, the Israeli military government prevented the Palestinian young men and women from joining Arab universities, in particular, and foreign universities, in general. As a result, groups of Palestinians from different geographical areas of Palestine initiated the establishment of Palestinian universities despite the social, political, and financial difficulties. At the time, the Israeli military authorities approved these universities' establishment to achieve their own interests - one of which was to monitor the travel of Palestinian young men abroad and prevent them from having contacts with their legitimate leadership. The authorities meant to concentrate the young men in the universities so as to make it easy for them to monitor and control the young Palestinian men.

In 1980/81, the Israeli authorities felt and realised that their aims had not been achieved. On the contrary, the establishment of the universities, which had received Israeli approval, had the opposite effect which the Israelis had had in mind. Instead of controlling the Palestinians, the universities became strongholds and centres for steadfastness and resistance against the occupation. The Israelis issued military order 854 to control the universities. Since then, the world of academia has become familiar with this notorious, ill-advised order. The Palestinian universities stood firmly against the order with all their might, supported by the international academic community, universities and professors, as well as by international organisations. UNESCO was a case in point. As a result, the order was frozen.

Against this background, the Palestinian universities continued their message, despite all obstacles and problems such as the severe restrictions on the importation of scientific equipment and references, the repeated and prolonged closures, and the detentions and deportation of students and teachers. Equally damaging, the Israeli military authorities prevented the establishment of agriculture and fine arts colleges because of the important role they play in the preservation of land, cultural and national identity. At the time, the idea of establishing Al-Quds Open University crystallised. UNESCO had an outstanding role in its creation. However, the university was only launched in 1985, when preparation of programmes, curricula, textbooks and educational aids started.

In December 1987, the blessed Intifada broke out against the Israeli Occupation which reacted by shutting down all Palestinian institutions of higher education for prolonged periods that extended for four years. In spite of this act, the universities continued to exercise their duties by holding classroom instruction in mosques, churches and private homes of teachers and students. At the same time, the Amman-based Al-Quds Open University began broadcasting its educational programmes which brought university education into full circle. During that critical period, the idea of European-Palestinian Academic Co-operation began to take shape and materialise, particularly, in education and at academic institutes.

After that, some American universities joined in. Thanks are due to the European Union for its full funding of this PEACE Programme of activities from the beginning. UNESCO and a number of European universities have also supported the Programme. We express our thanks to all.

To conclude, we may state the following:

- I. The Palestinian universities' role, since their foundation until the outbreak of Intifada, has been to provide higher education to the people of Palestine despite all impediments, while simultaneously, to persist in resisting the Israeli Occupation.
- II. During the Intifada, despite their closure, the universities played a leading and unique role by providing higher education to young men and women in Palestine through both traditional and non-traditional means. Al-Quds Open University programmes are a case in point. This enabled the Palestinian young men and women to maintain the difficult balance of continuing the Intifada and their resistance of the occupation, on one hand, while continuing their academic achievement on the other hand.
- III. The limitless PLO's support had a greater effect on the continuation of Palestinian universities. University education and resistance to the occupation have paralleled each other and have been of equal importance. This has been something that President Abu Ammar has reiterated on numerous occasions.
- IV. In the presence of the Palestinian National Authority, and during the stages of building the State of Palestine, the Palestinian universities have an important role to play which is drastically different from that of the past. This new role is the focus of our Conference and I will leave it to you and to the participants to come up with a comprehensive, clear vision of this new role.

Again, I thank you, Mr. President, for sponsoring and attending this international conference despite your busy schedule. My thanks and regards are also due to the participating colleagues who have taken great pains to come and actively participate.

I wish all of you a happy stay in Palestine and every success for your deliberations and this conference.

Peace and **Allah's** blessing unto you all.



Speech by **President Yasser Arafat**, President of the Palestinian National Authority

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful,

Brother Dr. Munther Salah  
Ladies and Gentlemen  
Honourable Guests  
Brothers:

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an: "O' My Lord, may you increase my knowledge".

At the beginning, as I stand in front of you, I have but to remember my comrade, comrade of my way, Martyr Hero, the late Thafer Al-Masri, and I say to him: "High in the heavens along with martyrs, prophets and true believers." I say to him: "the Oath is the Oath and the pledge is the pledge until we reach Jerusalem".

I have also but to remember the late Hikmat Al-Masri, may he rest in peace; I stand among you on the Mountain of Fire which is also the mountain of light, knowledge and gratitude.

It is a great pleasure today to be with you in this high rise scientific edifice. We are proud of it and we say that we will continue this process and the scientific evolution.

We have made two revolutions: an armed revolution, side by side with an equally important one, the scientific revolution. The latter one has enabled the Palestinian people to record the highest rate of education in the region. This is something we are proud of.

Ladies and Gentlemen  
Honourable Guests  
Brothers and Sisters

It is a pleasure to meet you today, scholars, thinkers, and professors, in all fields of knowledge. I welcome you and I would like to express my pleasure and deep happiness. We meet today in this valuable academic and scientific demonstration, on the campus of An-Najah National University, in the land of Palestine, under the Palestinian National Authority. We all have hope and confidence that this important convention will contribute to the development and upgrading of our academic institutions of higher learning, in a scientific way, in line with the urgent needs and requirements of the Palestinian people, particularly concerning the reconstruction of our vital sectors and the building of the Palestinian National Authority institutions on deep scientific bases which would achieve the greatest comprehensive economic and social development.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

At this critical and sensitive stage, the role of Palestinian higher education is of utmost importance. We are facing serious social and economic challenges, something that dictates on us to develop our national universities and centres of science so that they could become comprehensive centres for the training of promising generations. The human element is seen as the basic pillar on which both construction and development of state institutions rest. In so doing, our institutions can become effective elements in the bandwagon of human civilisation. In the course of life, we need these institutions to advance and prosper with useful knowledge, the future foundation for all nations.

Allow me to emphasise the leading role played by Palestinian thinkers and scholars. They have contributed effectively to the building of Arab generations and to developing their potentials in all fields: science, engineering, culture, education, medicine and production. We are proud of the contributions of Palestinian scholars to humanity. We hope more of this will continue in all creative ways, in our homeland, on the basis of co-operation, exchange of knowledge and expertise between our scientists and their counterparts in brotherly and friendly countries for the benefit of humanity, to meet basic needs and enable the Palestinian people to live in dignity and freedom, let alone improving their living conditions and alleviating their daily suffering.

At present, the Palestinian people are living under unbearable conditions due to the high rate of unemployment and poverty. This has been the result of blockade and unjust closure of Palestinian lands by the Israeli government under the pretext of security. The world has never experienced collective punishments like the ones we are facing.

Despite the drastic changes and difficult circumstances, we are proud that the Palestinian people have kept abreast of the scientific course with both responsibility and capability. In the last eight decades, the Palestinian people have faced so many obstacles in their pursuit for protection of their identity against all attempts, by Israel, to obliterate this identity and impose hegemony on their resources. Credit goes to your sincere constructive efforts and strong determination for the establishment of our universities despite all hindrances and repressive methods by Israeli occupation practised against both university teachers and students.

The Palestinian people have been made homeless and have been dispersed in all corners of the world. Despite that, they have had all motivation to seek education and knowledge with strong unprecedented will and determination. We say that with pride. According to Israeli's Jaffee Centre, we have the highest rates of graduates, in our region, surpassing even the number of graduates in Israel which still occupies our land.

We are grateful to the role of our brothers and friends who have supported our cause and helped us by all means possible during the past years.

Allow me, on behalf of the Palestinian people, - to express my deep appreciation and gratefulness to the distinguished and outstanding role of the European countries, governments and peoples, for their constructive and fruitful efforts. All appreciation is due to UNESCO for its support, financially and morally, of our universities and in the field of culture and education.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are longing for a great hope towards the future. We all have conviction and confidence in our people's ability to continue the course of building peace. We have great hope in the continuation of this creative co-operation for the sake of laying the solid foundations and beams as well as the formulation of noble goals for the process of higher education in our country. We will move side by side, with sincere efforts, to bring about a just, permanent and comprehensive peace that guarantees security, stability for all peoples of the region and opens horizons for regional coexistence and co-operation.

I take the opportunity today to send my warm congratulations to President Bill Clinton on the occasion of winning in the American Presidential elections. We are confident he will continue his efforts to push the peace process. He has been sponsoring and following up this process since the signing of the Oslo Agreements in the White House.

The Palestinian people, as the Arab nations have emphasised in the Cairo Arab Summit resolutions, have chosen peace as a strategic option and an irreversible road. They have chosen the peace that secures the termination of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands including the Christian and Islamic holy places and the restoration and exercise of our national rights at the top of which are the right to self determination and establishment of a Palestinian state, with Jerusalem, as its Capital.

We will continue our national course, the course of reconstruction, and building. We all hope to achieve our legitimate aspirations With the help and support of our friends and brothers and all peace-loving, democratic and freedom forces the world over.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Again, I welcome you all in the land of Palestine, the land of peace and love. I thank you for your participation in this important academic gathering. I wish you a happy stay and a successful conference.

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.. "And say: Act! Allah will behold your actions and his messenger and his believers."

Truthful is Allah the Magnificent

**Dr. Gabi A. Baramki** presented the objectives of the Conference, in his capacity as Chairman of the PEACE Programme Steering Committee. He underlined that the chief objective of the PEACE Programme was to support the Palestinian universities, through interuniversity co-operation, and to enhance the quality of their teaching, training and research programmes. He reminded the participants in the Conference about the continued Israeli measures against the Palestinian educational institutions. Several of them, including Abu Dies College in Jerusalem, Hebron University and its Polytechnic Institute are still closed. He outlined briefly the achievements of the PEACE Programme since the last International Conference held in Louvain-La-Neuve, in November 1994, and insisted on the need for the present Conference to result in recommendations and concrete proposals for action.

In his address to the Conference, **Mr. Michael Bahr**, Acting Representative of the European Commission, pointed out the strong relationship that binds Europe with Palestine and emphasised the commitment of the European Union to support the social economic development of the Palestinian people, as a prerequisite for the progress of the peace process in the Region. As part of that support, a large share is allocated to education, in particular to higher education. He assured the participants of the continued support which the European Commission will extend to higher education, given its key role in the development of the high level human resources of the Palestinians.

**Professor M.A.R. Dias**, Director of UNESCO's Division of Higher Education,

President Arafat,

Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, Minister of Higher Education of the Palestinian Authority,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my capacity as Director of the Division of Higher Education of UNESCO, it is both an honour and a privilege for me to extend to you the greetings of Dr. Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO, and together with my colleagues present here, Dr. Adnan Shehab Eldin, Director of the UNESCO Office in Cairo, and Dr. Khawla Shaheen of the Education Sector of UNESCO, to wish full success to this important meeting devoted to the further development of Palestinian higher education and to the contribution that the international academic community can make in that direction.

It is a great honour for me to convey, on behalf of Dr. Mayor, his best wishes to you, Chairman Arafat, and to assure you of UNESCO's full support in your courageous efforts for the peaceful democratic and prosperous development of the Palestinian people. Peace is a process: we learn this every day. Each day also, we observe negative steps in the process, but the positive movement for peace is irreversible and does not, and cannot stop. Yesterday -this is an example- I represented

UNESCO in a ceremony at the University of Haifa: the closing of an exhibition on Bethlehem 2000, in the presence of Palestinian and Israeli officials and of representatives of the Universities of Haifa and Bethlehem. During the ceremony, my personal feelings on the irreversibility of the peace process became more concrete.

Chairman Arafat,

Let me express a very personal consideration. One does not need to be a prophet to see that you will be remembered for ever as one among the most important personalities of this century. In private life, in public affairs, on the international scene, there is a moment for fighting, even for war, but one will become a wise man only when he knows how to make peace. The Peace Agreement signed by you and by the Prime Minister Rabin - the agreement of the braves- is in the collective memory of the humanity. In my functions, I have had neither the opportunity nor the privilege of meeting Mr. Rabin. It is a real privilege to meet you. As a former journalist, a university professor and academic administrator and as an international civil servant, I learned that following your actions and reactions is a permanent lesson of life. Thank you very much.

May I take this opportunity to convey personal greetings, on behalf of the Director General, to you, Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, and to wish you all success in your new and important task as Minister of Higher Education. We all see you as an internationally well-known academic and as a highly respected partner in the international dialogue in the region. Last week, in the United Nations, in New York, I had echoes, very positive ones, on your international action. I wish to assure you that UNESCO is ready to assist you in your endeavour to raise the quality of Palestinian higher education system and to better adapt them to the specific needs of Palestinians.

UNESCO's experience shows that, without a good higher education system, no country, no people may envisage to be really independent. And in democratic societies, where governments are elected by people, a fruitful dialogue must be established among the academic world - free, autonomous and responsible - and the legitimate representatives of people, including the Parliament. Democracy, as well as Peace, is the result of a process, sometimes a long process, in which patience is a necessary virtue, but the identification of common objectives and the closer co-operation among all partners is indispensable.

This is one of the reasons why the Director General of UNESCO decided to call, in 1998, a World Conference on Higher Education, which will be preceded in 1996 and 1997, by a series of regional conferences. The first one in Latin America and the Caribbean will take place in a few days, in La Havana, Cuba, from 18 to 22 November 1996. The Regional Conference for Arab countries is scheduled to take place in April 1997 in Beirut, Lebanon. All these conferences will discuss issues linked to quality, relevance, equity and international co-operation. The Conferences will, we hope, approve declarations containing the principles of the Academic Community (rectors, presidents, professors, students) of government representatives and of members of the civil society, agree on the challenges higher education faces at the end

of this century for the construction of a better society based on Peace and Development. These conferences will also prepare and approve regional and later international plans of action aiming at the amelioration of higher education systems.

Professor Abu Lughod, here present, is actively involved in this process, as member of the Steering Committee of the International Advisory Group, the Director General appointed, under the presidency of Professor Georges Haddad, of the Sorbonne University, to monitor and guide the preparation and realisation of these conferences. In UNESCO, we are confident that the discussions you start today will provide an important input to this process.

Special thanks and greetings, Mr. Chairman, are also due to Professor Munthir Salah, the President of An-Najah National University, as host of this Conference. Your University serves as a good example to show that, despite obstacles, difficulties and chronic shortage of resources and funds, the Palestinian higher education institutions have made important progress in upgrading the quality of their programmes and in being more active, as equal partners, on the international scene. Established as a national College in 1919, An-Najah developed as a full university since 1977 and became the largest one in Northern Palestine. We are happy to collaborate with you, Professor Salah.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When two years ago, I addressed your preceding Conference in Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium, I emphasised the particular attention and active support extended by UNESCO and by the Director General personally to the Palestinian higher education, even before your network was formally constituted in 1991, as an expression of the academic solidarity with the Palestinian universities. This support was in keeping with the relevant Resolutions of the General Conference of UNESCO and the Decisions of its Executive Board, which urged the Organisation to reinforce its support to the Palestinian People in all areas within its competence. I must insist on the fact that this support was unconditional and was done a long time before the Peace Agreement was signed. I will never forget the discussions on this matter we had with Professors Vincent Hanssens and Valerio Grementieri and with the president of the Steering Committee of the PEACE Programme, Professor Baramki, whose leadership was fundamental in the development of this programme.

This year's meeting convened by the PEACE Programme with the support of UNESCO and of the European Commission, acquires a particular significance. In the first place, it is the first large international gathering on higher education to be held in the Palestinian territories. It is also, as I was told last week in the Secretary General's office in New York, the first international conference held with the sponsorship of one UN agency in the territories under Palestinian Authority. Moreover, it meets at a time when every effort is needed in order to reset the peace process on the right track again. It is becoming increasingly clear that the only solution for tranquillity and safety for sustainable and sovereign development for all the peoples in the Region is to pursue the efforts to find solutions to the disputed issues through dialogue and negotiations.



It is UNESCO's belief that the international academic community can make a contribution of its own in this direction. The network of European and North American Universities, very appropriately called the PEACE Programme, which has convened this Conference acts in this direction. Your presence here is an expression of the commitment to continue the valuable work you have started a few years ago.

The topic of this Conference concerns the future of Palestinian higher education. In keeping with its consistent stand, which emphasises the role of higher education for any effort to achieve self sustainable development, UNESCO believes that the Palestinians need to build up a modern, high quality, system of higher education which should be tuned to the specific needs of Palestinian society, while being, at the same time, efficient and competitive on the international and regional academic scene. In the present day world, in which any kind of development has become knowledge intensive, one of the chances for the future of the Palestinian people lies precisely in its capacity to develop an education system capable of assuring the acquisition and mastery of advanced knowledge and skills so as to introduce new technologies and provide a broad spectrum of products and services. A good system of higher education is not only a tool for the development of high level human resources in Palestine, it is also called upon to make an invaluable contribution to the enhancement of the national identity and to the sovereign development of the Palestinians.

Within its overall Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian people, UNESCO, through a concerted action between the special unit headed by Mr. Omar Massalha and the Division of Higher Education, has included, as priority actions, a number of projects which are aimed at the further development of Palestinian higher education and research. When the joint UNESCO/Palestinian Committee met in Paris in April of this year to discuss the stage of implementation of the Programme, the Director-General received the members of the Committee and made it very clear that the Organisation wishes to make a special effort in the field of higher education for the Palestinians, which is not limited to be the host of the secretariat of the Programme.

Your network has known a steady dynamic growth: from twenty-two member institutions which was your membership two years ago in Louvain-la-Neuve, to over sixty-five member universities at present. I am pleased to note that this is the result of the positive dynamics centred by the Programme, but also the result of the work of the Steering Committee and of the Secretariat headed by my former colleague, Mr. Chitoran. It is expected that this Conference will give a new impetus to the programme. I wish to assure you that you will always have the constant support of UNESCO.

Let me list below, by way of example, a few projects in which UNESCO, within the limitation imposed by its financial constraints (and all of you know how drastic these constraints are) could provide assistance to the PEACE programme.

- the Director-General has approved a contribution to cover travel costs for the 17 Palestinian post graduate students who have been offered scholarships by the PEACE programme member universities. In addition, several Palestinian

- the Director-General has approved a contribution to cover travel costs for the 17 Palestinian post graduate students who have been offered scholarships by the PEACE programme member universities. In addition, several Palestinian students have been able to pursue studies abroad, following the appeal of the Director-General to governments, IGOs, NGOs and universities, to launch an

#### International Fellowship Scheme for Palestinian Students;

- within the framework of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs programme, we have continued to support the UNESCO Chair in Archaeology, established at the Institute of Archaeology of Al-Quds University, but serving also Birzeit and An-Najah Universities. The international expert who is currently teaching at the Chair is present at this Conference. I hope you will discuss in one of the Working Groups ways by means of which the programme of the Chair can be further strengthened and expanded;

- support has been extended for the establishment of a Modern Language Resources Centre, with the purpose to upgrade foreign language teaching at Palestinian universities, and to provide intensive language courses for the Palestinian students who intend to complete postgraduate studies abroad;

- we have also supported the establishment of an international university network on refugee studies, an area of particular topicality for the Palestinians. Several Palestinian universities belong to the network;

- UNESCO has covered transportation costs for the equipment, books and journals collected by CICUP, which co-operates with UNESCO.

UNESCO will pursue the search for funding from various sources for the other projects included in the Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People which concern directly higher education. It has already secured substantial support from the Norwegian Development Agency (NORAD) for the project devoted to the elaboration of a strategy for the development of higher education in Palestine. Slow but steady progress is made in relation to other projects, namely the Marine Science Centre to be established in the Gaza Strip, the establishment of a microelectronics facility serving the Palestinian universities as well as the local communities, etc.

All these actions represent an effort, express a good will, but, of course, the needs of the Palestinians in the field of higher education are so important that it is only through the joint, concerted efforts of all those concerned and ready to assist that steps can be taken in order to meet them. I understand that the PEACE Programme member-universities are fully aware of this, because they have expressed and have actually proved by facts that they are ready to:

- offer scholarships;

- wave tuition fees, offer free access to library and laboratory facilities and cheap accommodation, whenever they cannot offer full grants;
- do not charge fees for consultants, experts and teachers who go on mission to Palestinian universities and, in some cases, cover also travel costs;
- initiate bilateral projects, which are then developed into larger-scale, multilateral ones;
- seek and obtain funding for various projects from their national authorities and from other potential donors.

I can only hope that the international community in its turn will understand how important it is to increase support to the development of high-level human resources of the Palestinians.

I wish to appeal in particular to the European Commission which, together with UNESCO, have been the main supporters of the PEACE Programme, and are willing to continue this support in the future as well. I would like to address the same appeal to the representatives of the sister organisations in the UN System present in the Conference, to various NGOs, agencies and foundations present, to bring their contribution in order to assist the Palestinians to give a fresh start to the development of Palestinian higher education. The first and most important efforts are to be made by the Palestinians themselves, but they need the partnership of the international academic community and the active support of the international community in general.

I therefore wish you full success in your proceedings and would like to assure you once again of the Director-General of UNESCO's support to the PEACE Programme and to the development of a strong higher education system in Palestine as a contribution to the peace process for the development of Palestine.

**Dr. Hanan Ashrawi**, Minister of Higher Education, Palestinian National Authority

After the series of talks that we have had this morning, that have covered probably most of the topics I want to cover, I feel the last thing you need is another speech. But I think I am going to give you one.

First I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the organisers of this Conference, and for the long and hard and difficult work that they took in order to put it together, with its long tradition of co-operation and dedication.

I also would like to thank An-Najah National University for hosting this Conference and the Masri family and Masri Foundation for the opening of the new

auditorium and for their ongoing and continued dedication to the Palestinian nation, to Palestinian education which is enhancing the authenticity of the Palestinian identity.

I would like to welcome all our international guests here in Palestine which is not just a state of mind, which is not just a hope or an inspiration but is in a state of emergence as a new state, on the ground: the fusion of the people and the land. The relation of our history, the relation of an ancient and proud culture that has long been denied and is now in the process of being vindicated through an act of will. This act of will by the Palestinian people wherever, under the general state of injustice, whether in exile or under occupation has maintained that without the basic component of justice without the basic recognition of Palestinian national rights and identity, there can never be genuine peace or stability. We thank you for sharing this commitment for genuine peace, blending the components and the constituents of peace that are based on great awareness because our real enemy is the politics of exclusion and domination. Our real ally is knowledge, values, and a sense of commitment to all that is just and valuable in human society.

We are involved in two very difficult processes which are parallel: mutually dependent and simultaneous. It is the real process of the evolution of occupation and the evolution of statehood, and both in tremendously hard work, serious challenges and very painful decisions. The peace process as you know is undergoing serious difficulties. I am not going to go into all the details of Israeli intransigence, of the regression into the land which again is the reality of exclusion, of domination, of adapting to impose the will of one side on the other, and therefore challenging the magnitude of this peace process, and the prospects for long-term peace and stability.

The Palestinians are, as usual, with their dedication, with their strong will, with international law, active, and aware, and they are political people who have not been broken by occupation or exile and who have not been defeated by these. But we see in them challenges. Again we are involved in the process of nation building which is equally challenging, equally arduous and much more difficult in many ways, because we are laying the foundations of a future, after such a long legacy of pain and of injustice and we do not want to go back into the past. We are not interested in presenting ourselves as victims or in mutual victimage. We are interested in looking forward to a future for the Palestinian people everywhere on the land of Palestine with our own legitimacy and you are here to participate in that consultation with me in building institutions.

An academic foundation is the basis of the nation building process, because it involves one component which is the means and ends of our endeavour: the human component. The human mind is one of the most valuable trusts that we have. We, as educators, are entrusted with it and we cannot in any way sell short this trust. That is why I keep saying that this newly formed ministry, as a result of the decision of President Arafat and of the Palestinian National Authority, which is also struggling to bring this here today, is a relatively new one but with an old heritage based on present and serious challenges - closures, and restrictions on people's movement, in political movements, freedoms notwithstanding. This ministry also sells to you a future vision,

and the future vision is all-encompassing to the Palestinians everywhere, based of course, on the experience of the Palestinians here and elsewhere, in building the foundation of our own reality.

As you know, the universities and all institutions of higher learning emerge essentially as an extension of the will of the people, as an act of affirmation of identity, as an act of positive defiance and resistance against all attempts at the abrogation of this identity in us, and also as part of the institution building process which started even under the occupation and in exile. It is like a secret marriage between the PLO and the leadership in exile, and the Palestinian people here who have to work together in order to maintain our relation with the process, our institutions, even though we were held accountable as being illegal because we were not supposed to affirm anything at all, least of all our national identity.

I believe in certain criteria and values for education, as one that is induced, and these values must be promoted by education, and by society. Education must be relevant, and not in the official approach to relevant, as a didactic but as an integral part of what is required in the process. At the same time, education must be appropriate, using the means available, plus being ongoing and sustainable. Simultaneously, I must say, in being appropriate and available, and integrated, there must be no compromise on quality or standards. We have to be absolutely clear and ruthless on these issues. We cannot justify any type of shortcoming by saying "we are being unjustly treated while we are learning under conditions that are difficult." We have to be true to ourselves, before others. I cannot make this compromise with myself, and therefore there will be no compromise on quality or on standards. We have to be involved, again, in long- term planning - while we are meeting immediate and short-term needs, which are by no means, an easy task. Therefore, we have to be moderate and flexible in our approach and in our rhythm.

Part of the challenge of the Ministry is to provide economic security and support for the universities and this, of course, involves international effort as well as our own effort to provide this type of sustained support and financial security. We are also working on a leader framework and basis for economic works in order, again, to provide a firm and clear foundation for all institutions of higher learning. They are putting this into context, the Palestinian reality being rooted and firmly embedded in the knowledge of our identity and our needs and our future requirements and of course international correlation as the global context of Palestinian higher education. That is why we are committed to the two principles simultaneously: the principle of authenticity, and the principle of contemporary innovation and we will not sacrifice either for the sake of that. We are also committed to enhancing research and supporting research activities, here and internationally. We are all putting effort into that. We are giving more effort and time to technical and vocational training which will meet the needs of our people and to create an integrated society that will be part of a nation building developmental process. This is being laid.

We are also committed to faculty development, not just, as Dr. Baramki said, not just the new graduates, but also the faculty who are in institutions, who constantly



need to feel that they are part of an ongoing, progressing process. And of course we are committed to institution building, and to do this, we have to create an environment of feasibility and co-ordination among institutions of higher learning, and of course with international development. Therefore, we view ourselves, as people who have national goals but who also have a global vision. And we will dare to intervene and to conclude and to make ourselves ready because in this age of information, the universality of knowledge holds to the importance of skills to intervene and to influence serious global knowledge. We need to have the tools and the ability not only to gain access, but also to be part of the shaping of this age and this knowledge.

Therefore we will be part of this new definition of power and leadership globally. It is no longer the possession of arms or even resources that can give you power, it is the possession of knowledge. Knowledge as defined by information, skills, and ability to intervene, the values and attitudes that you bring to the interaction of this knowledge as well as your ability to effect change. This is the source of power and leadership. So we may be a very small nation in the making, a very small country struggling for its independence, but we also need the tools in order to utilise them and the skills and the access in order to give us these new sources of authority, of leadership, of power to intervene and to place ourselves on the global map of knowledge and education.

Having been entrusted with these human resources and knowledge, I would like to emphasise that our focus is one of decentralisation, one of accepting privatisation, (even governments are being privatised nowadays), of enhancing civil society and the work of civil society and being part of these new concepts of governments: inclusive, participatory, broad-based governments, based on respect for diversity and pluralism and of course versatility and ability. Therefore we see this as a process of empowerment, both national empowerment, as a nation, and the empowerment of the individual to be part of the decision-making of that nation, challenging, of course, the given norms and attitudes that have long been used to justify the exclusion of the Palestinians.

And in order to do that we have to be part of the dynamic process. We are going to build our own democracy, internally, again as an act of will. To maintain the rule of law and to designate just laws. We are going to safeguard basic rights and freedoms and create a nation based on institutions that use meritocracy and professionalism as basic principles of assessment and evaluation. To do that we also guarantee non-discrimination. I do not think that anyone should be excluded from education or any kind of form of endeavour on the basis of any handicap whether gender, physical, or economic. Gender is being used as an excuse to exclude women. I may not be one of the greatest advocates of women's rights or I may not be the first to tell you that President Arafat is committed, on his honour, to women's rights.

As a nation in the making we need to mobilise and utilise all our resources: we cannot exclude anybody. But we need to attract people. Palestinian expertise is all abroad. We need to end this exile. We would like to bring them back to be part of the nation building process and part of the political process as well. We need involvement



and therefore, not just with our Palestinian expatriates but also with the international community of which you are a part, an outreach program, to network, to co-operate to work together on the basis of parity and mutual empowerment because we have a lot that we can learn from each other.

I salute this endeavour, the PEACE Programme, its objectives, and particularly its aim in assisting Palestinian universities and education. It is the time for excellence in endeavours, I look forward to the results, the resolutions, and the recommendations of this meeting of minds here today. I am proud of you that we will meet together in full partnership and support for Palestinian education. Thank you very much.

The next speaker was **Dr. K. Yassin**, Director of Thafer Al-Masri Foundation, who presented the contribution of the Foundation to the development of Palestinian society. In particular, he referred to the cultural, educational and social projects meant to restore the city of Nablus, including the Auditorium donated to An Najah National University. He announced the decision of the Foundation to build a College of Fine Arts for the University.