



PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA MEDITERRANEE
الجمعية البرلمانية للبحر الأبيض المتوسط

1st Standing Committee on Political and Security-related Cooperation

***Ad Hoc* Committee on the Middle East**

Report adopted by consensus on 24 June 2009
at the 4th meeting of the 1st Standing Committee in Lisbon

Visit to the Middle East by the PAM Bureau, 18 – 21 May 2009

Rapporteur : Hon. George Vella (Malta)

Introduction

The mission took place from 18 to 21 May 2009 and was organized by the PAM Secretariat with the aid and support of the Egyptian and Jordanian Parliaments, the United Nations and French diplomatic authorities.

The trip was carried out over 4 days in 4 countries (Egypt, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Israel and Jordan), with 12 meetings held with major actors on the regional scene, namely:

- *H.E. Dr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour, President of the People's Assembly of Egypt*
- *H.E. Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt*
- *Hon. Ahmed Ben Helli, Deputy-Secretary General of the League of Arab States*
- *Mrs. Karen AbuZayd, Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)*
- *H.E. Mr. Abdulbadi Majali, Speaker of the Chamber of Representatives of Jordan and President of EMPA*
- *H.E. Mr. Riyad Al-Maliki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority*
- *Representatives of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC)*
- *H.E. Mr. Samir Abdallah, Minister of Planning of the Palestinian Authority*
- *Ambassador Robert Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process*
- *H.E. Mr. Reuven Rivlin, Speaker of the Knesset*
- *H.E. Mr. Naser Judeh, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Jordan*
- *Representatives of the Palestinian National Council (PNC)*

The delegation was led by Hon. Rudy Salles, PAM President, from 18 to 20 May, following which Hon. Ellisaveth Papadimitriou stepped in on 21 May after the President's departure.

The following were the objectives of the mission:

- *To give tangible proof of our genuine concern and selfless interest in the problems of the Middle East, in particular the Israeli Palestinian conflict, and the human suffering it has brought along in its wake over the years;*
- *To acquire hands on experience of the situation on the ground, and then, on the experience gained, consider how best PAM could promote peace and stability in the region;*
- *To carry out a fact-finding mission on the consequences of Israeli military operations in Gaza, which took place from 27 December 2008 until 18 January 2009;*
- *To express solidarity to the aggrieved people of Gaza, and to the families of all those hit by any military action be they Israeli or Palestinian;*
- *To convey the message that we do care about what is going on, and about what has been going on in the Middle East, as it impinges directly on the security of our region;*
- *To present PAM as a responsible, trustworthy parliamentary forum to the different actors in the region, especially parliamentarians and parliamentary assemblies, in order to establish regular contacts and open channels of communication which could be used profitably and in a constructive way in the future;*
- *To reestablish dialogue with the Knesset so that it resumes active participation within PAM.*

This report represents the fundamentals of the exchanges which took place with PAM contacts, in chronological order.

Annexes:

-List of PAM delegates

-Official Program

-List of PLC delegates

-List of PNC delegates

Cairo, Egypt

18 May 2009

I - H.E. Dr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour, President of the People's Assembly of Egypt

a- The difference between PAM and EMPA

At the onset of the meeting, President Sorour requested to better know the differences between PAM and EMPA.

President Salles, speaking on behalf of the delegation, stressed first of all, that the work of PAM and EMPA were complementary.

These processes are, however, different in nature. EMPA was the parliamentary expression supporting North-South dialogue stemming from the Barcelona Process. PAM, in contrast, is an independent international organization dealing only with the Mediterranean and with issues of direct concern to the region through the use of parliamentary diplomacy. PAM is comprised solely of the countries bordering the Mediterranean, and those traditionally considered as being Mediterranean (e.g. Jordan, Portugal, Serbia, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), all being represented on a completely equal footing.

b- The objectives of the PAM Bureau mission

Following this explanation, President Salles was able to give the essential reasons for this trip by the PAM Bureau. The two main points being:

- The wish to present PAM to actors in the region in order to consider the best possible way for PAM to support the current Peace Process between the Israelis and Palestinians on the basis of parliamentary diplomacy.
- A fact-finding mission on the consequences of the recent Israeli military operations in Gaza.

c- The situation in Gaza

President Sorour subsequently referred to what he called “a real Holocaust” experienced in the Gaza Strip during the recent attacks by the Israeli army. He hoped to see those who had

committed these war crimes be judged before the International Criminal Court. He gave his support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and welcomed the upcoming mission to the region by the United Nations Human Rights Council.

d- Relations with the Knesset

On relations with the Israeli Parliament, President Sorour gave us part of an exchange of letters between Hon. Reuven Rivlin, Speaker of the Knesset, and himself on the subject of the commemoration of the Holocaust. It expresses clearly an agreement between the two Presidents on the unanimous condemnation of this tragic event. A disagreement, however, exists on the current situation; the Speaker of the Knesset wanted all attention and efforts to be concentrated on Iran as a threat to security in the area, while President Sorour believes that the priority should be the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as he considers this to be the root of all unrest in the region.

e- The Peace Process

President Sorour expressed hope that PAM lends its support to the current Road Map in order to resolve, in particular, the very delicate situation that is the issue of the future of Jerusalem, and to putting an end to the settlement in the West Bank. As of now, global public opinion is on the side of the Palestinians, and he considered it essential that, as representatives of the people, PAM parliamentarians put pressure on their respective governments to support the ongoing peace efforts.

Finally, President Sorour welcomed this trip by the Bureau as well as the important work done by PAM.

Following this meeting, Dr.Sorour welcomed the delegation to the debating chamber of the Egyptian Parliament during a public session.

II - H.E. Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt

a- The crisis in the Middle East

Beginning with his remarks on the crisis in the Near East and the role that parliamentary diplomacy could play there, Minister Aboul Gheit wished to offer his vision of current geopolitical stakes by concentrating the discussion on what he described as “troublemakers”.

Certain countries are perceived by Egypt as destabilising the region. These countries benefit from the current crisis by supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza in order to exercise a direct influence on the evolution of the situation and to push forwards their own interests. They make political capital of the extreme regional instability by presenting themselves as a counterweight to the State of Israel, hoping to defend the interests of the oppressed people of Palestine. By these justifications, they could eventually acquire nuclear weapons in their military arsenals.

These actions are viewed negatively and are not condoned by the Egyptian authorities, because they particularly threaten the current regional military balance by opening the door for an arms race and subsequently lead to dangerous nuclear proliferation.

b- The situation in Gaza

Following the military coup by Hamas in Gaza, Egypt has found itself in a very delicate situation. It cannot officially recognise the Hamas “government” in place in Gaza for fear of creating two Palestinian authorities, nor can it ignore the situation that afflicts 1.5 million people on this narrow strip of land.

The Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt is actually open, however, transit is limited to the few , namely those who are injured (Egypt has treated 4,000 Palestinians after the attack on Gaza), those who are sick or are students who have obtained a scholarship to study abroad. Egyptian authorities do not consider it possible to open the Rafah terminal completely, because it would risk:

- Allowing Hamas elements to enter on Egyptian territory and potentially threaten the internal stability of the country;

- Rendering Egypt directly responsible for the situation in Gaza. Israel would then rid themselves of their guardianship which they are obliged to exercise, and leave the Egyptian authorities to manage the Strip.

It was pointed out that Egypt had already given treatment free of charge to about 4,000 Palestinians following the incursion into Gaza of the Israeli authorities.

Egypt had already supplied 8,000 tons of medical aid and equipment. 30,000 tons are yet to come, of which 15,000 are being supplied by Egypt.

The Minister expressed his annoyance with “people who teach lessons” regarding the behaviour Egypt adopted in view of this situation. Given the geopolitical reality of the region, Egypt had done its best under the prevailing circumstances.

c- Inter-Palestinian dialogue

Following a discussion with the delegation on the inter-Palestinian situation, the Minister provided a report on the current status of the issue.

H.E. Aboul Gheit pointed out that the first to suffer from the Palestinian division were the Palestinians themselves. In fact, this division between Hamas and Fatah and the divide between the West Bank and Gaza serve as a pretext for the Israeli government to affirm that there is no valid partner with whom to negotiate for peace.

Currently, an inter-Palestinian dialogue is taking place under the auspices of Egypt and presently is focusing on three main subjects:

- The electoral system which will be used for the July 2010 elections. Hamas wants a proportional ballot, while Fatah wants a majority ballot. Egypt is proposing a mixture of both systems with 25% being proportional and 75% being majority.
- The composition of the police forces. Egypt proposes a division of 50% Hamas-50% Fatah until the formation of the new government.
- The creation of an authority responsible for the temporary management of Palestinian affairs, to be dissolved upon the creation of the new government.

The meeting concluded with the wish of the Minister that the Union for the Mediterranean could be a real opportunity to make progress in the region with Egypt holding the Co-Presidency with France.

III – Hon. Ahmed Ben Helli, Deputy-Secretary General of the League of Arab States

a- The Arab Peace Initiative

After excusing the Secretary General's absence, who was in Sudan during the visit by the PAM Bureau, Ambassador Ben Helli went straight to the core of the matter, arguing that the Road Map adopted in 2003 by the Quartet (the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations) as well as the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative should have PAM's support.

He recalled that the Arab Peace Initiative advances the idea that the Arab countries would offer peace and the normalisation of their relations with the Jewish State in exchange for a return of Israel to the boundaries of 4 June 1967, including the Golan Heights. They call for the application of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, as well as the creation of a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital and a solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees (according to UN Security Council Resolution 194). This initiative is based on two principles: that of "Land for Peace", and the idea that peace and security cannot be attained through force of arms.

b- The United States and Europe

The League of Arab States has high expectations for the new American Administration's vision for the resolution of the conflict in the region. The Deputy-Secretary General expressed his great astonishment at the strange silence of the Europeans during the Israeli aggression in Gaza. He questioned the disturbing behaviour of the Czech President of the EU during the conflict. In fact, while the Israeli forces were bombarding Gaza, President Topolánek had proposed that collaboration and relations between Israel and the European Union be upgraded.

c- PAM and the role of public opinion

Finally, it was also stressed that cooperation between PAM and the League of Arab States is growing continuously. The Arab League will participate at the forthcoming Plenary Session in Istanbul, represented by its Secretary General, H.E. Dr. Amr Moussa. A Memorandum on the Exchange of Observer Status between the two organizations is in the process of being finalised.

According to Ambassador Ben Helli, only strong international pressure on Israel will push the country to reconsider its positions. Deputy-Secretary General Ben Helli opined that PAM, as a representative of the people of the region, must participate in exerting this pressure.

Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territories

Amman, Jordan

19 May 2009

The delegation, made use of the private aircraft of Hon. Abou E-Enein, kindly put at the disposal of the delegation, to fly from Cairo to El Arish. The delegation entered into Gaza through the Rafah terminal and was greeted by representatives of the United Nations. It visited an area that had been destroyed (Zeituna) and met with Palestinians living there amongst the rubble and destruction of houses, mosques, and small industrial complexes. The delegation noticed the widespread destruction, and the appalling conditions in which homeless people in this region were living in makeshift sheds and all sorts of tents, with no sanitary facilities and no running water. The delegation was briefed about the many children who had fallen ill or been killed by bullets, bombs, shrapnel, or falling masonry, and heard stories from, and were shown photographs by Palestinians who had lost family members in the raids, or of cases where whole families had been wiped out.

Driving through southern Gaza territory in UN-provided four-wheelers, one could see that many areas were simply unscathed, and life went on as usual, with children walking home from schools during the midday break.

Evidence of mortar fire on buildings, however, could be seen at regular intervals in all areas along our route.

Delegates were also told that whole tracts of cultivated land had been purposely bombed to destroy crops and agricultural production.

The delegation left for the Jordanian Military Hospital in Gaza and met with the Commissioner General of UNRWA.

The Jordanian Military Hospital is a Jordanian initiative whereby a largish building was in a few months expertly converted into a general hospital, staffed by highly qualified Jordanian physicians and surgeons, providing more than just basic hospital services, with the provision of all emergency and planned services in the medical, surgical and gynaecological fields, and all necessary equipment as one would expect to find in any modern regional hospital.

The many Palestinian patients spoken to by the delegation showed great appreciation for the sterling services provided by the Jordanian medical staff.

I - Mrs. Karen AbuZayd, Commissioner General of UNRWA

a- The situation in Gaza

Mrs. AbuZayd began her remarks by explaining that the recent attack on Gaza had aggravated the situation in the area. 70% of Palestinians in Gaza are refugees. Many Palestinians are fed thanks to food aid distributed by the United Nations and live below the poverty line. Although the donations are abundant, it is only possible to bring into Gaza food and medical aid. Israel prevents all other goods from crossing the border.

During the recent bombardments, over 250 houses had been destroyed and 3,000 damaged. It was, however, impossible to reconstruct them due to the restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities on bringing in any types of construction material.

United Nations personnel also know the difficulties of access to the area because of red tape at the various border crossings.

A formal complaint had been filed, along with a request for 10 million dollars compensation, with the State of Israel due to destruction caused to United Nations infrastructure by the Israeli Defence Forces during the attack on Gaza.

b- Requests to improve the situation

The Commissioner General hoped that the PAM delegates could urgently support two demands in order to allow for an improvement in the situation:

- To loosen the tight controls on the border in order to allow building equipment to pass through for the gradual reconstruction of the damaged homes to begin;
- To authorize and allow larger monetary transfers into Gaza's interior. Today, 13.5 million dollars enter per month, and this is only enough to pay the salaries of the United Nations staff. Funds for programs and other activities supported by the United Nations exist, especially following the Donor's conference where \$4.5 billion had been promised, but these funds were frozen in accounts abroad and could not reach Gaza to benefit the stricken Palestinian population.

- This dearth of liquidity was also keeping the economy from taking off and reviving itself.

The delegation had planned to drive further north to enter Gaza city, but a change in the program took place at the last minute. A saddening death in the family of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and his wish to see Hon. Abou El-Enein at the funeral resulted in a shorting of the time allocated for the visit of the delegation in Gaza.

The delegation cut short its Gaza visit, drove out of Gaza territory through the Rafah terminal, and on to El Arish, from where the delegation left for Cairo, waited until Hon. Abou El-Enein went to pay his respects to the Egyptian President, and later on flew to Amman for a working dinner with H.E. Mr. Abdulhadi Majali

II - H.E. Mr. Abdulhadi Majali, Speaker of the Chamber of Representatives of Jordan and President of EMPA

a- Situation in the Middle East

On a very warm note, President Majali welcomed the trip of the PAM Bureau in the region and the efforts that the Assembly deployed in promoting parliamentary diplomacy to support the Peace Process in the region.

The President had hoped that the discussions regarding the Peace Process could end so that the agreed measures could finally be put into practice. All the issues had been addressed, and solutions existed. Now courage was needed to put them into practice. PAM must support the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

H.E. Majali quoted King Abdullah II of Jordan, who said that if nothing happens in 2009 to improve the situation, a new military confrontation could be inevitable. President Majali emphasised the fact that this is the first time that the King of Jordan has spoken in such terms.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become a strategic priority for the United States, which now considers it as a matter of national security. It is in President Obama's interest to act quickly, and the Arab countries expect a lot from him.

b- Collaboration between PAM and EMPA

On the Middle East and on other issues, PAM and EMPA must work together in the future. The two Presidents have therefore decided that the two Assemblies should collaborate together in a

structured and regular manner. The Bureaus of the two Assemblies will now regularly exchange information in a regular manner and jointly organize meetings. After recalling that PAM was created in Amman in 2006, President Majali indicated that the set up of a Secretariat for EMPA was one of his priorities. PAM's offer to help in its creation was welcomed.

Ramallah, Occupied Palestinian Territories

Jerusalem, Israel

20 May 2009

After crossing the Allenby Bridge separating Jordan and Israel with the help of the Jordanian Parliament, the PAM delegation was received by the French diplomatic authorities, who had handled the organization and the logistics for the entire day of 20 May, both in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and in Israel.

Ramallah

The delegation could not help noting the stringent controls at road blocks by armed Israeli soldiers on the way to Ramallah, and the presence of the Israeli flag fluttering from all lampposts and vantage points along the route.

I - H.E. Mr. Riyad Al-Maliki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority

a- Status report on relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority

Minister Al-Maliki, in welcoming the PAM delegation, acknowledged the great importance of parliamentary diplomacy and the fundamental role that parliamentarians have in supporting the Peace Process in the region. Support is practically a moral responsibility, as this issue is crucial for the rest of the world.

Today, the situation is at a real impasse, with an Israeli government, which is almost 50 years behind in its proposals, refusing even the idea of a Palestinian State. A total stop to the settlements was needed, including those presently justified by “natural growth”, as well as the recognition of East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State. The destruction in Gaza was not only defensive; it was deliberately done in order to destroy the area’s economic infrastructures and to drive the entire civilian population into misery and terror, and to impede all possibilities for the creation of a viable Palestinian State.

The Palestinian people and their government refuse to live in a 'prison' under Israeli administration, where the sole concessions given will be economic. The Palestinian Authority expects a lot from the change in the foreign policy of the United States in the region brought about by the Obama Administration, the only player capable of having a real influence on the Israeli government. The European Union and the Europeans must act in support of the policy of the United States in order to put pressure on the Jewish State.

b- Inter-Palestinian dialogue

Concerning the de facto division between the West Bank and Gaza, as well as inter-Palestinian dialogue, between Fatah and Hamas, the Minister was waiting on the results of the discussions being brokered by Cairo, which have a deadline of 7 July 2009.

c- The situation in Jerusalem

Particular attention was given to the situation of Jerusalem, which is in the process of being transformed into a Jewish city. The Mayor's plan is to render it completely Jewish by the year 2020. This political choice goes against the commitments made in the Road Map and could eventually constitute a "crime against History". Discrimination is an official policy of the Mayor of Jerusalem. 34% of its population (Arabs) only receive 5% of the city's budget, 43% of the budget goes to the settlements, and finally, only 12% of the total budget goes to East Jerusalem. If the city is completely transformed according to the current plan, the West Bank will be cut into two, thus rendering impossible forever the creation of a Palestinian State.

II – Meeting with members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC)

Hon. Abdullah Abdullah, in opening the discussion, recalled that the PLC is a founding member of PAM. 41 of its elected members, however, are currently in prison.

Time is against the Palestinians. Israel is in the process of physically destroying the idea of a Palestinian State through the partition of Jerusalem and the construction of new settlements. The new Israeli government refuses the emergence of a Palestinian State.

One of the many examples of discrimination against the Palestinians is the fact that Israel finds all sorts of legislative excuses to turn Palestinians living in Jerusalem into non-permanent residents in order to expel them and prevent them from returning to their property. According to the PLC delegates, however, there will not be a real peace process without the return of the Palestinian refugees, East Jerusalem as the capital of the future Palestinian State and full respect for, and return to, the 1967 borders.

He added that we must not fall victims to the dream of Israel, which is to link the Gaza Strip with Egypt and the West Bank with Jordan in order to do away with the Palestinian question. The PLC hold that only solution for a lasting peace is the creation of a Palestinian State and not the division of its people.

The delegates enthusiastically supported the idea that PAM, at the request of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, could organize a colloquy on the status of Jerusalem in the near future.

III - H.E. Mr. Samir Abdallah, Minister of Planning of the Palestinian Authority

The main goal of the Ministry was to plan the economy and reconstruction of the country. According to the Minister, the economic aspect is just as important as the diplomatic one in that it happens to support peace efforts. The Ministry works in close collaboration with the UNDP and UNRWA in order to make optimal use of large sums of money from abroad. Despite international support, the situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate as no development project has been implemented in this region, particularly due to the total blockade imposed by Israel. The Gaza Strip alone absorbs 40% of the Palestinian Authority's budget, and this is a real burden because nothing is produced there; the money is an economic infusion without a long-term vision.

IV – Ambassador Robert Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process

a- Status of the Peace Process

The Peace Process is in a state of crisis. There is a real urgency because the situation is degrading very rapidly, specifically through the questioning of the principle of Two States by the new Israeli government and the policy of settlements, particularly in East Jerusalem.

b- Relations with parties involved in the conflict

The division within the Palestinian Authority was working against the interests of the Palestinians themselves. Fatah was weakened by this division, especially because Hamas still refuses to officially recognize the State of Israel, something which impedes any dialogue from starting.

The new Israeli government adopted a hard line policy in order to get out of the conflict. He did not wish to talk because he felt that there was no valid and reliable partner to do so with. The new Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs explained to Mr. Serry that his country does not feel bound by Israel's obligations under international law, including the various United Nations Resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

Ambassador Serry is anxiously waiting for the position of the new American Administration on the situation in the region. He will be present during the next PAM Plenary Session in Istanbul.

Getting to Jerusalem

On its way to Jerusalem, the delegation had the opportunity to note the high security measures taken by the Israeli authorities, including the high concrete Separation wall with watch towers, the electrified wire fences, innumerable roadblocks, etc...

V – H.E. Mr. Reuven Rivlin, Speaker of the Knesset

a- Relations between PAM and the Knesset

Hon. Rivlin, newly-elected Speaker of the Knesset, welcomed the delegation and agreed on the fact that the Knesset is a founding member of PAM, and that for this reason it should actively participate in the organization.

b- Situation of the Peace Process

According to the Speaker of the Knesset, Israel should be acknowledged as being, in essence, a Jewish State, and thus the homeland of all Jews in the world. To ignore this would be to call into question Israel's entire existence.

The fear of the advent of a "Hamastan" bordering Israel, in his mind, justifies his refusal of the creation of a Palestinian State, which would constitute a threat to Israeli security. An economic peace, however, is envisaged. Furthermore, the Palestinians will have the right to manage their local administrations under Israeli supervision. According to Hon. Rivlin, it should be recognised that the Palestinians are the guests of the Israelis. On the subject of the Palestinian refugees, this issue cannot be on the agenda as they are now outside of Israel territory, and their return would threaten its very existence.

c- Situation in Jerusalem

Regarding the situation in Jerusalem, Mr. Rivlin considers the Holy City, as a whole, as the capital of the Jewish State. It is impossible for him to conceive of a partition because firstly, a Palestinian State is not possible, and secondly, because according to him Jerusalem was promised to the Jews by God Himself.

d- Settlement in the West Bank

On the settlements of the West Bank, the Speaker of the Knesset affirmed that Israel's entire history since its creation has been one of settlement. To stop that process would be tantamount as calling into question Israel's very existence.

Finally, according to the Speaker, the priority is not Palestine but Iran, which should be the focus of the international community's attention. The Speaker of the Knesset expressed his exhaustion and annoyance with seeing Israel behaviour permanently being called into question in all the international committees, particularly in the areas where the subjects do not absolutely concern the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Hon. Speaker Rivlin announced that the Knesset will participate in the next PAM Plenary Session in Istanbul.

Following this meeting, the delegation was welcomed in the debating chamber of the Knesset during a public session.

Amman, Jordan

21 May 2009

I - H.E. Mr. Naser Judeh, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Jordan

a- Situation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

The Minister opened the discussion by explaining that today there exists a real window of opportunity to achieve peace in the region. To do this, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative needed to be supported. The United States is really involved in the search for a solution to the current conflict. President Obama addressed this issue at the very start of his term, something which is quite remarkable.

The previous Bush Administration's position is often criticised, however, credit must be given as he was the first President of the United States to have officially referred to the formation of a Palestinian State.

It is necessary to realise that time is truly against us all. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a global conflict as its ramifications are felt across the entire world. People are also being used to promote dangerous ideologies. History must not be used in order to justify the present. Resolving this conflict would allow many tensions across the world to either diminish or disappear completely.

b- Israel and Iran

Today, the Israeli government's current approach is the opposite of the current reality. It does not need to attack Iran in order to resolve the Palestinian conflict, but rather act on the contrary. It needs to resolve the Palestinian conflict so as to remove any pretext for Iran to want to attack Israel. On this issue, President Obama is in total disagreement with the Israeli government and hopes to resolve, first of all, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

c- Peace is possible

Possibilities exist of progress in the negotiations in order to reach a solution. For example, Jordan could even agree with the proposal of the Netanyahu Government on the definition of Israel as a “Jewish State”. After all, the Hashemite Kingdom is, by constitution, a Muslim State, but it also has religious minorities. It is, however, necessary that all citizens, Jewish and non-Jewish, have the same rights and duties and that they are guaranteed.

In order to reach a global agreement, the Palestinians must be united. Egypt’s efforts to maintain inter-Palestinian dialogue must continue, even if at the moment, prospects are anything but promising. It is necessary to support this dialogue and above all, not to open new channels of discussion so as to refrain from diluting our efforts.

In conclusion, it should be noted that for the first time, the entire world is against Israel’s attitude in the region. Settlements need to be stopped, roadblocks removed, destruction of holy sites brought to an end, and the Separation wall destroyed. 67% of the Israeli population is in favour of the creation of a Palestinian State. The Vice President of the United States even spoke of the need to stop supporting settlements during the Annual Gala Dinner of a powerful Jewish lobby group (AIPAC) in the USA.

PAM, as a representative of the Mediterranean people, should exert pressure on governments and mobilise public opinion to find a quick and lasting solution to this conflict, which has already gone on for too long.

II – Meeting with members of the Palestinian National Council

Hon. Tayseer Quba’a excused the absence on Hon. Al-Zanoon for health reasons.

The Peace Process is currently at an impasse, and all eyes are turned towards the United States, however Europe’s silence is largely questionable. The European Union, as a whole, can adopt a strong position to show its condemnation of Israel’s attitude towards the Palestinian people. PAM can act, in this sense, and ask Europe to take strong actions, such as retaliatory economic measures, in order to influence Israeli policy.

Pressure needs to be put on Israel as peace will be impossible without, in particular, the return of refugees, a halt to the settlements and the creation of a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. Inter-Palestinian dialogue is constant, and the PNC is optimistic on its outcome because the division became apparent only recently. The situation in Jerusalem and the widespread destruction that the city is threatened with will soon render the idea of peace impossible. The PNC supports the idea of a colloquy on the situation in Jerusalem organized by PAM at the request of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine.

Conclusions

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED

The primary objectives of the mission which were achieved were:

- *To understand better in what manner PAM could support and go along with the Peace Process in the region. These proposals, in their entirety, are outlined in the resolution;*
- *To observe, at first hand, the current situation in Gaza and the plight of the Palestinians in this region following the destruction brought about by the Israeli armed forces;*
- *To meet and establish regular contacts with various key players in the region with the prospect of establishing contacts and launching a process of continuous future cooperation;*
- *To reinforce PAM's role both at the political level through the various meetings conducted, as well as at the local level, thanks to many televised reports and interviews given;*
- *To reestablish dialogue with the Knesset, which announced that it would sit again at the next PAM Plenary Session in Istanbul in October 2009.*

Besides, it has to be acknowledged that all delegates learnt a lot during this mission, managed to make PAM more visible in the region, and established important personal contacts in the political sphere.

During this visit the delegation also managed to bring closer to fruition the prospect of collaboration between PAM and EMPA.

It is to be noted that during all meetings, all members of the delegation underlined and emphasized the importance of unity amongst the Palestinian factions themselves.

Throughout this mission, PAM made the political players we met with more aware of the tool that is regional parliamentary diplomacy and showed that they supported the Quartet and Arab peace initiatives as well as new approaches for achieving peace in the region through the use of dialogue.

The delegation was able to meet with high-level representatives, both legislative and executive, in addition to senior officials of international organizations.

These different types of meetings confirmed the credit that the actors in the region accord to PAM and to parliamentary diplomacy in general.

Although the duration of the mission and the frequency of meetings did not allow for additional appointments with larger numbers of political players from both the Israeli and Palestinian sides as well as representatives of civil society, especially in Gaza, a sense of trust in the possibilities of PAM, was established. Many expectations now converge upon our Assembly which, due to its special status, has a unique role to play in the Mediterranean.

In their capacity as representatives of the people of the Mediterranean, the PAM delegations must now continue their efforts with their respective governments so that political progress can be achieved. This mission by the Bureau has become part of PAM's activities to promote and support the efforts the international community to establish peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Special thanks for the success of this mission must go to:

The Egyptian Government and the Egyptian Parliament.

Hon Abou El Enein.

The Jordanian Government and the Jordanian Parliament.

The French Embassy in Israel and the Consulate General of France in Jerusalem.

The Knesset.

The Palestinian Authority and its Ministers.

The Palestinian National Council.

The Palestinian Legislative Council.

UNWRA.

UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

The Medical Staff at the Jordanian Hospital in Gaza.

The Secretarial Staff at PAM.

The PAM Secretary General for coordinating the whole visit.

Annex I

List of PAM delegates:

- Hon. Rudy Salles – PAM President (France)
- Hon. Mohamed Abou El Enein (Egypt)
- Hon. Askin Asan (Turkey)
- Hon. Suleiman Ghneimat (Jordan)
- Hon. Elissaveth Papadimitriou (Greece)
- Hon. Tayseer Quba'a (Palestine)
- Hon. George Vella (Malta)
- Dr. Sergio Piazzi- PAM Secretary General
- Mr. Mustapha Abdelaziz Belaouda – Special Assistant to the PAM Secretary General
- Ms. Kalliopi Mermigki – Assistant of Hon. Elissaveth Papadimitriou (Greece)

Annex II

Official program of the PAM Bureau visit to the Middle East:

Cairo, Egypt - 18 May 2009

- 10.00 Meeting of the PAM delegation to prepare for the mission
Hotel Intercontinental Semiramis
- 10.50 Departure from *Hotel Intercontinental Semiramis*
Cars provided by the Egyptian Parliament
- 11.30 Meeting with **H.E. Dr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour**, Speaker of the lower house of the
Parliament of Egypt
People's Assembly
- 13.00 Meeting with **H.E. Ahmed Aboul Gheit**, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- 14.00 Meeting with **Hon. Ahmed Ben Helli**, Deputy- Secretary General of the Arab
League
Arab League Headquarters
Free lunch and free afternoon
- Evening Dinner hosted by **Hon. Mohamed Abou El-Enein (PAM Roving Ambassador),
with H.E. Sorour**
Private residence of Hon. Abou El-Enein

Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territories/Amman, Jordan - 19 May 2009

- 08.30 Departure from *Hotel Intercontinental Semiramis*
Cars provided by Egyptian Parliament
- 09.30 Departure from Cairo airport
Private aircraft of Hon. Abou El-Enein
- 10.15 Arrival in El Arish airport
Van provided by the Egyptian Parliament
- 11.00 Arrival at the Rafah checkpoint
- 12.00 Entry into Gaza
PAM Delegation met by UNRWA
- 12.45 Entry into Gaza City
- 12.45-13.30 Visit of the area, including the Jordanian Military Hospital
- 13.45 Meeting with **Mrs. Karen AbuZayd**, UNRWA Commissioner General
- 15.00 Departure from Gaza
Van provided by the Egyptian Parliament
- 17.00 Departure from El-Arish airport
Private aircraft of Hon. Abou El Enein
- 18.15 Arrival in Amman and transfer to *Hotel Hyatt*
Cars provided by the Jordanian Parliament
- 20.00 Dinner hosted by **Hon. Abulhadi Majali**, Speaker of the lower house of the Parliament of Jordan and President of EMPA
Hotel Hyatt

Ramallah, Palestinian Occupied Territories/Jerusalem, Israel - 20 May 2009

<u>06.50</u>	Departure from Amman <i>Cars provided by the Jordanian Parliament</i>
<u>08.00</u>	Arrival at the <i>Allenby Bridge</i>
<u>09.00</u>	<i>PAM delegation met by officials of the French Consulate General, departure for Ramallah - change of cars</i> Departure for Ramallah
<u>10.00</u>	Meeting with H.E. Riyad Al-Maliki , Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian National Authority <i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</i>
<u>11.00</u>	Meeting with members of the Palestinian Legislative Council <i>PLC Headquarters</i>
<u>12.30</u>	Meeting with Hon. Samir Abdullah , Minister of Planning of the Palestinian National Authority <i>Ministry of Planning</i>
<u>13.30</u>	Meeting with Ambassador Robert Serry -UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process <i>UN House – Tokyo Street</i>
<u>14.00</u>	Departure for Jerusalem
<u>16.00</u>	Meeting with Hon. Reuven Rivlin , President of the Knesset <i>Knesset</i>
<u>17.00</u>	Departure from Jerusalem
<u>18.00</u>	Arrival at the <i>Allenby Bridge</i> , change of cars and departure for Amman
<u>19.00</u>	Arrival in Amman
<u>Evening</u>	Free Dinner

Amman, Jordan - 21 May 2009

- 09.55 Departure from the *Hyatt Hotel*
Cars provided by the Jordanian Parliament
- 10.30 Meeting with **Hon. Naser Judeh**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Jordan
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- 12.00 Meeting with **Hon. Tayseer Quba'a**, Vice President of the PNC and Vice President of PAM
Palestinian National Council Headquarters
- 13.00 Lunch hosted by **Hon. Tayseer Quba'a**, Vice President of the PNC and Vice President of PAM
Restaurant Tanori
- Afternoon Concluding informal meeting of the PAM delegates
Hyatt hotel
- Evening Dinner hosted by **Hon. Suleiman Ghneimat**-PAM Vice President and President of the 2nd Standing Committee, Speaker of the Administrative Committee of the Jordanian National Assembly
Private residence

Annex III

List of members met at the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC):

- Hon. Abdullah Abdullah
- Hon. Hanan Ashrawi
- Hon. Khaleda Jarrar
- Hon. Qays Khader
- Hon. Najat Alastal

Annex IV

List of members met at the Palestinian National Council (PNC):

- Hon. Tayseer Quba'a
- Hon. Zuhair Sanduka
- Hon. Belal Qassem
- Hon. Zuhair Al Khatih
- Hon. Mohamed Melhem
- Hon. Leila Khaled
- Hon. Mustafa Melhem
- Hon. Abdelraouf Al-Alani
- Hon. Ibrahim Abu Ayyah
- Hon. Hussnieh Ismael