



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

4th Meeting of the First Standing Committee on Political and Security-related Cooperation

Assembly of the Republic of Portugal
24-26 June 2009 – Lisbon, Portugal

Executive Report

Wednesday, 24 June 2009

4th Meeting, First Standing Committee on Political and Security-Related Cooperation

Hon. José Junqueiro (Portugal), chairing the session as President of the 1st Standing Committee, warmly welcomed the distinguished guests and parliamentarians on behalf of the Portuguese delegation and Portuguese Parliament hosting the meetings of the three PAM Standing Committees. He reiterated the importance of the Assembly's work to Portugal and called for the PAM parliamentarians to be pro-active at all times in making proposals and recommendations.

Thereafter, the agenda was adopted.

Next followed a brief account of the First Standing Committee's activities to date in 2009, during which reference was made, among others, to the work of the Reflection Group on Terrorism, which had met in Istanbul in January and later in Rome in March, the *Ad Hoc* Committee on the Middle East, which had sent a delegation on a fact-finding mission to the region in May, and the Special Task Force on Organised Crime, which had held its inaugural meeting in Cairo and is led by Hon. Angela Napoli (Italy) as Rapporteur.

Before discussing the work of the respective working groups in detail, the floor was given to the day's keynote speaker, Mr. Filippo Grandi, who described the work of UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East), which is currently observing its 60th anniversary.

Keynote address by Mr. Filippo Grandi, Deputy Commissioner General, UNRWA

Mr. Grandi expressed his pleasure at being able to represent UNRWA as a guest speaker at the Lisbon event, which he stated was an appropriate way to define the Agency's presence within the Assembly. He began by speaking on the challenges that UNRWA faces in Palestine and neighbouring countries, so as to give another perspective on problems in the region, and stated how important it is to hear the voices of the people we work for (the dispossessed Palestinian people).

UNRWA represents 4.6 million Palestinians, who had fled Palestine at the termination of the British mandate, in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and the Occupied Territories in 58 refugee camps, yet the majority of refugees by now live outside these camps. UNRWA provides education, healthcare, services to the poor and micro-financing. In situations of conflict, it also provides humanitarian services. Moreover, it runs about 700 schools with half a million children attending, 130 health centres and feeds 1.2 million people. UNRWA is not purely a humanitarian organisation, however, and it does not provide technical assistance to governments; on the contrary, it works directly with the people. It has 30,000 staff, the majority of whom are refugees and mostly Palestinian. Its work is defined as human development, and it is also a vehicle with which to convey UN values. It is used to working in times of conflict (since 1949), yet the situation over the last 2-3 years is perhaps one of the most difficult ever. There has been conflict, as well as political crisis and a funding crisis. The situation is the most acute in emergency areas, such as Gaza.

Mr. Grandi expressed his belief that peace could not be achieved in Palestine unless the situation of the displaced people is resolved.

Mr. Grandi then spoke of Lebanon, which officially hosts 400,000 refugees (in actuality it is probably 25% less), where a minority live in 12 very difficult and problematic camps; the reality is one of exclusion and fragmentation, but since 2005-2006, the outgoing government has recognised courageously that it is important to address some of these issues. This situation worsened during the Israel-Hezbollah war, with Al-Qaeda militants taking refuge in the Nahr el-Bared in 2007, which resulted in its destruction, and which urgently needs reconstruction, as well as left some 30,000 people doubly displaced.

The greatest challenge which still remains, however, is that of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, where 30% of the population in the West Bank and 70% in Gaza are refugees. These regions suffer from scarce resources, and conflict makes any access to them more difficult. The West Bank, which is home to 2.5 million Palestinians, is a land of obstacles, with illegal Israeli settlements, a Separation Wall, checkpoints, blockades, etc. aimed at separating Palestinians from Israeli settlers as well as separating Palestinians from each other. This affects every aspect of their lives (health, commerce, education and religion), and is especially acute in East Jerusalem. What is most striking is witnessing the profound humiliation inflicted every day upon the Palestinian people.

Gaza is a city of 1.5 million people (the size of Barcelona or Marseille) trapped in a siege and also in inter-Palestinian conflict. Humanitarian organizations need 500 trucks of aid every day to maintain basic living conditions, but at present only 75 trucks pass on average per day and only through one small crossing point at Kerem Shalom. All other crossing points, including the Rafah Terminal, are closed the majority of the time. In practice, the only things that can go into Gaza are basic food supplies and those supplies which are required for acute medical situations. Sea movement is also restricted to almost nothing and there is no air access. The consequences for the population are brutal, and the private economy has collapsed, with unemployment at 46%. The majority of those that are unemployed are men. 80% of the population are dependent

on humanitarian aid and sewage is pumped raw into the Mediterranean. There are chronic shortages of fuel. The situation has been like this since 2006.

The international community chose not to talk to Hamas. The situation worsened in 2007, and even more dramatically after the conflict in 2007-2008, which killed 1,400 people, including 350 children. Damage also occurred to schools, public buildings and UN infrastructure, such as a warehouse in Gaza. There was huge outcry, and international humanitarian effort poured out, culminating in billions of dollars being pledged for reconstruction, but nothing has occurred because materials and equipment for reconstruction are not allowed in. Furthermore, these financial assets are frozen.

Gaza is kept alive through strict Israeli rationing of humanitarian aid, which also undermines the forces that act against violence. Rockets are sent into South Israel from Gaza. Forces of moderation cannot operate. Since the ceasefire on 18 January, nothing has progressed on the Gaza Strip. UNRWA has a yearly recurring budget shortfall of 20%. The decline of its programs affects young people, contributing to a sentiment of disaffection and alienation. Jordan and Syria contribute to the humanitarian programme, but they are also stretched beyond their means.

There is only one solution: to restart the political process/es in the Middle East, in particular between Israel and Palestine, and for this there is hope in the wake of President Obama's speech in Egypt. UNRWA is not a political actor, but it depends on political progress, and it is committed to fulfilling its role and acting as a factor of social stability.

Mr. Grandi concluded by posing to the PAM members the question of what they can achieve through parliamentary diplomacy. He argued that national governments have a lot of leverage in relation to either one or the other side. PAM parliamentarians can be of service by keeping them well-informed. The Middle East conflict is one of the most talked about but worst informed conflicts in modern history. Mr. Grandi then proposed four points of reflection.

First: restart the Peace Process. Perhaps this is an internationally favourable climate, but a lot of political pressure needs to be applied on both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities, and this means supporting commendable Egyptian efforts to bring the Palestinian factions together.

Second: remind both parties to the conflict that international law must be observed at all times. Violations on both sides have been flagrant. Respect for international law exists to protect civilians.

Third: it is paramount to address the issue of access. Lifting some of the entrance restrictions can create a climate that can foster peace. Improving access will mean improved living conditions. It will solidify a fragile social fabric and will give dignity back.

Fourth: if there is a new lease of life thanks to the new American administration, we need to remember the refugees and their voices must be heard. Ultimately, they will be the judges of this process.

Finally, Mr. Grandi asked for the parliamentarians to support UNRWA politically vis-à-vis their own national governments. It is a visible and tangible sign of interest in the region. He concluded by saying that the agency cannot be allowed to fail or recede. It was time for action. He feared that if the opportunity was wasted, those who do not want peace would prevail, and it would take too long to reassemble positive conditions again.

Hon. Rudy Salles, PAM President, thanked Mr. Grandi for his objective and factual account. He informed Mr. Grandi on how PAM had reacted very strongly and clearly following the events in Gaza. He also informed him that PAM had sent a delegation to the Occupied Palestinian Territories to see the misery and poverty there, and concluded that the way the Palestinians were living is unbearable, despite it being an area of wealth and natural resources including coastal access to the Mediterranean Sea. He also reminded the parliamentarians that it was necessary to find a political solution, and that PAM advocated for the rapid establishment of a Palestinian State with its own secure borders. There was new hope for a solution to the conflict through the Obama Administration, and recently, Prime Minister Netanyahu had modified his strong tone. There was also the problem of a divided people within Palestine. PAM sees itself as both Mediterranean and European, and can play an important role in uniting its neighbours. Why not hope for a Union of the Maghreb and Middle East? Europe had been divided in the past, but successfully overcame its problems for its citizens to live in peace.

The Jordanian delegation suggested that UNRWA should become an “honorary member” of PAM due to its contribution to peace in the area, and it also asked the question of how we could apply pressure on Israel if it refused even to comply with UN resolutions. The Algerian delegation called for greater pressure on the powers sponsoring the peace process. The Palestinian delegation, speaking on behalf of the Palestinian National Council, reminded PAM of the many concessions it had made in the hope of achieving peace, to the extent that 78% of its historical lands were now part of Israel. Furthermore, it asked its European neighbours for fairness towards Palestine in representing the sides of the conflict, as Israel was often portrayed as the victim of terrorism, which they indicated could not be farther from the truth. The Greek delegation argued that for a two-state solution to be viable, it was essential to open dialogue on all sides, which included talking to Hamas. The Tunisian delegation also agreed that it was important to unite Palestine, and that the EU should come out of the shadow of the United States in championing the cause of a two-state solution. Creating the right conditions for dialogue was further endorsed by the Italian delegation, which commented that the Pope had also supported the two-state solution during his recent visit to the Middle East. PAM could play an important role in contributing to creating the right conditions for achieving peace. The French delegation asked a specific question to UNRWA: namely, did it have a particular women’s programme?

In conclusion, Mr. Grandi answered the questions posed by the delegates and developed the themes they had touched upon. He informed the delegates that women are the most vulnerable group, often having to shoulder the burden of large families without husbands (especially in Lebanon or the Occupied Palestinian Territories), so women are at the centre of focus of many of UNRWA’s programmes. As to the effectiveness of parliamentary diplomacy, Mr. Grandi thought it could work but that it needed a lot of stern political courage to give confidence to the governments of the countries concerned that need to make difficult and possibly unpopular

decisions. Most importantly, he reminded PAM that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a human problem which UNRWA had been dealing with for 60 years.

Presentation/Discussion/Endorsement of draft reports/resolutions

a) *Ad Hoc* Committee on the Middle East: Hon. George Vella (Malta)

Hon. Vella thanked Mr. Grandi for his excellent presentation. The visit to Gaza was an enriching experience for all of the members of the high-level PAM delegation. The visit took place from 18-21 May, stopping in Egypt, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Israel and Jordan. It led to a lot of reflection, as it gave the visiting delegation the opportunity to gain hands-on experience of the situation. PAM additionally wished to express its solidarity to the civilian victims, whether they be Palestinian or Israeli. The visiting delegation also wanted to present PAM as a responsible inter-parliamentary forum to the different actors in the region in order to open dialogue, and re-establish dialogue with the Knesset.

Hon. Vella described the situation in Gaza as akin to a “holocaust”. He also referred to the meeting with the Knesset, who were more interested in focusing the discussion on the threat represented by Iran.

The Chair of the *Ad Hoc* Committee, who had also acted as Rapporteur for the mission, then gave an overview of the key events which took place during the visit.

- The Egyptian Foreign Minister, H.E. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, explained why Egypt could not afford to take the risk of officially recognising the Hamas government in Gaza or re-opening the Rafah border because it would cause the *de facto* recognition of two Palestinian authorities, in addition to creating a potential threat to Egyptian domestic security.
- The delegation also visited the League of Arab States and spoke with the Deputy Secretary General, H.E. Ahmed Ben Helli, who stated that the organization supported the Road Map for Peace and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative (advocating withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Occupied Palestinian Territories, as well as the Golan Heights, and the recognition of the Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital). Expectations were high because of the Obama Administration, but there was residual disappointment with the stance taken by the EU during the 2007-2008 invasion of Gaza.
- During the visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, accessed via the Rafah border point, the delegation witnessed townships that had been destroyed and the appalling living conditions that the Palestinian people are forced to endure, where there was evidence of deliberate obliteration of economic and agricultural infrastructure. The delegation also visited the Jordanian Military Hospital, where they witnessed the scars caused by white phosphorus bombs.

- The members also met the Speaker of the Jordanian Parliament, H.E. Abdulhadi Majali, who feared that if peace was not reached in 2009, there would be a new military confrontation. On that occasion, the Presidents of EMPA and PAM signed a joint statement on collaboration between the two organizations to support the Peace Process.
- In Ramallah, the newly re-elected Foreign Affairs Minister of the Palestinian National Authority, H.E. Riyad al-Malki, informed the delegation that settlement in the Occupied Palestinian Territories was justified by Israel on the grounds of demographic growth, and that there was a deliberate policy under way to transform Jerusalem into a Jewish city by 2020.
- The UN Special Coordinator for the Peace Process, Ambassador Robert Serry, confirmed that there was a state of crisis and that Israel did not feel bound by the UN Resolutions.
- Finally, the Speaker of the Knesset, H.E. Reuven Rivlin, informed the delegation that he wanted Israel recognised as a Jewish State, with Jerusalem as the holy capital, and that it could not be divided and shared with the Palestinians because it was their Holy Land, promised to them by their God. Palestinians were guests, and refugees could not be allowed to return as it would be a threat to Israeli security.

Hon. Vella concluded in saying that as a result of their visit, PAM now knows better how to contribute to the Peace Process, as it had met and established contacts with key players, thereby strengthening PAM's role at the political and local levels, and moreover, re-established dialogue with the Knesset.

There was one proposal by the Palestinian delegation for an amendment, and a small drafting group, composed of Hon. Vella (Malta), Hon. Salles (France), Hon. Ghneimat (Jordan) and Hon. Zuhair Sanduka (Palestine), met immediately to agree on a final text.

It was decided that the amended text would be debated at the beginning of the Thursday morning session.

The *Ad Hoc* Committee reconvened briefly on the morning of the 25th to look at the suggested text. Hon. Suleiman Ghneimat, President of the Second Standing Committee, offered the Chair to Hon. José Junqueiro, President of the First Standing Committee, so that the preceding day's work could be concluded, namely the debate of the amendments to Hon. Vella's draft resolution.

Hon. Junqueiro informed the members of the short meeting that had been organised to agree on a final draft of Hon. Vella's text on the Middle East. After briefly covering the main points of the text again, Hon. Vella invited members to give their comments.

The French delegation pointed out that there was still a mistake in the French translation of the text, compared to the English version, which was correct, at point 15 of the preamble. The Palestinian delegation commented that the text demonstrated great sensitivity to the issue, but it still tended to ignore the question of attacker/victim. The 2nd paragraph strongly condemns Israeli

military operations in Gaza and the West Bank; however, these should be referred to as military “aggressions” not “operations”, which killed thousands of “civilians”. Here the text should read: “Palestinian civilians”. In the 4th bullet point, reference is made to rockets attacking Israel, but in order to be fair, the text should also mention daily air attacks over Gaza. In the 9th bullet point, a reference should be added to the International Court of Justice ordering the removal of the Israeli walls in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The 9th point deplores only acts of violence against Israeli civilians, and it should also mention acts of violence against Palestinian civilians. The Tunisian delegation thought that the draft resolution should refer to the change in American administration, as it is seen as a sign of hope. The Greek delegation felt that the text should steer clear of value judgements, as it was based on empirical observations. The delegation felt, however, that it would be appropriate to add an addendum to state how PAM feels about the case of Jerusalem. The Jordanian delegation supported the content of the text, adding that no text could be perfect but this one does acknowledge human suffering and acts of aggression against Palestinian civilians. The Italian delegation also considered it to be a fair text and that it should be approved immediately, on the provision that amendments could still be made to it.

Hon. Vella subscribed to the idea of reflecting the suggestions in the text, and commented that in the 11th bullet point, reference was already made to the change in American administration. As regards the comments made by the Palestinian delegation, Hon. Vella thought that the text sought wholeheartedly to reach balanced and fair conclusions. In the interests of being fair, the other side must certainly be mentioned; even if there is only one Israeli death, it has to be acknowledged. Furthermore, the text definitely does make a distinction between attacker and victim. He then invited the Palestinian delegation, and any others, to submit their written amendments for a final draft. Finally, Hon. Vella agreed to the possibility of subsequent amendments being introduced ahead of the Istanbul Plenary Session, given the evolving nature of the circumstances on the ground.

Hon. Vella then proposed the draft resolution to the Standing Committee for adoption. It was suggested, however, that should the situation on the ground change drastically, the resolution could be amended to reflect these circumstances.

The proposed text, with the new suggestions listed by Hon. Vella, was finally approved, with the abstention of the Palestinian delegation.

b) Special Task Force on Organised Crime: Hon. Angela Napoli (Italy)

Hon. Angela Napoli referred to her report presented in Cairo in April in which she had outlined the major criminal organisations that were active in the Mediterranean. She also cited the major international instruments to combat organised crime. She suggested that her draft report and resolution could be the starting point for PAM in conducting further research. Organised crime, whether it is expressed through activities relating to illicit trade in drugs, arms and goods, piracy, money laundering, or human trafficking, is a threat to the entire Mediterranean region. Moreover, the most vulnerable countries are those where the rule of law is weak, with little political stability. It is estimated that 2-25% of GDP globally is in the hands of organised crime. The current economic climate is also an ally of organised crime: there is an increasing demand

for cheaper labour and cheaper goods. Amongst the major issues that Mediterranean countries have to deal with, the report refers to: rising cocaine consumption, trafficking in migrants (for labour or the sex trade), theft of identity papers and trade in stolen artefacts.

The report suggests ways in which organised crime can be weakened, and that PAM can play an important role through consensus-building towards demand reduction (for drugs), exchanging best practices, raising awareness, developing cooperation frameworks to return stolen goods, monitoring criminal activities by setting up parliamentary committees at the national level, signing agreements on the common heritage of the Mediterranean and a regional pact on cooperation in the fight against organised crime. The Turkish delegation requested that the sentence which included mention of “Turkish organized crime groups” be reformulated to make reference to “organized crime groups operating out of Turkey”. The Rapporteur immediately agreed to this request.

The Palestinian delegation asked for the report to make special reference to the stolen art treasure of the Palestinian people, as well as the issue of their forced migration, while the Algerian delegation asked for the insertion of a more detailed paragraph on internet crime.

Hon. Napoli agreed that when she referred to the example of Egyptian works of art, she could extend it to make a general comment about art for the entire region. Forced migration was, on the contrary, the subject of a separate Committee dealing specifically with this argument. While the reference to internet crime is scant, this document is intended as a basis for further research, as the specific issue will indeed have to be dealt with by the STF next year.

The draft resolution and report were endorsed.

c) Reflection group on Terrorism: Hon. Askin Asan (Turkey) and Hon. Tayseer Quba’a (Palestine)

Hon. Askin Asan informed the Committee that she would not be re-reading the report co-drafted by herself and Hon. Quba’a, as the members were already well aware of its contents, rather she would refer to some of its major issues.

She stated that all agreed on terrorism being a major challenge. As PAM Member States, everyone believes in the need to increase inter-parliamentary collaboration, as well as on the necessity for an agreed definition of terrorism. The Reflection Group met in Istanbul on 30 January 2009 to work towards this definition, the outcome of which was enriched thanks to the contributions of, namely: Dr. Walter Gehr (UN Office on Drugs and Crime in Vienna), Mr. Mahmood Ayub (UN Resident Coordinator, Ankara), Mr. Mutlu Köseli (Major, Turkish Police Department and International Analyst on Terrorism), and Mr. Sedat Laçiner (Associate Professor, Director of the International Strategic Research Organisation (Turkey)). A proposal for a definition was reached in Rome on 12 March. The report therefore clarifies the concept of terrorism, assessing the need for a common definition before attempting to provide one. The draft resolution deals with the important issues from PAM’s perspective. It sees terrorism as a major threat to peace and stability, as well as a direct attack on human life and dignity, and it is

condemned in all its forms. The resolution also states that it is wrong to link terrorism to ethnic and religious groups. Reference is made to the UN-*acquis* on terrorism, and the draft resolution advocates the need for further judicial cooperation between states, including the principle of “extradite or prosecute”. At the same time, however, the draft resolution calls for the utmost respect for the rule of law and human rights in combating and punishing acts of terrorism.

Hon. Quba’a added that further work needed to be done in relation to the question of State terrorism, so that a clear distinction is made between the definition and the right to resist occupation. The French delegation expressed a reservation in relation to the 13th indent of the preamble to the draft resolution, in that it stressed that States are not legally bound by this resolution in the sense that they are not liable in cases of terrorism. They wanted the definition of terrorism to focus on individual acts and not those of States (even if committing acts of violence outside armed conflicts). Hon. Asan agreed that the question of acts of States was a very sensitive issue, but argued that where States abused their powers they should be judged for their acts and be punishable under international law. The Jordanian delegation asked the question of defining the root causes of terrorism, and Hon. Asan pointed out that this would be the subject of a subsequent report by the Reflection Group next year.

The Rapporteurs asked the delegates to endorse the resolution.

The draft resolution and report were endorsed.

PAM’s progress in outreaching with other regional/international organisations

The Secretary General, Dr. Sergio Piazzì, informed the members of the progress made by PAM in deepening its relations with other similar regional/international organisations, namely in relation to the following:

- The PAM Instruments have been deposited with the legal department of the UN, and PAM is in the process of formally requesting observer status at the General Assembly. The national delegations must now inform their Ambassadors in New York so that they can lobby in preparation for the proposal at the 6th Committee, which will then forward the request to the General Assembly;
- In a meeting with the League of Arab States, while in Egypt during the mission to the Middle East, progress was made towards reaching a Memorandum of Understanding to promote exchange of information, etc.;
- PAM officially exchanged Observer Status with the Parliamentary Assembly of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC), and this has already been formalized;
- Consultations are taking place with the Cardinal Secretary of State, presiding over the Vatican Secretariat of State, to see how the Vatican can be more closely associated with PAM especially with respect to enlisting the Holy See’s support for the Middle East peace process;

- During the PAM President's visit to the Gulf Region, the Parliament of Qatar indicated its intention to request Associate Member status to PAM;
- PAM is building closer links with the Dubai International Humanitarian Aid and Development Forum (DIHAD), a network of key charitable and humanitarian organizations from the Muslim world, the UN and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement;
- PAM has also exchanged Observer Status with the Parliamentary Union of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (PUIC)

1st Standing Committee key objective and dates for 2010

Hon. Junqueiro, as President of the Committee, identified the key activities of the 1st Standing Committee and its Special Task Forces and *Ad Hoc* Committees for 2010, as well as the key elements for the 2009 Plenary Session. After consultation with the national delegations and the Secretariat, three points emerged, namely:

- the Reflection Group on Terrorism had concluded its work on a definition, and will now focus on its root causes;
- the STF on Organised Crime could continue its work and focus its attention on regional and transnational crime;
- the *Ad Hoc* Committee on the Middle East should continue its work, and a meeting could be organised in conjunction with the 3rd Standing Committee on the question of forced migration.

The provisional calendar for the 1st Standing Committee for 2010 is the following:

- February 2010 - Syria: joint meeting of some of the STFs (TBC);
- March 2010 – Nice, France: joint meeting of some of the STFs;
- June 2010 - Serbia: 5th meeting of the Standing Committees.

Finally, he recalled that the 4th Plenary Session of the Assembly would be held from 23-25 October in Istanbul, Turkey, whereupon he passed the floor to Hon. Askin Asan, who informed the delegates of the progress made in preparation for the event, as well as the 1st Meeting of the Secretaries General of the PAM Member States. This was an occasion for them to discuss how they can complement their work in order to deliver the best possible services to their PAM MPs. Lastly, she indicated that the Turkish Parliament had invited US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, H.E. Bernard Kouchner, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of France, and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, to the opening session.

Hon. Junqueiro then declared the session closed.