

OFID works with UNFPA on Palestinian census

Executive Director Obaid talks to OFID Newsletter



PHOTO: B. BABAJIDE

OFID Director-General, Suleiman J. Al-Herbish, with Dr. Thoraya Obaid, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund.

OFID and The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have co-financed several projects in the past. In continuation of their collaborative efforts, OFID recently approved a US\$1.5 million grant in support of the Palestinian Population, Housing and Establishment Census Program. This grant typifies OFID's support towards the enhancement of the social sector in Palestine. **Dr. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid**, Executive Director of UNFPA, was at OFID Headquarters in Vienna to sign the grant agreement for the project. In this NL interview, among other points, Dr. Obaid highlights UNFPA's objectives in respect of the census project.

NL: *As the agency responsible for coordinating the implementation of the first population census in the occupied Palestinian Territories since 1997, please describe the essence of the project.*

Obaid: The last census was conducted 10 years ago in 1997. Our aim is to work very closely with the Central Statistics Organization, because they are the local implementation agency. We plan to provide them with technical assistance that would be prudent to the sustainability of the project.

The main purpose of this project, apart from collecting information, is to track three main things. First, we plan to track the demographic variations, that is, population changes within the last 10 years. The focus will be on age groups, gender and what has happened to the population between 1997 and today. Secondly, we intend to measure the impact of the wall and the separ-

ation it has created amongst the population and the affect it exerts on people's lives. Thirdly, it will gauge the impact of the checkpoints and their effect in terms of transportation and the movement of people. All of these factors exhibit trends within family structures that are important to investigate for this census.

NL: *What are the main challenges that UNFPA foresees in the implementation of this project?*

Obaid: The main challenge will arise from the difficulties associated with restricted mobility concerning travel between Ghaza and the West Bank. Because of the objectives of the census, and since it is essential to focus on both territories, we additionally intend to look at the effects of the occupation on both sides. UNFPA is confident of the cooperation it will receive, and remains optimistic, as we trust we can work closely with local authorities to collect the data necessary. ►

“We intend to measure the impact of the wall and the separation it has created amongst the population and the affect it exerts on people's lives.” *Obaid*

◀ **NL:** *How will the differences in trends be measured between the two areas?*

Obaid: Naturally, we will begin by comparing all results with the available base line, bearing in mind that the last demographic data was collected during the 1997 census. Furthermore, we hope to compare the trends that have developed within these areas since. Thereafter, we shall analyse the instruments and measures that have led to changes amongst the population.

NL: *A large component of the project concentrates on gender issues. Could you please elaborate?*

Obaid: We are aiming to collect information on the services provided to young women, as this is crucial to our analysis. It is important to investigate the impact the wall has had on travel and checkpoints with regard to issues dealing with maternity healthcare. There is a very influential film called *‘Born at the checkpoint’* about women who gave birth at the checkpoints as a result of

their inability to reach healthcare centers in time. The film shows pregnant women suffering as a result of immobility, and how many of them have to climb the wall to be able to reach healthcare providers. This is one example of the struggles of young women within these territories, which is prudent to analyze.

NL: *The project also focuses on several Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) pertaining to women. What indicators will UNFPA study in regard to achieving such goals?*

Obaid: The fifth MDG, which relates to improving maternal healthcare, is a key focus of this project. Amongst the substantial indicators gathered is teenage pregnancy. There are many complications and risks associated with early marriage. UNFPA hopes to examine extensively the issue of reproductive health. For example, we would like to see the number of children a woman gives birth to before turning 20 years



Dr. Obaid and Mr. Al-Herbish with HE Dr. Zuheir Elwazer, Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Palestine to Austria after the grant signature.

PHOTO: B. BABA/IDE

and analyze the affects. We are also hoping to explore issues of reproductive health from pre-pregnancy to post-natal care.

Another subject we plan to look at is where young people receive public health information. Since youth represent one third of the Palestinian population, analysis of the limited access to services including information and counselling is essential. So as to achieve overall progress, it would be necessary to improve the climate of health education at an early age.

NL: *This project aims to develop an infrastructure which can assist in long-term administration of demographic data. How does UNFPA plan to implement such an integrated Population Information System?*

Obaid: The program will be implemented in coordination with other United Nations organizations, including UNICEF, UNDP, WHO and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The Palestinian Government will also implement the program in collaboration with local NGOs and civil society organizations. Key agencies are the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Women Affairs, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Planning and the Central Bureau of Statistics.

In addition, field work will consist of training programs and close coordination with local authorities aimed at providing strong technical assistance and improving the national capacity to focus on data systems. Other UNFPA goals are to provide expertise in order to institutionalize mechanisms that can achieve stronger monitoring, as well as determine the emerging needs of the Palestinian population.

NL: *Clearly, this project is crucial for assisting the ministries in their planning so as to meet the MDGs, particularly gender data. What difficulties does the project anticipate in the process of specific data collection particularly regarding the female population?*

Obaid: The high rate of Palestinian population growth (4.3per cent per annum) and the high poverty and eco-



Palestine's public services, including healthcare, are under growing pressure due to the high population growth rate.

nomical circumstances are critical factors which characterize the environment of this program. Whereas population and development issues are intertwined within these territories, strong coalition with local groups has proved successful. An important pillar is to increase the technical organizational capacity of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and civil society organizations. Also, it will be worthwhile to assist them in institutionalizing gender principles and human rights on a long-term basis. Since building awareness is a strong component, UNFPA aims to support government and civil society organizations to empower women through programs that are based on community-building. ■

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