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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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From Imprisonment to Negotiation

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Dear Peter,

My name is Ghassan Abdul Wahab al-Khattib. I am originally from a village 5km west of Nablus called Beit Iba, however, I was born in Nablus because my father was working there at the time as an educationalist. I consider myself to have come from an ordinary middle class family and not a wealthy environment. My family was distant from politics and primarily concerned with their daily life. I was also unconcerned about politics. As I grew up I was mainly concerned with my studies. However, I was imprisoned as I was finishing my secondary education and this was the turning point in my life.

I was in prison for five years and this experience caused an important qualitative transformation in my attitudes and beliefs. This first arrest took place in 1974 when I was 20 and it was during this phase that I was directed towards political matters and political work and activism. Since then, I have been immersed in political life.

The nature of political life dictated that I had an affiliation from the beginning, therefore I joined the Communist party which later on became known as the PPP or Palestine People's Party. My political and ideological thoughts were grounded in this context and I consider myself to be a person involved in social as well as political affairs. My personality and overall areas of concern have evolved in this framework as well.

After my first arrest, I enrolled in Birzeit university where I was active in the student movement, whose work is inherently political owing to the surrounding circumstances of life here. I began my involvement with Birzeit in late 1977, immediately after my release and I stayed there until 1982. I ran in the student council elections in all the years I was there and succeeded in becoming a member of the student council throughout that whole period. The student movement played a

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pivotal role in political life at that time, to the extent that the student leadership played a large part in national politics as well. For example, in the late 1970s I was chosen to represent the student movement in the National Guidance Committee¹ in order to supervise political action [among students] throughout the whole of the Occupied Territories. My work in the NGC did not last long because I was arrested for the second time two months after I joined and charged with involvement in student demonstrations. I was also arrested a third time, at Birzeit, for involvement in student political activities and demonstrations.

Once I graduated, I got a lecturing job at Birzeit, I served in this capacity for three years, following which I got a scholarship from the university to do my MA in Economic Development in Britain. After completing my graduate studies I returned once more to Birzeit. A few months after my return in 1987 the intifada started, the university was closed and as a result I had nothing to do. Consequently, in coordination with some colleagues, I chose to establish this institution - The Jerusalem Media and Communication Center - JMCC.

The purpose behind establishing the JMCC was to contribute to the goals of the intifada by concerning ourselves with its publicity. In that context, my overall political role started to emerge and took the shape of attending official and semi-official meetings with foreign visitors and diplomats who came to examine what was going on with the intifada. I also got involved in other dimensions of intifada activities, some of which can be discussed and others not, even now.

As the political scene evolved in the direction of negotiations, I was chosen to be a member of the delegation and participated in the Madrid conference and the Washington meetings. However, in December 1992, over 400 Palestinians were deported to South Lebanon by the Israeli authorities. The U.N. security council passed a resolution calling for their return but the Israeli authorities were tenacious in their refusal to implement that resolution. Consequently, the Palestinian leadership, of which I was part, took a decision on December 20th of that year to suspend the talks until Israel committed itself to respecting the U.N. resolution. As a result the talks were suspended for three and half months. In the end, however, some Palestinian leaders retreated on the suspension decision and restarted the negotiations. I personally, and what I represent politically, thought that this was a mistaken decision and I did not go immediately back to the talks when they resumed.

¹ The National Guidance Committee was a broad alliance of PLO factions set up in 1978 in response to the Camp David process.

Following that came the Oslo agreement which I supported but with certain reservations. Then came the signing of the Cairo agreement which I vehemently opposed and still do. As my formal role came to an end, I gradually started to get back into the university while partly participating in general political and JMCC activities. This is a very brief review of what I did in the past few years and I consider my experience to be modest, in fact.

HHA: What we are talking about is a 20 year period of experience, many questions beg answers as a result. Let's first talk about the prison experience. I realize that it might be difficult for you to talk about certain issues for security reasons yet lets try to probe the experience as much as we can. Why were you imprisoned the first time?

GK: In 1974, I was imprisoned on the charge of being affiliated with what was then known as the Palestinian National Front. This was an umbrella organization for Palestinian political forces such as Fatah, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the Popular Front, General Command (PFLP.GC). During that period the Palestinian arena was divided into two main streams, known as the rejectionist and non-rejectionist fronts. The mainstream political leadership who were not rejectionist, established a coalition which they called the National Front in the early 1970s. This front played a pivotal role in directing national activity in the OPT in 73-74. The climax of its work was in leading the campaign for the municipal elections which took place in the mid-1970s. At that time there was a battle against the occupation authorities who wanted to impose what was then known as the civil administration plan. The plan meant that through the guise of municipal elections the occupation authorities could delegate some of their responsibilities to Palestinians. They hoped that the Palestinian winners of these elections would take charge of administering the occupation on behalf of Israel. The national movement and the people rejected that plan, therefore, the campaign was centered on resisting the civil administration project and more clearly defining the Palestinian national position and the position of the PLO.

I was actually arrested before these elections on charges of being a member of that front, participating in demonstrations, writing leaflets and also on a charge of having been trained to use weapons and explosives with the intent to use them. The occupation at that time accused the communist party of organizing a military wing and launched a widespread campaign of arrests among the leaders of the Party in 73-74. I was one of those accused of being involved in the military wing of the communist party. Weapons were found with some of my colleagues and I was also arrested.

HHA: How do you evaluate the prison experience?

GK: The prison experience is a very rich one, it cannot be described in words. Not much has been written about such experiences at all. One of the reasons is because there are some security related factors which make the writing of details about imprisonment dangerous. We need to get to a stage where there are no security related concerns but this hasn't happened yet.

The prison experience does not only deal with the political dimension. I believe that there are three levels of analysis involved in such an experience - the political, the social and the personal or psychological.

Much has been said about the political experience which is quite straightforward - the prisoner interacts with other prisoners of different political backgrounds and orientations in a rather compressed environment and accordingly, he listens, learns and participates in debates involving various political perspectives. It is also the type of political experience which offers a direct confrontation with the representatives of the occupation, the police, the prison guards and the interrogators. This experience mobilizes the political personality and develops it, giving an opportunity to interact internally with Palestinians and externally with Israelis. The political personality develops tremendously in prison and this dimension of it is direct, clear and simple. Everyone talks about it. However, there are two other dimensions which I would like to talk about.

The first is the social dimension. In prison you end up living with a great number of people. The Nablus prison where I was, held 600 prisoners on average, these 600 were constantly changing as almost every day 20 to 30 people leave and others arrive to take their place. That way you get to know a huge number of people and you do not interact with them the way you usually do in normal life. In a normal working environment, for example, you see your colleagues in the morning or for several hours during the day only. Therefore, the social experience at work is limited as is that in clubs or sports activities or indeed, in any other activity. In prison, however, you see these people for 24 hours a day. You see them when they are frustrated, when they are happy, depressed, before they go to sleep and even when they dream at night you get to hear what they dream about. Prisoners cannot hide anything from each other because they are constantly together. Therefore, there is a unique social experience where you get to learn a lot about different types of people, their characteristics and the way you personally adapt to deal with them. In normal life you see only the face that any individual wishes to project and you can never know about those personality traits which are kept

hidden. In prison however, there is nothing hidden. Prisoners live together through all phases and however much one tries to fake his personality, it is not possible to maintain day in and day out. It is an experience so free of barriers that its intensity and depth becomes quite profound.

Another factor is the incredible diversity of the people you meet. If you normally live in a city you generally end up interacting with people from your own social background. In prison there are people from refugee camps, from villages and cities. All the social classes are represented, it's as if you become part of an ongoing laboratory experiment which requires a cross section of the complete society. You acquire expertise and experience of the way in which all social classes think, react to certain issues and deal with matters in general. From this social dimension I believe I have learned much more than it is possible to describe. I have learned things which I would not have been able to learn without being imprisoned.

The third dimension is the psychological one. This is very important and also quite unique. You experience many personal and psychological changes when you live in a cell by yourself for weeks or months on end. I left the court with a five year sentence and before that had been detained for ten months while awaiting trial. You have to rapidly reach a psychological equilibrium within yourself so as to be able to confront in your own mind, the fact that you are going to be living in a small closed room for four more years. Others have longer sentences than mine - 10, 20 years or even their whole lives.

I would imagine that most people, including myself under my current circumstances, had I not been imprisoned, would become hysterical if they were told that they had to stay in a closed room for even ten days.

HHA: Do you remember how you felt when you left the courthouse?

GK: Yes, it was a feeling of despair and disbelief that I could actually survive the next four years. I felt that I had a weight beyond my capacity to carry and I was thinking about how I would manage. However, there is a process in prison which helps people to bear it. You don't know about it in advance but it is discovered later. Life in prison necessitates the adjustment of ones psyche to the new circumstances and this is not an achievement of your own will. I didn't have a plan to help me cope but it happened subconsciously and one discovers this after the event.

In prison, because one is totally isolated, the prison becomes the whole world and it difficult to conceive of anything beyond it. This has a lot of benefits, you stop feeling that you are living in a special situation - it becomes normality.

Subconsciously, you start adjusting yourself to the fact that this is your normal situation, that this is your life. Its boundaries are the prison walls, it has limited horizons and there is a specific society with certain laws. There are different forms of entertainment and a completely different set of difficulties. Before being sentenced one feels trapped, with limitations not of his choosing. As time passes, however, and as he gets sentenced he stops drawing the comparison. He stops daily thinking about the existence of another larger world from which he is deprived, becomes acclimatized and feels that it his world after all.

Horizons become limited to the criteria of the prison in a surprisingly short time and it feels like ones brain shrinks. Sometimes, prisoners fight with each other and beat each other over things like who took the biggest tomato. In normal life these are superfluous things but in prison they assume a huge degree of importance. These are the type of things to which your mind adjusts and the only escape from this is to read. This is the only recreational activity allowed in prison which enables one to escape from the atmosphere. This is not necessarily an advantage, however. It removes you from the adjustment process and because of that the educated and the more intellectual usually suffer a lot more than non-educated prisoners. Most ordinary people, although this may be an exaggeration, only remember that they are prisoners and pay attention to the fact that there is a difference between them and other "normal" people once a month, at visiting time. The night of the visit the prisoners get very depressed as they start thinking about their children, their parents, their homes, their lost opportunities for education and so on. This feeling becomes very intense at visiting time and the depression lasts for a while after the visit but gradually the daily routine of prison life takes over again. For example, the food comes in the afternoon, the prisoners distribute and eat it. Following that, there is an educational program after which there are political meetings organized by each faction in which prisoners discuss prison problems or talk about a problem involving interfactional fighting and start calculating how to get in touch with their representative on the coordinating committee. The next morning, at "foura" or exercise time in the yard, plans are made as to how to keep one person behind in the yard to have an opportunity to talk to the man [with whom there is an argument] who is in another room. This requires a talk with the "dabat" [prison guard] and suddenly we are engulfed by our intense little world again.

In the evening there will be a question and answer session and we joke and laugh and throw parties. The following day, perhaps, prisoners will interrogate a collaborator and then write and distribute a "ta'mim" which is a statement giving details of what was discovered. So we are immersed again and

the visit atmosphere is forgotten. This overwhelming environment with its social, psychological, political humorous, tragic, violent and peaceful dimensions forces ones mind to get adjusted to it. This in effect, reduces the intensity of the potential psychological damage which results from confinement. In a sense, one stops feeling imprisoned until he thinks about it. It's something like being away from home and feeling homesick. With time you get used to it and only remember that you are away when you get a letter from your family.

The psychological experience has a lot of ramifications. One's ability to cope with hardship develops. A man from my hometown was imprisoned and when someone first arrives they are put in the "zinzaneh" [solitary] cell during the interrogation stage. I managed to get to see him in this cell on the third day of his imprisonment. Like most of us this was the first time he had been in prison. I asked him how he was and he said, "I can't stand it. Do you know how long I have been here? THREE days!" I couldn't help but say, "Three days eh? Big deal" He replied "Yes, I realize three days isn't long but they are going to keep me for a whole week and there are still four days to go." He asked me how much longer I had to spend in prison. "Three YEARS", I said.

I felt sorry for him and realized how much my psychological abilities to endure my situation had developed. This is a dimension which I consider to be very rewarding but unfortunately, the experience of Palestinian prisoners has not been documented well enough to explore this. The only person who has written about is the Palestinian writer Sahar Khalifa. The experience she wrote about, however, was for part of a novel and was not from something she had lived and felt herself, but only from tales she had heard from others. I hope that one day, one of the many who have been in prison will write about it.

HHA: Can you tell us how you felt at the moment the decision was handed down by the military judge?

GK: There are three stages, the first is when the sentence is passed and all you really want to do is hit something. The hall is full of your family and friends, journalists and the lawyer. Therefore, you try to sound unaffected, heroic and unconcerned about whatever the judgement was. You might even manage to chant "Long live free Arab Palestine" before you get handcuffed and taken out of the courthouse to prison. As you arrive other prisoners are shouting:

"Good job, well done, God damn them you couldn't care less! The occupation is not going to last for four years! You're a young man, a strong man".

This makes you feel proud. However, the first moment one is alone is the most difficult time. You are plunged into the confusing state of mind of a human being who has been dealt a blow which he could not get up from, not run from and not confront. This creates a feeling of powerlessness and fear that the magnitude of the event is actually bigger than you can cope with. There's a sudden shock when you realize where you are and a wave of utter panic when you think about how you are going to deal with this new state of affairs.

This situation is slowly come to terms with in the way I previously described. Like everybody else I was subject to many things - sweet and bitter. There is nothing more bitter than the passing of sentence and imprisonment but there is nothing more sweet than release.

One old man was in prison at the same time as me and he said it was his sixth or seventh time. He had been imprisoned by both the Jordanians and Israelis. He was in his sixties and told me:

"I have experienced how it feels to be successful after gaining a degree. I have experienced a happy marriage. I have experienced the joy of having children. I have experienced everything that is enjoyable about human life but can honestly say that there is nothing sweeter than the moment of being released from prison."

I also believe this to be true. I think there is nothing more difficult than imprisonment, therefore, governments have been unable to come up with a punishment more harsh than total denial of freedom and total denial of choice.

HHA: How did the five years affect you personally?

GK: First, it affected me politically and deepened my feeling that I should live and work in political life. This was the result of political interaction in prison and the result of suffering. Secondly, I believe that the period in my life which contributed most to the formation of my personality was undoubtedly the years of imprisonment although I cannot say whether it made me a better or a worse person. I have also learned a lot about people, about their nature and about how you deal with them. I also learned how to be more tolerant and I believe this is quite important. I also learned the meaning of challenge and conflict. You are in a constant state of conflict - with the interrogator, with the prison guards, with the other prisoners and in conflict with yourself. This strengthens personality and the ability to the face challenges

and deal with conflicts. It enhances ones "sumud"². This is how I feel at least.

HHA: Would you say that the imprisonment achieved results which were the reverse of those intended by imprisonment, which is to deter prisoners from future political activity?

GK: Of course, this is widely understood. The Israelis know this but what else can they do with someone whom they want to punish. They have to put him in prison. This is a paradox that is well known even with those imprisoned for non-political reasons. When one goes to prison after committing a crime, he becomes a master of crime after interacting with gang leaders and more experienced criminals. This phenomenon happens in both types of arrest. Political movements, parties, and organizations exploit prisons to educate, socialize, develop and recruit prisoners in order to prepare them for a clearer and more effective political role. Consequently, our society has the phenomenon of prison graduates who tend to occupy important positions in political life. This is not to do with sympathy but rather because the experiences they gained, qualify them to play certain roles that others can't. Prison fills one with a more effective hatred against the occupation which motivates one to pursue or continue on the path of struggle. This has been statistically calculated by Israel as well as by us. The percentage of people who end up back in prison is greater than those who don't.

HHA: Did the experience scar you permanently .

GK: Not really. The human capabilities that are activated out of necessity are remarkable. The ability to forget is unimaginable and extremely helpful. When I first got out of jail there were clear psychological and physical effects but with time I forgot them. For example, in jail you have to eat certain types of food. There were these dry beans, cooked in a really ugly way and because I ate them so much I was utterly convinced that there would never be a day in my life where I would be able to eat them again. Dry Beans...Yuk. Impossible. I was waiting for the day when I would leave prison so I would never have to see them again. I left prison hating dry beans, I wouldn't allow them into the house when I went home. I couldn't even bear to smell them. With time, however, this feeling dissipated and I now like dry beans all over again.

HHA: As the date of release approached what did you think about?

² Sumud literally translated means steadfastness. It is an expression that became particularly associated with the period of Palestinian endurance of their situation prior to the outbreak of the intifada.

GK: My release came abruptly, seven months before my actual sentence was up and this was quite a surprise. It's a funny story actually. When the Likud [Israeli Political Party, currently out of office] were elected in 1977, they wanted to make a goodwill gesture and decided to release 100 prisoners at the time of Iid al-Fitr [The holiday immediately after Ramadan]. I was one of those released although I don't know why. Perhaps it was because I only had a few months of my sentence left anyway.

I was the representative in my political organization who would liaise with the prison administration. I represented one of eleven rooms in Nablus prison. At times, the prison director would call the representatives to his office if he wanted to badger them, force the prisoners to do something or issue warnings. In prison language a representative is known as the "shawish"³ The eleven of us shawish, were summoned to meet the director who was a brutal man named Rodekh. He said that he wished us to convey his greetings to the prisoners on the occasion of the feast and said that he wished us all a speedy release.

This annoyed me and I asked his permission to respond which he granted. I said that it was clear that he was not sincere in his wishes and wishing us a quick release was not meant either because it was not possible to achieve. I said that if he really wanted to do something for us, then he could give us, at the next holiday, an extra blanket or perhaps allow our exercise time to be 30 minutes instead of twenty or perhaps allow our families to visit us twice instead of once a month. I said that these things were under his control and could be done whereas wishing us a speedy release was insincere and ultimately insulting.

Of course, he got angry with me and swore at me and kicked us all out of his office.

Half an hour later, the prison guards called me in again and I thought that some type of punishment would be coming my way. Usually, if the prison administration thinks that you have done something wrong, they will confine you to your cell for about a week and this is what I was expecting.

When I got to the director's office, about 25 other people were there too. He said:

"Half an hour ago, I called in the shawishas from the rooms and I wished them a speedy release. That little shit, Khattib, did not like what I said. He considered it

³ The word "shawish" has military and disciplinary connotations.

insincere. He didn't know, as I myself did not know at the time, that half an hour later I would call him to tell him that he is going to be released."

I didn't have a clue what he was talking about - release? What? On the desk in front of him were our 25 files and this confirmed it. Release!

Therefore, my release was abrupt, thus I did not live the stage of suspense prior to normal release. However, from what others have told me, this stage is very difficult. One begins to feel what it means to be in prison as the release approaches. They say that the most difficult days of the prison term are the last ones. When you know there is only a month or a week left, you start to feel what normal life on the outside means and impatiently you begin counting the days. You start to make painful mental adjustments to "de-program" yourself from prison life. Psychologically, you want to think that you live on the outside while the reality is still confinement.

HHA: How did you feel when you were told?

GK: It was a surprise so dramatic and oddly enough, similar in magnitude to the moment of sentence. The tradition in prison is that the night prior to a release, the prisoners throw a party. They give out their own cigarettes, sing and dance and the following day they all queue to congratulate the one to be released and say goodbye.

HHA: So you left prison and went back to the outside world. How was it?

GK: I went home almost with a different personality. My family felt that I was a different person and not the one who went to prison four or five years before. In addition the Israelis put heavy restrictions on released prisoners. They put a stamp on our ID cards to indicate that we were not allowed to travel or obtain a drivers license. These stamps provide a green light to soldiers at checkpoints to treat us with cruelty.

Consequently, I couldn't travel to continue my studies as I was planning to do. I had been arrested when I was still in high school and did the tawjihi⁴ while in prison. I had no choice but to enrol in Bir Zeit university and was admitted under the rubric of "special cases". As an ex-prisoner you cannot compete with other students based on grades because you don't stand a chance of getting high grades while in prison. A colleague of mine and I were the first two "special cases" to be admitted to Bir Zeit. At the beginning, they rejected us but then we went

⁴ The high school leaving examination.

to talk with Gabi Baramki [Vice president of Bir Zeit University]⁵ and told him that this was unfair. We explained that we had done the tawjihi in prison and should not be evaluated by the same criteria as other students. He responded that we would be admitted but on probation. The condition was that we had to get consistent honor grades throughout the first year or else our admission would be withdrawn. We took up the challenge and enrolled in an intensive orientation course for one semester. There were 120 students on that course - my colleague got the highest grade and I got the second highest. For us this was the challenge to guarantee admission, afterwards we stopped being first and second!

When I first enrolled in Bir Zeit, I faced a most difficult problem. My colleagues in the classroom were quite young, they were high school graduates of 17 and 18 years old. I found them very childish in some of the ways they behaved. I had lived a different life and my way of seeing things was certainly not that of a recent high school graduate. My concerns were completely different and I was very serious in my approach, the general behavior of the other students grated on my nerves. Twice I packed my case, gave up and left the university in order to go and farm my family's land but my friends talked me into staying. The way I got out of this dilemma was getting involved in the student council elections. This enabled me to participate in more serious activities. It was in line with what I wanted to do all along and it was the thing that finally adjusted me to university life.

HHA: How do you evaluate student life in Bir Zeit in general and your political involvement in particular?

GK: Student life at Bir Zeit at that time was rich and beautiful. First, it was a mixture of political and non-political work, entertainment, social activities, arts etc. At that stage, students used to participate in all sorts of political activities such as demonstrations while also maintaining a normal student life. They had parties, picnics, dances, educational programs etc and this mixture was wonderful. Second, there was an atmosphere of political plurality which was educationally positive in student life. There were different political orientations and there was an educational ethos which created a willingness to co-exist This was very healthy.

I will never forget that the year Sadat visited Israel and after which came the Camp David accords. A student and a

⁵ The president of Bir Zeit University, Hanna Nasser, had already been deported by the Israelis, therefore, the Vice President served as acting president.

professor were in support of Sadat's visit at a time when Palestinian opposition, especially at Bir Zeit, was close to 100%. These two individuals had the full freedom to express their views at any student meeting or in any other setting at the university without any restrictions and without fear. I imagine that this would be quite impossible to do today. The political atmosphere has become tense to the extent that it cannot withstand opinions that differ from the general consensus. There was a true atmosphere of liberalism.

HHA: What happened after you returned from Britain to Bir Zeit in 1987?

GK: After I returned to my job, the intifada started and, as usual, Bir Zeit was active from the beginning. However, a decision was soon taken to close down the university and this closure lasted for about 4 years. At the beginning, university students participated in the intifada on a limited basis, primarily through demonstrations around the campus. After the closure of the university they went back to their places of residence and became involved in different popular committees which were confronting the occupation.

My involvement in teaching stopped as a result of the closure and like many others in our society at that stage, I started becoming active in other areas, some of which remain undisclosed and, therefore, difficult to discuss. Other activities were in the media and public relations fields. Specifically, the objective was to portray a positive picture of the intifada since it was a positive and constructive phenomenon. Around the world the intifada was viewed as a phenomenon of violence although in actuality, it had profound meanings which went straight to the heart of Palestinian society. For example, it deepened the value of self-reliance and demonstrated the importance of civil disobedience. It also demonstrated the significance of organizing the various communities in the villages in a collective manner through popular committees. The various locales organized themselves to adapt to curfew situations and the isolation of various territories for extended periods of time. The popular committees secretly transported and distributed food to the population and some committees guarded villages and informed their residents of Israeli soldiers' movements into the villages to conduct arrests.

Such activities did not only reveal an immense ability to engage in direct violent confrontations, but they also indicated the readiness for autonomous development. People started to develop local production to satisfy their needs since movement from the various villages to the cities was quite difficult. Many active villages were subjected to sieges and refugee camps were subjected to extended curfews. I

remember Jalazon refugee camp being subjected to the longest continuous and uninterrupted curfew for 43 days. Of course, the camp ran out of all necessities during the first week and store owners were not allowed to go to neighboring villages or cities to bring in new products. However, in a democratic and consensual manner, activists established committees to smuggle in food for distribution. Such committees also helped to solve whatever other problems the people faced.

Of course, other sectors in the society played similar roles. For example, those who worked in the health field organized health and medical relief activities all the while promoting self-reliance. These people went through a lot of dangerous times as they often had to reach others under curfew. We tried to help in some of these areas in addition to trying to portray a more positive picture of the intifada to foreign public opinion.

My role in such activities took two shapes: First, in collaboration with some friends I started issuing a circular in English focusing on transmission of the news and events of the intifada in a factual manner. We tried to issue a true picture of what the people who made up Palestinian society faced. This circular was published secretly: No names of publishers or editors could appear on its pages and even now the names of the people who were involved in putting out this publication are kept secret.

Furthermore, the area was the center of attention for the outside world. Many concerned journalists, researchers, fact finding missions and diplomats made numerous visits here. They would come to Jerusalem, stay at local hotels and meet with Palestinian intellectuals who spoke English. Such visitors used to believe that doing this would give them an idea of what was really going on with the intifada.

In my opinion, at that time at least, the intifada represented something profounder than a visitor could understand after a meeting in Jerusalem with some intellectuals. Thus, we started a process of taking such visitors to various locations where the people live and where the reality of the intifada lies. In doing that, of course, there were a lot of difficulties but fortunately, we had contacts in all locations which enabled us to organize visits for most of these delegations. That way, they managed to visit refugee camps and villages. They got the opportunity to meet with real people through popular committees. This helped them understand the nature of the intifada and its dynamics, in addition to its achievements on the level of societal organization. Such arrangements had a tremendous effect on formulating a positive picture of the intifada in the mind of the outside world.

In my view, the intifada had some terrific aspects, most important of which was the popular mass-oriented nature of the process. All sectors in society of all ages and backgrounds participated in quite a wide array of activities which all had the same goal of ridding Palestinian society of the occupation.

Accompanying these delegations who wanted to understand more by meeting people participating in the intifada, came the idea of establishing a media center. This came to be known as the JMCC, the Jerusalem Media and Communication Center and it began as a service to enable concerned visitors better understand what was happening. This was the preliminary idea, initially formed by Hakam Al-Fahum, Ms. Tubassi and myself. We were able to rent a modest office in Jerusalem thanks to voluntary assistance from a huge number of people who wanted to help us facilitate this mission.

The Israelis increasingly began to declare areas "closed military zones" which obstructed the ability of the media and others concerned to get to such areas. So we issued a daily news publication for journalists who could not get to areas declared closed in order to inform them of what was going on. The intifada grew bigger, to the extent that research was needed to describe and study the various sectors in society and to give some kind of a picture about them. So we began to do this too and published them in English. We conducted one study, for example, on the state of the educational sector during the intifada, in which we discussed various Israeli measures such as the closure of schools. We also put out a study focusing on the situation of universities during the intifada, most notably the impact of lengthy closures on higher education. Thereafter, we had a similar study focussing on the agricultural situation which we called "Bitter Harvest". This study offered a comprehensive description of Israeli measures against the land and the agricultural sector. It also dealt with the various ways farmers organized their lives under such harsh conditions. Another study was on the situation of the media during the intifada, "Reporting Harassment" explained Israeli measures taken to obstruct free journalism such as closures, actual physical attacks on journalists and military censorship on both local and foreign media.

Such studies were short but precise and comprehensive, they were meant to provide the foreign reader with background information as to the nature of the situation in the Occupied Territories. Such studies contributed to forming a better understanding of the reality of the situation here and from this evolved the research unit at the JMCC.

Therefore, working in the media and public relations fields, was one of the centers of my activities during the intifada.

The third dimension of my work during that stage was political. A group of Palestinian intellectuals, which was trying to develop semi-formal and semi-diplomatic ties evolved. I happened to be a member of this group which wanted to strengthen or establish more communication with concerned parties abroad. We started to meet, organize campaigns and make contacts with the outside world in a semi-formal manner. We held meetings with consuls and ambassadors of foreign countries which have representation here. We also organized meetings with diplomats and ministers.

At the beginning this group was composed of Hanan Ashrawi, Faisal Husseini, Riad Malki, Zahira Kamal, Mamdouh al-Aker, Khalil Mahshi and myself. At a later stage others such as Ziad Abu Zayyad, Sari Nusseibeh, Mohammed Jadallah and Tamer Essawi joined the group.

This group started to play a political role serving as the committee representing the people of the OPT vis-a-vis formal foreign missions. When VIPs visited Israel, they began contacting this group too.

The focus of our work was first, to explain the nature of oppressive Israeli measures against the intifada; second, to present such visitors with information, documentation and evidence as to the extent of Israeli brutality; and third, to explain the political message, importance and objectives of the intifada. It was not feasible for any concerned party from the outside to meet directly with the leadership of the intifada who had to remain underground, so it was this group who played the representational role.

HHA: This group formed the nucleus of the delegation that went to Madrid and later to Washington - how did this group evolve? It is also apparent that the group is composed of members representing most trends in the Palestinian political arena and some of these ended up in the opposition while others became supporters of the peace process. Do you have any comments on this?

GK: When this group was formed there was no peace process. There was no opposition or non-opposition. The current divisions did not exist at that time since the peace process did not exist. However, this group did not evolve at the initiation of anyone in particular, it was established gradually owing to need. These individuals are intellectuals who were concerned with what was happening and who had also obtained their education abroad. Therefore, they already had their own independent contacts with the outside world and were thus in a position which enabled them to talk to the outside world. The formation of the group started simply. When visitors arrived we would try and gather individuals who reflected

different popular sentiments in an articulate way. Gradually, things became more organized and we held preliminary meetings in which some harmony developed among the members of this group. Consequently we began to appear as a team. It was not a well defined group in the real sense of the term, tasks were not strictly specified and people changed from time to time, but the nucleus was permanent.

Then the Gulf War erupted, sending shock waves as far as the political status of the intifada was concerned. It did not affect the local popularity of the uprising, since the Palestinian masses were sympathetic to Iraq. The Palestinian leadership appearing to be supportive of Iraq caused tremendous harm as far as the status of the intifada on the level of world public opinion was concerned. Our work became more and more difficult and although the group actually held a different position towards the Gulf war than did the Palestinian people and leadership, this did not enjoy its share of attention from the media. We tried to promote our position and we published a memorandum signed by all group members which stated that we opposed the Iraqi military measures in Kuwait to the same extent that we opposed the U.S. military build-up in the Gulf. At that time we demanded that the military build up stop, and insisted on the importance of searching for a peaceful settlement to the Kuwaiti problem.

Myself and the other members of the group publicized this position in various articles and radio and television interviews. We all tried to link the importance of peacefully solving the Palestinian problem on the basis of U.N. resolutions in the same manner the world was insistent on solving the Kuwaiti problem by forcing Iraq to adhere to international legality. What we tried to say was that international legality cannot be divided. We spoke of the imminent danger of double standards and said that all outstanding conflicts and problems in the Middle East should be dealt with using the same yardstick. If the whole world was amassing its power to compel Iraq to adhere to U.N. resolutions, the world should also compel Israel to acquiesce to international legality. This was the focal point of our diplomatic discussions on this matter.

After the Gulf war, there was a boycott on the Palestinians by the international community. This state of affairs remained until a ministerial delegation from the European Troika visited Israel and the OPT. This delegation agreed to hold a meeting with Palestinians which took place at the French Consulate, since France was Chair of the European Union at that time. The same group of individuals which I mentioned earlier participated in this meeting with the addition of Dr. Haidar Abdel Shafi. A few months later several American moves followed this initiative. Eventually, such moves came to be known as the

peace process which led to the Madrid conference. Secretary of State, Baker, visited the area at that time and asked to meet with the same Palestinian group which had met with the European Troika. He said that his purpose was to discuss the feasibility of an American initiative for solving the Palestinian/Israeli conflict.

I took a position calling for a boycott of this meeting which was also the view of the political party to which I belong, the PPP. Our view was that the U.S. wanted to exploit the results of the Gulf war by initiating a peace process and was determined to go ahead with this initiative. Therefore, this was an ideal opportunity for the Palestinian people to compel the U.S. and the international community to finally recognize the PLO. Our position was, that all Palestinians in the OPT should refuse to deal with this initiative in order to push the United States to go to the proper address of the Palestinian people - the PLO. We thought that way we could gain the recognition of the PLO and the recognition of what the PLO stood for in terms of representing the Palestinians as a people. One way or another this would have meant recognition of Palestinian national rights.

Unfortunately, there was no responsiveness to this stance and the majority of the group preferred to go along with the view of the PLO itself which accepted the principle of holding that meeting. I declared an official boycott of that meeting, not as an expression of refusal to be a part of the meeting, but as an expression of my belief that U.S. diplomacy should take it into a direct relationship with the PLO. Of course the meeting took place and was followed by several other meetings with a three member Palestinian team which became almost delegated by the PLO. This team was composed of Hanan Ashrawi, Faisal Husseini and Zakaria al Agha.

HHA: You boycotted the first and subsequent meetings with Secretary of State, Baker. Did Dr. Haidar Abdul Shafi attend the first meeting?

GK: Yes, Dr. Haidar attended the first meeting but refused to attend subsequent ones.

HHA: Did he attend the first meeting in a personal capacity or in an official one?

GK: Well, everyone who attended the first meeting did so on a personal basis. At that time, the motives behind the meetings were not really clear. Only afterwards was it realized that the initiative came from the Secretary of State. Subsequently, as I indicated, meetings were limited to Faisal, Hanan and Zakaria.

I continued to call upon Palestinians to take a position where

they would insist that all official and diplomatic contacts were conducted with the PLO. The idea was to compel the U.S. to recognize the PLO and there was a historic opportunity to achieve this objective. This position evolved out of our understanding that the U.S. was determined to push its initiative forward and that they had calculated that it would not succeed without Palestinian participation. Gaining recognition for the PLO at that time would have been a major gain for the Palestinians and a good beginning for Palestinian participation. As it turned out, we started participating in a position of weakness from where any settlement inevitably had to end unequally.

I was in daily contact with the three mentioned above and we used to participate in meetings with people on the American side other than the American Secretary of State. Meetings with him were attended only by individuals representing mainstream Palestinian political life, Fatah, and others supportive of this line. Such contacts continued until the American-Russian initiative where the parties to the Arab/Palestinian-Israeli conflict were invited to attend the Madrid peace conference. Then, as a representative of the Palestinian People's Party, I was invited to participate in the Madrid conference. In spite of our reservations on the way in which such contacts were started, we felt, unfortunately, that the conference would take place no matter what. Ultimately we decided that participation would be more beneficial than a boycott. We felt that the process was unfolding and that there may be a chance to make a strong contribution. We agreed to attend and thus, Dr. Samir Abdallah and I were delegated as the representatives of the PPP in the Palestinian delegation which consisted of most members of the original group.

Some crises surfaced among the Palestinians as discussions were taking place on the selection of participating members in the delegation. At one point, we refused to participate because we disagreed strongly with some of the suggested members. Regrettably, I cannot mention names because this is too personal.

In the middle of this crisis, I was invited to Amman to meet the PLO Chairman, Yassir Arafat, in order to discuss this very subject. This was the first time in my life that I had met him. All the members of the PLO Executive Committee attended that meeting and I was in the company of one other person from the Occupied Territories. A discussion of the delegation took place and we spoke of our reservations about members suggested, even if they had been suggested by the leadership of the PLO itself.

As a result of that meeting, other contacts which followed, and, in my view, of the PPP's threats of non-participation unless the composition of the delegation was improved, some

changes took place which we considered positive. Thus, we agreed to participate and I became a member in the negotiating delegation. In Madrid, I was part of the official Palestinian delegation of 14 members. The group which actually went to Madrid, however, was considerably larger, totalling about 120 persons. There were several reasons why such a big group left with the Palestinian delegation. First, there was the need for a number of advisors, assistants and politicians. Even if they could not participate in the conference sessions, they would play a role in the preparation, thinking and decision-making. There were other reasons which were not quite so positive as to why such a huge number went to Madrid. It was a decision meant to satisfy a lot of people whose attitudes might have been different had they not attended. There was generosity from the leadership in giving the opportunity to the greatest number of people possible as a means of avoiding personal opposition from some individuals. They were not the majority, however.

HHA: Were there any Palestinians suggested for participation in Madrid who were opposed by the Israelis?

GK: Of course, the Israeli side demanded that representation be limited to Palestinians from the Occupied Territories, ie. the West Bank and the Gaza Strip only. According to Israel, no Palestinian from Jerusalem, the diaspora, or affiliated with the PLO could participate. Some Israeli conditions were imposed on Palestinian representatives in Madrid and accordingly, Hanan Ashrawi was prevented from participation in the conference sessions. Faisal Husseini and others were prevented as well.

In order to get around this problem, the Palestinian side decided to enlarge the delegation by adding important individuals who could participate in areas related to the conference, though not in the sessions themselves. This included people to do the media work, prepare the papers and figure out tactics for the negotiating process itself. As such, we developed what we called the Palestinian negotiating team which was composed of individuals accepted by Israel as well as others who were not. The Palestinian delegation was a part of this larger team, ie, those from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip who were accepted by Israel became the official delegation.

The head of the delegation was Dr. Haidar Abdul Shafi and its official spokesperson was Hanan Ashrawi. These two individuals were the most visible throughout the negotiating process.

It was clear that Palestinian participation was successful in making the Palestinian problem most central in the conference. That participation gave the Palestinian people a historic media opportunity, Dr. Haidar Abdul-Shafi, head of the Palestinian delegation had the chance to speak on an equal footing with

heads of other delegations, such as Shamir, Bush and Gorbachev. The whole world witnessed what went on in that conference and listened to what the Palestinians had to say. This served as the first real opportunity to project Palestinian existence in a positive and civilized manner on the world stage.

The Palestinian speech gave a mixed impression, firstly, of Palestinian inner power and willingness to carry out the struggle until declared objectives are achieved, and secondly, Palestinian willingness to reach a peaceful resolution to the conflict on the basis of international legality.

Also in this conference the first meeting between the Palestinian delegation and the Palestinian leadership took place. On the second night of the conference a group of the delegation leaders secretly left to Tunis on a private plane. I was one of them. This was done at night without anyone knowing. We left at night and came back at night, close to dawn.

HHA: Did not the Israeli side know of the trip?

GK: No doubt. We expected the Israelis to know through intelligence sources although they did not know about it officially or on the political level and did not evoke this issue at the time.

The following night we traveled once again to meet the leadership of the PLO, this time in Algeria. Our numbers were bigger, reaching about 80. It was a very warm meeting with the Palestinian leadership. All the Secretary Generals of the factions supporting the peace process and all Executive Committee members who supported the Madrid conference were there, headed by Yassir Arafat. There was an all night session in which the conference and our participation were evaluated. Again, we returned around dawn without anybody noticing that we had left the hotel.

At the end of the Madrid conference, the first session of bilateral talks between Israel and each of the participating Arab states was held. Therefore, we held the first closed session as the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation with the Israeli delegation. From our side, Dr. Abdul Shafi served as chairman with Dr. Elyakim Rubinstein from the Israeli delegation. This was a preliminary opening session in which short speeches were exchanged and each side spoke of its conception of the negotiations. Drafts of agendas for upcoming meetings were exchanged as well. At the end of the meeting, both sides agreed on a joint statement to the press, which was too general and too formal. With this came the end of Madrid. Involved parties agreed to resume bilateral talks later on in Washington and this is how the negotiations started.

HHA: How do you evaluate Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian participation in the first closed session? How was that session documented?

GK: To begin with, that session was an opening one - short and very formal. Opening statements were presented and agendas were exchanged. There weren't a lot of details for discussion. It lasted less than an hour. In that session, Dr. Walid Khalidi played a particularly leading role. He was a member in the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. In fact, this was the first time for me to meet and get to know him.

HHA: He participated despite the fact that he is a diaspora Palestinian?

GK: He is from the Diaspora, however, officially, he participated as a member of the Jordanian side. This was the basis for his acceptance by Israel. Soon enough, though, Israel requested his ouster from the delegation and he did not participate afterwards. There was no official explanation. My estimation is that Israel had reservations about him because he played a leading role in the preparation, the strategy and the performance in the first session. In my view he is one of the greatest Palestinian minds and a huge benefit of participating in the negotiations for me personally, is that I got the opportunity to meet Palestinians living in the diaspora whose reputations preceded them. I felt so much pride to know that our people have individuals of such calibre among them. For example, people like, Walid Khalidi, Ahmad Khalidi, Yezid Sayigh, Elie Sanbar and Kamil Mansour are all Palestinians whose names were well known and I am fortunate to have been able to meet them.

The other benefit was my experience with people involved in the PLO. In Madrid we had a team of people from the PLO who conducted secret contacts with us. They stayed at another hotel. They were delegated by the PLO to participate in the preparation, thinking and follow up of the conference. This group was composed of Nabil Sha'ath, Akram Haniyyeh, Ahmad Abdul-Rahman, Nasser Al-Qudwa [the PLO representative to the United Nations], Taysir Arouri, Mahmoud Darwish and Azmi Al-Shu'abi. All of those were there in Madrid as a part of the Palestinian team, yet without us being able to stay with them in the same building. We used to meet them secretly in order to conduct the necessary co-ordination.

In the last days for us in Madrid, relations between them and us started to normalize. We became more aggressive in disclosing the relationship and in the last two days, some of them moved to stay in our hotel without a lot of media attention being paid.

HHA: Did Mahmoud Darwish participate in the team despite the fact that he became one of the most ardent opponents later on?

GK: In my view, Mahmoud Darwish was, and still is, an opponent of the details and the Palestinian performance more than of the principle of negotiation. He was one of the first ones to discover that we would really lose out if we continued to negotiate in such a "Palestinian way". Of course, Mahmoud Darwish contributed to drafting the Palestinian statement in Madrid although he was not the main composer. Actually, I always try to address this point because there is a lot of debate about it - Who wrote the Palestinian speech? This was one of the greatest Palestinian statements ever made and although it was a collective effort, the person who played the leading role in the writing was Dr. Hanan Ashrawi and this is something I was a witness to. Several people participated, including Arafat himself because drafts were being sent back and forth to him for comments, but the real credit for this speech must go to Hanan Ashrawi.

Anyway, Madrid ended and we returned to the homeland. We were met with huge receptions at the bridge and in Jericho where all residents took to the streets with a demonstration to receive the delegation. There were posters and flags. People climbed all over the buses. This emotional reception really reflected the support of the Palestinian people for the performance in Madrid. It had maintained Palestinian dignity and held on tightly to Palestinian rights. It lifted the head of the Palestinian people and they were all very proud of Dr. Haidar Abdul-Shafi and Dr. Hanan Ashrawi.

We came back to Jerusalem and had another great reception at the Hakawati theater hall. Numerous other supportive celebrations and festivals were organized for delegation members in most cities and villages in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. There was strong popular backing for the Palestinian negotiators and I believe that the reason for this was that they had insisted on reflecting the Palestinian popular position with as much precision, honesty and responsibility as possible.

The celebrations to which we were all invited gave us the opportunity to interact with people and to listen to their concerns as far as the ongoing negotiations were concerned. This also gave us the opportunity to explain to them the reasons which motivated us to participate and the principles upon which our participation was based.

Following that the bilateral talks started and we began going to Washington once a month and spending 2-3 weeks there and then be back home for a week or two. After each round in Washington we would return to Tunis or meet the PLO in Amman.

After that we would return to the Occupied Territories where we would again be involved in popular activities and be invited to appear on forums to explain what was happening with the negotiations. Our goal was to rally popular support around the Palestinian negotiating position in order to strengthen it. We also needed to listen to what the people considered to be important.

The Palestinian team in Washington was about the same as the Palestinian delegation which participated in Madrid. Every now and then some minor changes would take place but gradually a negotiating team in Washington composed of four different parts evolved.

The first was the core delegation who were directly involved in negotiations with the Israelis. The second, was the PLO team which was with us in Washington and which served as the go between for us and the PLO. The third part was a group of Palestinian experts from the diaspora who participated with us as strategists in preparing our position and the fourth part was the support group - interpreters, media experts, lawyers, secretaries, administrators etc. The complete group became like an institution with administrative offices, meeting rooms, offices for secretaries, interpreters, media, etc.

HHA: Was all of this at the expense of the host country?

GK: No, it was all done at the expense of the PLO. In my view, each round of negotiations cost about a quarter of a million dollars. This included travel expenses, local transportation, etc.

In order to organize the work, a leadership committee was created composed of about ten people or a few more. Some of these were from Tunis, from the PLO, others were leading individuals in the delegation and there were some experts. In principle this committee was composed of Dr. Haidar, Hanan, Nabil Sha'ath, Saeb Erekat, myself, Taysir Aruri, Azmi Shu'abi. I don't remember them all but these were the main people. This committee used to meet after each negotiating session to evaluate what had happened and to delegate responsibilities to various groups in the team so that the necessary preparations could be made for continuation.

At the end of each week, the committee would delegate two or three people to travel to Tunis to consult with the leadership and to inform them of what was happening. I was included on most of those trips and so was Sa'eb. Each weekend he and I would travel to Tunis and then return to Washington.

In fact the experience was very enriching for me personally. It gave me the opportunity to meet many people and to interact with Israelis in a way I had never been able to do before. As a

person living in the OPT, the Israelis were no strangers to me but my dealings with them had been either in prison, under interrogation or later, with Israeli peace activists. This time the experience was with an official Israeli body and the relationship was on an equal footing. The fact that I had experiences from the oppressive side of the Israeli occupation through my repeated arrests, helped me to put certain things in context when dealing with the Israeli negotiators. In each negotiating session, for example, we used to present a brief daily report on Israeli violations of human rights in the previous 24 hours. JMCC was the main provider of this information to the Palestinian delegation. In one of those reports we talked about incidents of torture in Israeli prisons and as a result the head of the Israeli delegation, Rubinstein, got very angry. He said that such reports were inaccurate and that the state of Israel was a state of law and order and the Israeli army and police do not engage in such acts of torture. He finished by saying that there was no validity to claims of torture in Israeli prisons.

HHA: Did this discussion take place in a closed session?

GK: Yes, it was closed. This issue in particular provoked me so I took the floor and I told him that I personally had been subjected to torture several times in Israeli prisons. I emphasized the brutality with which it was done and described to him what had happened to me. I told him that thousands of other Palestinians were also subjected to torture as well and it was only by coincidence, that one of them was here in this session, in which he was trying to say that Israel does not engage in such activity. Of course, the discussion ended with that and he refused to concede that I was telling the truth. He was representing an official position after all.

HHA: Was that discussion documented, recorded or filmed?

GK: There was no documentation. For one reason or another the Israelis refused to have official documentation such as tape recording or video in the negotiations. We used to take the minutes. Each delegation did it on its own and I generally took down the minutes for the Palestinian delegation. At a later stage the Israelis agreed to have each side take in a tape recorder but this wasn't done until the sixth round.

Of course in December 1993, if I'm not mistaken [sic] Israel deported over 400 Palestinians to South Lebanon and in our view this was a blow to the negotiations which made it necessary to suspend the eighth round. We travelled to Tunis and meetings took place with the Palestinian leadership in which the decision was taken to formally suspend Palestinian participation in the negotiations until the return of the deportees. Afterwards, however, pressure was put on the PLO

from the United States and from some of the participating Arab countries. This resulted in a change of the PLO position and the delegation was called for a meeting in Amman to discuss the issue of participation. The entire delegation left for Amman and we met with Arafat in a meeting which was the most difficult in my life. This meeting lasted from 7.00pm until 5.00am the following morning. In that meeting the first split emerged between the view of the leadership on the outside and that of all members of the Palestinian negotiating delegation.

This difference of opinion was very sharp. The overwhelming majority of the PLO brothers on the outside adopted the idea of going on with the negotiations and, therefore, stopping the suspension before the return of the deportees. All the members of the negotiating delegation from the inside, without exception and irrespective of their political backgrounds - Fatah, independents, etc. - were against resumption of the negotiations.

This was the first event in which the inside and the outside had diverged and there was a lot of very tense argument.

Close to morning, a compromise was reached - Dr. Haidar, would attend the meeting of Arab foreign ministers to discuss the issue. Another part of this compromise was that a reduced Palestinian delegation would participate in the upcoming round of negotiations if the Arab states would commit themselves to the principle of suspension until all the deportees were returned.

This solution was accepted by Dr. Haidar but myself and other representatives of the PPP in that meeting opposed this compromise. We insisted that the negotiations should remain suspended pointing out that Israeli success in avoiding implementation of the U.N. Security Council Resolution which called for the return of the deportees, would legitimize their avoiding implementation of resolution 242 on which the negotiations were based. Therefore, if we could not win this battle, we could never succeed in the war of the negotiations. We had to insist on Israeli respect for the U.N. resolution regarding the return of the deportees.

HHA: How do you evaluate the Palestinian performance in general? When the group evolved during the intifada it seems that there was no strategy to anticipate what was to come. This group became the Palestinian negotiating delegation but nowadays there seems to be a lot of dissatisfaction among many Palestinians, including some delegation members, as to the accomplishments of the peace talks. You already talked about the meeting which took place in Amman regarding the deportees but what do you think really happened?

GK: The first phase of the negotiations in my view was a very good performance. The negotiating decisions, positions and tactics were studied collectively and decisions were also arrived at collectively, in the PLO leadership. Secondly, our position was based on the popular legitimacy of the Palestinian people themselves. There was great concern that consistency between the Palestinian negotiating position and the position of the Palestinian people was maintained.

In the phase which began with Oslo, the Palestinian negotiating style changed. There was no collective decision making process with decision being taken on an individual basis. A gap grew between the official negotiating position and what the Palestinian people believed to be the right position. There emerged some malfunction in the Palestinian performance which led to the current agreements from which, in my view, we are all suffering. We could have gained so much more, had we maintained a solid position and had we continued with a position more consistent with the desires of Palestinian public opinion.

In my view, the change of position was due to individuals in the PLO accepting to take certain political positions in exchange for recognition of the PLO and its leadership and in return for the other side being willing to deal with the PLO for the remainder of the negotiations.

What the Palestinians got out of this trade off is a lot less than what the Palestinian delegation to the negotiations was insistent upon. This exchange was a loss for the Palestinian people which led to agreements which are unworkable but which give Israel the opportunity to have their cake and it too. As a result of the talks, Israel appeared as the state which signed a peace agreement. The world accepted Israel all over again and the agreement also gave Israel an open door policy on the Arab world. On the surface, the Palestinian problem appears resolved while the occupation continues - land confiscation goes on and the construction of settlements is moving forward. Therefore, we have moved into a phase where Israel has regained the initiative and has become stronger in its negotiating position. Palestinians, meanwhile have shifted to life in a situation characterized by a chain of regression which causes the attitude to Palestinians of the outside world to regress also. This is a tragedy for me.

HHA: Where do you think the Palestinian people are heading?

GK: in my view this error in the history of the Palestinian people, namely the error of negotiations, will unfortunately end with arrangements which will not enable the Palestinian people to exercise their rights or achieve their ambitions. The Palestinian struggle will not end, however, the Palestinian

cause will not be over. I'm sure there will continue to be errors in which Palestinian national struggle will re-ignite against the occupation. In the end, the agreements will have to be revised and modified to better serve the cause of the Palestinians or new initiatives will arise to provide results with which the Palestinian people can exercise at least the minimum of their rights.

HHA: So are you saying that this recent chapter in Palestinian history is a complete loss?

GK: One of the causes of Palestinian malfunction, is that negotiations were regarded as an alternative to other political measures which were taking place before the negotiations began. In actuality the negotiations should have been a complementary element to other forms of Palestinian struggle. Had this been done, it would have given the Palestinian negotiator a lot more strength, ability and maneuverability in regard to negotiating positions. It was the intifada that pushed Israel into negotiations in the first place but the fact that the intifada stopped as negotiations began was the most significant contribution to weakening the Palestinian negotiating position. Embarking on the negotiations, stopped the struggle before anything had been achieved.

Hisham H. Ahmed