

**Progress Report
Aid Watch Palestine
December 27, 2014**

This is the first report of the new initiative, Aid Watch Palestine. It covers the period September 1, 2014-December 31, 2014.

Background

International aid to Palestine, problematic for decades, has come under increasing criticism in the past few years, especially since the Oslo Accords framework has been exposed as obsolete and a failure. Yet after the 2014 Gaza war, international donors organized to respond to the humanitarian crisis as they have done after past wars in 2012 and 2008-9 – despite the fact that aid has been ineffective at best and in many ways harmful.

Aid Watch Palestine is a grassroots initiative of Palestinian and international civil society actors in Gaza, the West Bank, and throughout the world. It aims to shed light on international aid to Palestine – with a focus on the Gaza Strip – in order to increase transparency and accountability. The need for regular aid monitoring developed during and after the 2014 war. Nora Lester Murad and Omar Shaban, who both publish critiques of aid, decided to develop an initiative. Conceptualization and planning started in September 2014 with all voluntary resources. The period October 1-December 31 was supported by a \$3000 grant followed by a 4393 NIS supplement from Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung in Ramallah, which enabled us to hire a junior staff person in Gaza and conduct some small activities.

Description

Aid Watch Palestine is an initiative (not a registered organization) that aims to bring transparency and accountability to international aid in Palestine. While the model and strategy are still being developed, it is a hybrid of a think tank, advocacy effort, and community rights-claiming mechanism.

Achievements

The Aid Watch Palestine (AWP) initiative achieved important milestones in this period. They include:

- The hiring of Heba Hayek in Gaza, through a competitive process.
- Activation of Aid Watch's Facebook page (1300 likes) and Twitter account (203 tweets; 138 followers).
- Articulation of principles for aid and reconstruction in Gaza that build on other civil society statements (PNGO, Dalia Association, BDS, AIDA, PalThink, etc.) and used for consultation among a wide range of aid and civil society actors
- Establishment of strong cooperation between civil society activists in Gaza (led by Omar Shaban) and the West Bank (led by Nora Lester Murad), with involvement from over 100 advisors, volunteers, supporters, and interested parties.
- The identification of an informal group of advisors and potential interim steering committee members to form a governance body.

- Development of a well-conceived strategy document with a theory of change through a meeting of Gaza and West Bank volunteers with professional facilitation and translation of the strategy and annexes into Arabic.
- Implementation of a training program in writing and photography for young people from all Gaza districts, and completion of the first batch of stories (“glimpses of daily life in the Gaza Strip”).
- Significant research and development for AWP’s website in cooperation with Peace Geeks in Canada and Beyond Designs in Ramallah based on extensive research about aid monitoring platforms.
- Mobilization of significant local and in-kind resources.
- Extensive research leading to progress towards identification of monitoring indicators including community-driven, those derived from international agreements, and based on codes of conduct in different aid sectors.
- Major progress toward strategic partnerships with PalThink, Dalia Association, Al-Marsad, Peace Geeks, Beyond Designs, Diakonia, and conversations initiated with Alternative Information Center, Who Profits, Internews, AMAN Coalition, Oxfam, and others.
- Finalization of a logo and branding for the initiative.
- Purchase of a domain (www.aidwatch.ps), email addresses, mobile numbers, etc.
- Funding proposals for 2015 submitted to Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (approved), Medico (approved), IACC social entrepreneurship program (unknown), PeaceNexus (declined), Rockefeller Brothers Fund (under discussion due to unacceptable anti-terrorism clause in contract).
- Alternative Information Center published this story with input from Aid Watch: <http://www.alternativenews.org/english/index.php/special-reports/gaza/210-gaza-left-out-of-its-own-reconstruction>

In the same period, AWP initiators published:

Shaban, Omar. (December 2014). “Gaza’s Reconstruction.” Portland Trust. (Available at http://www.portlandtrust.org/sites/default/files/peb/tpt_special_issue_99_december_2014.pdf)

Murad, Nora Lester, (December 16, 2014). “Malala, Where is Your Money?” The Hill’s Congress Blog. (Available at <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/227172-malala-where-is-your-money>)

Murad, Nora Lester. (October 24, 2014). Donor Complicity in Israel’s Violations of Palestinian Rights. Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network. (Available at <http://al-shabaka.org/policy-brief/politics/donor-complicity-israels-violations>)

Shaban, Omar and Sultan Barakat. (October 12, 2014). The Case for a Collaborative for Gaza’s Reconstruction. (Available at <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2014/10/12-gaza-reconstruction-barakat-shaban>)

Omar Shaban also completed a one-month fellowship at New American Foundation in Washington DC that included meetings with policy makers and opinion leaders on topics related to international aid and reconstruction in the Gaza Strip.

Resource Mobilization

During this period, resources mobilized included the following:

Contributor	Value in Israeli NIS	Notes
Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, Ramallah	16,000	Monetary
PalThink for Strategic Studies, Gaza	1,175 est	In-kind (rent)
Nora Lester Murad, Ramallah	25,763 est	Volunteer time (full-time)
Omar Shaban, Gaza	8,595 est	Volunteer time (part-time)
Peace Geeks, Canada	7,576 est	In-kind (technical assistance)
Beyond Designs, Ramallah	3,820 est	In-kind (technical assistance)
Translators, various	2,000 est	In-kind (translation)
TOTAL	64,929	Many other volunteer hours are not accounted for here.

Challenges

The challenges faced by Aid Watch Palestine were significant and remain significant in the upcoming period. They include:

- Amount of work
The development of Aid Watch requires a tremendous amount of input from a broad range of experts (knowledge management, aid monitoring, security, advocacy, Palestinian politics, organizational development, etc.). Simply, there is more work than one person can coordinate, especially without financial resources, despite the availability of many excellent volunteers.
- Coordination between West Bank, Gaza, and Canada
The challenge of coordinating staff and volunteers around the world is non-trivial. Internet and electricity outages, phone service disruptions, language barriers and time differences all make team coordination labor intensive.
- Inherent difficulty of work
Since Aid Watch Palestine is doing new work, it is inherently difficult. A great deal of effort is spent on thinking and rethinking a governance body (challenges of earning legitimacy in a highly charged political environment), the timing of a public launch (wait for a full website or launch in stages), and funding policy (how to maintain credibility in advocacy in relation to donors), among many other decisions.
- Risks of push back from UN, PA, donors, etc., including personal security risks
International aid is highly profitable to some, so it is logical that scrutiny over how funds are spent could incite resistance and anger from some groups who may feel criticized or

threatened. There is a need to move forward with care, including the need to analyze personal security risks to staff and volunteers and community members who might speak out about corruption.

- **Ownership**
Aid Watch Palestine will gain credibility and strength with broad community support, yet opening ownership of the initiative too soon or too widely risks letting the initiative get blocked by narrow political interests or taken over. So far, these risks are being mitigated by being as transparent as possible and engaging in community consultation. Also, NGOs and research institutes (both Palestinian and international) are being invited to cooperate with Aid Watch as anchors of specific research indicators, thus broadening ownership and protection.
- **Strategy to influence the system**
There are allies and opponents both within and outside of the aid system. Therefore, we must have a nuanced advocacy strategy that takes advantage of internal champions, frames demands in ways that are reasonable and rights-based, and that can foresee and cope with resistance and counter-attacks, both public and private.
- **Pressure to act quickly due to the desperation of people in Gaza**
The desperation of people in Gaza and the absolutely unacceptable international aid response puts huge pressure on Aid Watch Palestine to act quickly. This pressure must be weighed against the need to build a strong foundation for a long-term initiative that can make a real difference. The balance is difficult for all who care.

Attachments

- Budget report to Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung for 2014 grant
- AWP Strategy (including Principles, List of Research Indicators, Workplan, Website Requirements)
- Photos from training of young writers in Gaza
- First batch of stories and photos in Arabic

Notes

Sincere thanks to the many, many volunteers in Palestine and around the world who have expressed interest and provided excellent input into the development of Aid Watch Palestine during this period. It is truly a community effort.

If there are errors or omissions in this report, please bring them to our attention.