



The Palestinian Center for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR)

Annual Report 2023

Center Introduction:

The Palestinian Center for Democracy and Conflict Resolution is a non-governmental, non-profit organization established in August 1998 by a group of Palestinian youth aiming to create a Palestinian model that promotes democratic concepts and alternatives for conflict resolution. The center serves all governorates of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank through its branches.

Center Vision:

The center aspires to a free democratic society that respects human rights, achieves social justice, and upholds the rule of law.

Mission:

In light of its vision and values, the Palestinian Center for Democracy and Conflict Resolution works to promote the principles of democracy and human rights in general, with a focus on vulnerable groups. It also aims to strengthen tolerance, civil peace, justice, accountability, and gender equality, in addition to consolidating good governance, transparency, and integrity. The center contributes to bridging the gap in service provision for vulnerable and marginalized groups at the psychological, social, and legal levels.

Center Goals:

- Contribute to developing the democratic process and enhancing aspects related to human rights in Palestine.
- Create a safe and supportive environment for children in Palestine.
- Protect women's rights and empower them.
- Strengthen the capacity and sustainability of the Palestinian Center for Democracy and Conflict Resolution.

Board of Directors:

- Dr. Ibrahim Ahmed Abu Rahma, Chairperson
- Alia Bashir Ghazal, Vice Chairperson
- Bakr Zakaria Al-Turkmani, Member - Secretary
- Zakia Al-Jadba, Member
- Nafudh Abu Saada, Member
- Asma Zaghloul, Member

Introduction

During the year 2023, the Palestinian Center for Democracy and Conflict Resolution continued its efforts to implement its programs and projects to achieve its goals. It was a year filled with challenges, the most significant being the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip in October 2023, and its repercussions on the ongoing and intensifying attacks in the West Bank. This aggression resulted in tens of thousands of casualties, most of whom were civilians, including children and women, in addition to the systematic and brutal destruction of all aspects of life, particularly in Gaza. Even before the Israeli aggression in October, Gaza had been suffering from blockade, poverty, and unemployment due to the policies and practices of the Israeli occupation, in addition to the negative effects stemming from the ongoing Palestinian political division, which unfortunately persists even after the widespread destruction caused by the Israeli war machine in both Gaza and the West Bank.

The drafting of this annual report for 2023 comes under extremely complex and dangerous circumstances, posing significant challenges for the center in executing its activities and programs, as people's concerns shift from democratic and rights issues to urgent relief needs that must be prioritized. However, the center's team managed to accomplish the required tasks in various projects, and this is a summary of the most prominent projects and activities carried out during the year 2023.

Projects Implemented by the Center in 2023

Project Name: Youth Can Change (Social Accountability for Local Governance)

Project Duration: 02/01/2023 – 01/31/2024

Implementation Location: Gaza Strip and West Bank

Partner/Funder: National Endowment for Democracy (NED)

Project Budget: \$42,000

Key Activities Implemented in 2023:

1. Restructured the Democratic Youth Forum in both Gaza and the West Bank, with a total of 55 young members (28 from Gaza and 27 from the West Bank).
2. Formed four working committees within the forum:
 - Committee on Democracy and Public Freedoms
 - Committee on Social Accountability
 - Committee on Media and Local Communities
 - Committee on Research and Information
3. Trained all forum members on topics of democracy, citizenship, social accountability, and media and research tools, totaling 140 training hours (70 hours in Gaza and 70 hours in the West Bank).
4. Conducted free elections among forum members to select the leadership in Gaza and the West Bank.

5. Held regular meetings for forum members and selected two issues for accountability and advocacy:
 - Safety and security in high-rise residential buildings in Gaza
 - Rights of working women in the West Bank.
6. Conducted six focus groups (3 in Gaza + 3 in the West Bank):
 - In Gaza, regarding safety procedures and protections in high-rise buildings, with sessions involving officials from the municipality and civil defense.
 - In the West Bank, regarding the rights of working women (minimum wage, maternity leave, nature of work, etc.), including sessions with officials from the Ministry of Labor and working women.
7. Issued two fact sheets based on focus group results:
 - The first fact sheet on safety measures in high-rise buildings.
 - The second fact sheet on the status of working women's rights in the West Bank.
8. Drafted two policy papers:
 - A policy paper in Gaza addressing safety and security in high-rise buildings.
 - A policy paper in the West Bank focusing on the rights of working women.

Project Name: A Protective Environment Against Hate Speech Supporting Freedom of Opinion and Expression in Gaza and the West Bank

Project Duration: 03/01/2020 – 02/28/2023

Implementation Location: Gaza Strip and West Bank

Partner/Funder: European Union (EU)

Project Budget: €474,493

Key Activities Implemented in 2023:

1. Held a final meeting for the Palestinian Network Against Hate Speech, comprising over 25 individuals representing grassroots organizations in the West Bank and Gaza, to discuss project progress and challenges faced, and to provide recommendations for possible project extension.
2. Held a final meeting for the steering committee, consisting of 15 active personalities and decision-makers, to evaluate the project and its sustainability.
3. Prepared and published a fact sheet including results from monitoring and documenting hate speech in various media during the first two months of 2023.
4. Prepared and published a quarterly report on monitoring and documenting hate speech in media.
5. Held an informational session via an online platform attended by 70 individuals, discussing hate speech on social media and legal precautions.

6. Followed up with partners on remaining awareness sessions for high school students, targeting 3,000 students (1,800 males, 1,200 females) in the West Bank and Gaza, aimed at raising awareness about hate speech and its impacts.
7. Followed up on remaining workshops for university students, targeting 1,400 students (470 males, 990 females) in the West Bank and Gaza, aimed at raising awareness about hate speech and its impacts.
8. Continued airing radio spots on hate speech and the necessity to combat it.
9. Continued publishing short awareness videos on hate speech.
10. Released and shared short video clips from citizens and influential figures calling to combat hate speech and support freedom of opinion and expression.
11. Held a concluding conference titled "Youth and Hate Speech: Roots and Mechanisms for Confrontation," during which four papers were presented, attended by 302 individuals (121 males, 181 females) from Gaza and the West Bank.
12. Conducted a final evaluation session for the project team to assess key achievements and main needs, incorporating this into the final project report.

Project Name: Developing Marginalized Communities Through Accountable Municipal Services in the Gaza Strip (Phase Two)

Project Duration: 09/01/2022 – 11/30/2024

Implementation Location: Gaza Strip

Partner/Funder: Municipal Development and Lending Fund (MDLF)

Project Budget: \$234,148

Key Activities Implemented in 2023

1. **A study was conducted** to select marginalized communities in 14 municipalities. This study aimed to identify the most vulnerable areas as a primary task within project activities, focusing on regions suffering from service deficiencies and multiple risk factors. The study identified 35 marginalized communities across seven new municipalities: Khan Younis, Abasan al-Kabira, Bani Suheila, Al-Fukhari, Wadi Al-Salqa, Al-Maghazi, and Al-Masdar. It also included 24 marginalized communities from seven municipalities previously worked with in Phase One (2018-2020): Al-Bureij, Al-Qarara, Khuza'a, Abasan al-Jadida, Al-Nasr, Al-Shawka, and Rafah. After drafting the initial study, 14 participatory meetings were held with municipal officials and citizens to discuss study findings and agree on the validity of the data. The study presented detailed data on the vulnerability of 35 communities regarding infrastructure services, socio-economic conditions, community participation, and empowerment. It also updated the vulnerability status of 24 communities from Phase One. This study serves as a starting point for designing effective interventions to address vulnerability causes in the most affected communities, in coordination with the MDLF and the targeted municipalities.

2. **Selecting projects and priorities** in the new and old municipalities. This task is the largest and most challenging among all project activities. Several activities were carried out in each municipality to generate a list of potential projects for implementation. To achieve this, the Palestinian Center for Democracy and Conflict Resolution selected participants from activists, influencers, community organization representatives, neighborhood committees, and community accountability committees from marginalized communities, emphasizing vulnerable groups such as women and persons with disabilities. This task was implemented using a comprehensive methodology involving 31 focus groups in the new municipalities, ensuring representation of all marginalized categories, with 10-15 participants of both genders from each community to determine their needs and project priorities in two lists: one for infrastructure projects and another for social and economic projects. Subsequently, the project team reviewed and updated the information and developments for all previously identified project lists in the marginalized areas within the seven municipalities targeted in Phase One. Additionally, the center held 14 joint workshops in both new and old municipalities with a total of 25-40 participants per workshop, including all relevant parties from the marginalized communities within each municipality, considering gender and age diversity, as well as representatives from institutions, neighborhood committees, and municipal officials. The results included two lists of project priorities in infrastructure and environmental fields for each municipality: 31 projects from new municipalities and 24 from old municipalities as priority number one, and a second list for social and economic service projects in each marginalized community totaling 31 projects in new municipalities and 24 in old municipalities as priority number one. This will lead to engineering consultations for these projects from a technical perspective, assessing their feasibility based on a comprehensive study from the engineering consulting office to identify the most prioritized projects for implementation within the marginalized communities. The team successfully completed this task as planned, despite encountering challenges that were overcome through increased collaboration and diligent follow-up. Some challenges included reluctance from residents of marginalized areas to participate due to previous unproductive experiences with the municipality, weak participation of women and persons with disabilities in some areas, and competitive tensions among some residents over securing project allocations for their municipalities, which sometimes led to heated debates and withdrawals from meetings. Ultimately, the importance of the results from this task lies in the fact that the 14 municipalities now possess prioritized project lists that can be integrated into their strategic plans and pursued for funding, even if not implemented within this project.
3. **A needs assessment study** for marginalized communities regarding participation and social accountability was conducted. This study aimed to understand the reality of community participation and accountability in the seven new targeted municipalities and update data from the seven old municipalities from Phase One. The study also aimed to identify gaps and challenges hindering the development of participation and accountability in marginalized communities. Field research tools included interviews with officials in each new municipality, one interview in each old municipality, focus groups across all 31 new municipalities, focus groups in all old municipalities, and distribution of approximately 1,400 questionnaires to citizens in

the seven new municipalities, targeting different genders and age groups. The collected information was categorized into four main axes: awareness of community participation and its tools, participatory planning, responsiveness, and community accountability and its tools. Each axis contained various questions addressing related points. The study aimed to:

1. Determine the state of community participation and accountability in the seven new municipalities.
2. Update data and information on participation and accountability in the seven old municipalities from Phase One.
3. Identify gaps and challenges hindering the development of participation and accountability in marginalized communities.
4. Provide data for decision-makers in municipalities and interested stakeholders to help understand the state of community participation and accountability in the targeted municipalities.

4. Training and Capacity Building

Based on the results of the needs assessment in task 3, which identified training needs for citizens and officials regarding community participation and accountability, a training program was designed prioritizing training topics for citizens in marginalized communities within partner municipalities, according to the preferences and choices of participating citizens. The prioritized training topics, ranked by importance from the citizens' perspective, included:

1. The relationship and interaction between citizens and municipalities
2. Rights and responsibilities equation
3. Concepts of community participation and accountability
4. Tools for community participation and accountability
5. Democratic participation
6. Participatory planning
7. Social transformation
8. Using social media Consequently, training materials were developed, and a capacity-building program was formulated for municipalities and community activists based on the training needs highlighted in the previous task's report. A total of 21 training courses were conducted for active citizens in community work within the municipalities and marginalized communities (14 courses in new municipalities, and 7 in old municipalities), with 20-30 participants selected for each municipality. The training program aimed to:
9. Enhance the knowledge capacities of trainees in the proposed training materials.
10. Select some participants to form a community committee for each municipality.

5. Mapping Study

This task aimed to:

- Inventory civil society organizations and committees active in the 14 targeted municipalities and describe the nature of their activities and interventions, highlighting how they intersect with project activities.
- Provide a database for interested stakeholders and specialists about the associations operating in these municipalities.
- Develop an intervention plan and clear mechanisms for integrating and involving these organizations in project activities.

The significance of this task's report lies in its description of the status and scope of work of civil society organizations, involving these organizations in data collection and updating from original sources, rather than relying solely on reports from government entities related to these organizations. The study provides a mechanism for communication with the associations to enrich project activities.

6. Media Activities Accompanying the Project

These activities included issuing newsletters, creating a project webpage, and designing promotional spots and videos.

Unfunded Volunteer Activities Implemented in 2023:

1. Contributed to the activities of the National Committee for Social Accountability through community and media activities.
2. Continued to provide legal aid to over 400 youth in the Spring Rehabilitation Center through legal representation in weekly court sessions.
3. Conducted training for youth groups engaged in social work in Gaza, hosting them at the center and providing space for their regular meetings.
4. Maintained communication with the civil coalition to promote civil peace and the rule of law, as well as participation in meetings of the Hope Coalition against violence against women.
5. Communicated with community leaders and reconciliation committees to resolve some social issues and disputes between conflicting parties.