

# Palestinian



# Challenges and Aspirations

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A Study on Youth, Peace and Security  
Based on UN Resolution 2250

Palestine 2017

Thanks to the support of



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# Palestinian Youth Challenges and Aspirations

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## Background

Youth comprise one third of Palestinian society, representing 30% of the 4.95 million population. The percentage of males is 104.2 to every 100 female. Youth live under harsh conditions, with around 40% unemployed, of whom 50% are among graduates. One person out of 25 young people is with disability. Polls indicate that over one third of youth wish to migrate abroad (37% in Gaza and 15% in the West Bank)<sup>1</sup>. There are differences in unemployment between men and women, as the rate is 21% among males and 43% among females. Also the rate is higher in the Gaza Strip (40%) than the West Bank (16.9%).

The school dropout rate is 31% (36% males and 25% females). The percentage of males who completed their university education (Bachelor's degree and above) is 8.7%, whereas it is higher among females (11.9%)<sup>2</sup>. Data reveals that 75% of youth use social media networks (Awrad 2014). Internet use is 74% among males and 64% among females. Youth who use mobile is 84% (91.9% males, and 77.3% females)<sup>3</sup>. used do not read daily newspapers or magazines, while 87% watch television, 27% listen to Radio, and 25% use the internet on daily basis (2010).

Data show that 20% of youth were subjected to at least one form of violence (19% males and 33% females), third of them were subjected to physiological violence, 38% to physical violence, and 1% to sexual violence.<sup>4</sup>

**Youth as well as development specialists and academics, emphasize that young people are absent from the processes of decision-making, community development and participation in building peace and achieving security.** The consequences of this situation has been reflected on society as a whole, with youth being the most affected at all levels, losing a multitude of opportunities to develop and enhance their roles. They have become unemployed, with less education opportunities, less public participation, and little hope for a better future.

Several factors have contributed to the insecurity and prevalence of violence, including primarily the ongoing conflict with the Israeli occupation, the continuous violent practices against the Palestinians, as well as the dispute between Hamas and Fateh that has evolved into various forms of confrontations and reciprocal violence. This has led to the emergence of anti-democratic practices at the level of leaderships, the creation of extremist groups, the development of armed conflicts and tribal disputes, leading to multiple forms of community violence.

On the other hand, and despite the difficult circumstances under which they are living, young people have launched several initiatives seeking to achieve peace among the conflicting sides and reinforce security and peace in society. Nevertheless, looking at the overall outcome of the different youth-led initiatives and activities, their influence seems to be limited given the important role youth are required to play.

The situation of the Palestinian youth is complex. On one hand they are addressed with optimism, since they are the largest segment in society that is expected to effect the desired change sought by all Palestinians in the form of national unity, liberation and ending the occupation. On the other hand, youth issues do not receive adequate attention and fail to occupy a central position in the decision-making agenda. This is in spite of the urgent need for Palestinians to build a more efficient economic, political and social system that would contribute to a better life and safer environment, and this cannot be achieved without the involvement of youth as the creators of development and builders of the present and the future of the nation.

Resolution 2250 came in response to the disorders caused by wars, conflicts and the prevailing violence and extremism around the world, which are depleting the energies of youth in particular. The resolution seeks to promote the participation of young people in peace and security and urges the states to increase youth participation and representation in decision-making processes at all levels.

The resolution emphasizes the need to engage youth inclusively in sustainable social and economic development and to promote their involvement in planning and policy-making, political participation, violence prevention, and promotion of societal peace by means of positive change towards peacebuilding in conflict and post-conflict situations.

The resolution calls for taking the necessary measures to involve and integrate youth in plans and programs towards building a violence-free and peaceful society and effecting positive change. The resolution consists of five main components, namely: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships and reintegration.



**Youth, Peace and Security focus group in Jenin. July 2017**

# Part One: Study Methodology

## Study objectives

To understand the factors that predispose youth to practicing violence, factors that prevent them from experiencing violence, and factors that enhance their positive engagement in building a peaceful and safe society, and identify examples of innovative non-violent actions, activities, events and initiatives that aim to promoting peace and achieving security and stability as well as to integrate youth in relevant national programs by the government and civil society.

## Study questions

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a number of questions were formulated by the research team in a participatory approach, while taking into consideration the specific characteristics of study locations, and in light of the guiding questions proposed by the progress study on Youth, Peace and Security. These questions are as follows:

1. What are the challenges facing Palestinian youth in the areas of peace and security? How does it affect their lives?
2. What activities, initiatives or projects related to peacebuilding and conflict prevention that Palestinian youth assume and what is their impact?
3. What factors prevent or hinder the participation of Palestinian youth in peacebuilding and their contribution to security?
4. What factors promote and support active participation of youth in peacebuilding, prevention of violence and social cohesion?
5. What recommendations do young people make to better contribute to and lead activities aimed at building sustainable peace, achieving security and preventing violence?
6. What are youth attitudes towards the role of Palestinian Authority (PA) institutions, civil society, the media and the international community in supporting and promoting youth contributions to peacebuilding?

## Study type and method

In order to understand factors which predispose youth to practicing violence and those which prevent them from experiencing violence and to identify their contributions to building a peaceful and safe society and activities in this direction, we should describe and analyze these factors and activities in depth in order to achieve a deeper understanding that would lay the foundation for integrating youth in programs aimed at promoting peace and achieving security and stability. To this end, the study adopts a descriptive analytical method based on a case study approach, which would provide thorough insights into the views, attitudes and experiences of the relevant stakeholders, allowing us to identify priority issues within the local context of the issue of peace and violence.

## **Study Limitations**

This study was limited to geographic boundaries, as it was conducted in three areas in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Jenin, Hebron and Gaza City), which would generally reflect the Palestinian situation and diversity. The target youth groups were selected through Mustakbalna Programme Network in each of those locations in a way to ensure a qualitative participation of youth that would be meaningful and fearful. The snowball methodology was used to reach to the selected youth members who formed the focus groups. The youth participants are activists in the civil society or political parties or youth groups, and they are active on social media networking and engaged in different social issues. The study faced several challenges; most notably that the discussion about peace and security issues within the Palestinian society is typically linked to normalization with Israel. While Israel continues to systematically violate the rights of Palestinians and abuse them and reject any offer towards achieving a genuine and justice peace, the study team was very careful to ensure participants that this study was not linked to normalization efforts and does not promote for it. While preparing for this study, the research team had fears that youth would be reluctant to participate in this study because of the apprehension from the ruling power and the possibility to be exposed to any of its non-democratic suppressive acts.

In addition, the Israeli security restrictions and apartheid policies that are imposed on Palestinians have prevented the research team from Gaza and the West Bank to meet, as well as the inability to organize common focus group sessions or validation workshops jointly between Gaza and the West Bank. So the three areas were targeted individually during the process of the study due to political complexities.

In Gaza, the authority ( Hamas government) requires to be informed of any public event or workshop, including the details of its reason, purpose, and the organizing entity. This measurement comes as a preventative step to eliminate any doubting intentions of the event, the international organization, or the Palestinian Authority against the Gaza Strip, and ensure it's not linked to any intelligence or aggressive efforts against Gaza.

## **Data collection tools**

The study employed several tools to reach an in-depth understanding of youth engagement in violence and role in building a peaceful and safe society. These tools were as follows:

1. Desk review: Referring to local literature and libraries of NGOs and universities to review research studies, examine initiatives related to the study subject and scan major activities and initiatives implemented by institutions or groups with the aim of achieving a stronger and deeper understanding of the context. This was done via; i-internet search, ii-visits to relevant institutions, and iii-site visits to projects.
2. Focus group discussions (FGDs): Three FGDs and three validation meetings were conducted in Jenin, Gaza and Hebron to obtain information on stakeholders' personal experiences, views and remarks and

help them express their feelings and attitudes towards peace and violence and future aspirations with regard to their role in promoting peace, security and stability.

3. In-depth interviews: Two interviews were conducted with persons who were involved in acts of violence in order to reach a deeper understanding of the driving or restraining causes and factors

## Study community

The study targeted three geographically varying areas, including Hebron Governorate south of the West Bank, Jenin Governorate north of the West Bank and Gaza City in Gaza Strip. These areas were selected because of the diverse experiences and sufferings of young people resulting from the Israeli occupation's measures and the internal division. These areas reflect the general case of the Palestinian situation, with each representing a different experience and pattern in terms of peace and violence and different regulatory relations between the different stakeholders in terms of partnership and/or engagement in violence, giving a more comprehensive view of the conflict and its prevalence, as follows:

1. **Hebron Governorate:** Being the largest in the West Bank, Hebron governorate and the Old city of Hebron in particular represent a special case that reflects diverse living conditions of young people in terms of high unemployment rates and exposure to varying forms of violence, insecurity and instability due to direct violence and violations practiced by Israeli settlers living inside the old city of Hebron, supported by the Israeli occupation, where violations against Palestinian indigenous has become regular such as arrests, beating, harassment and killings among others.
2. **Jenin Governorate:** Located in northern West Bank, Jenin governorate was selected to examine the situation of youth who are marginalized by national development policies because of the governorate's location at distance from the center. It was also selected as an example of lawlessness and internal disorder that prevails in certain areas in the West Bank.
3. **Gaza governorates:** Gaza is living in political and geographic isolation from West Bank governorates imposed by Israel and largely affected by the ongoing conflict between the two major Palestinian factions; Fateh and Hamas, since 2006, which has resulted in the Palestinian internal division that has increased the separation and isolation and led to the creation of two separate governments: Hamas-led in Gaza and Fateh-led in the West Bank.

## Target Groups:

The study reached out to young people in these areas who have not been used to express their views and make their voice heard. The research team relied on the long experience and access of Mustakbalna Programme to engage the participants, who were selected with utmost care to participate in the study and were beforehand verified in terms of their close association and relevancy with the study subject. They include active actors and initiators, as well as individuals who were exposed to violence, and persons with varied political and social experiences and backgrounds. The selection process ensured trust on part of the participants and a reasonable depth of discussions.

The participants were selected while taking into consideration the element of diversity, as the youth engaged included: partisan activists, local leaders, creators of launched initiatives, leaders within civil society, activists in peace and security. The participants came from cities, villages, and refugee camps. Some of the participants had special needs because of previous violence acts. Other youth were previously excluded and marginalized in one way or another.

The targeted youth were selected through Mustakbalna programme after the YPS study was explained to them, including the selection criteria to ensure objectivity. The study achieved success to reach out to youth whose voices are not usually heard, such as a fighter (religious extremist) who took part of the fighting during the internal Palestinian division, another who was involved in a murder and an injury, and a limited number of youth who are members of Mustakbalna youth groups were engaged.

The study targeted 63 young people: 32 males and 31 females, aged between 15-33 years. Protection standards were observed in dealing with teens (under the age of 18) who took part in the meetings. Three participants in the age within 30 and 33 years were engaged in the study given the important role they assume as activists in this field.



**Youth, Peace and security focus group in Gaza, July 2017**

# Part Two: Analysis of Field Data

## First: Challenges and difficulties facing youth for achieving security and stability

### Youth understanding of security

Young people have a clear vision of the concept of security, stemming from a painful and distressed reality of experiencing thorough details of daily violence, lawlessness, and oppression of the occupier. The following seeks to provide detailed description of how participant young men and women tried to explain their perception of security:

Feeling psychologically relaxed, self-conscious practice of freedom, making decisions without pressures, lack of deprivation, prevalence of peace among people and groups and at the level of all segments, making sure that we are heard and our demands are being attended to, the provision of decent living requirements that ensure material and moral stability, living safely within one's family, with the ability to make choices and move freely without any form of restrictions, expressing one's views freely, prevalence of democracy in society, and first and foremost, removal of the cause behind all of that, i.e., the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

### Young people's fears causing them to feel insecure

Fears sensed by Palestinian youth vary and mostly result from the deteriorated situation in which the Palestinians live. Youth believe they are trapped by a countless number of fears that threaten their future. They feel they are going towards an unclear future, with high risk and little certainty, which is affecting their sense of security and stability. They are not comfortable with what is going on around them, "with 79 per cent of youth in Gaza and 70 per cent in the West Bank believe their future is not safe."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, 21.9 per cent of young people said that the major problem of primary concern for them is the lack of security."<sup>6</sup> According to keywords in the interviews, young people's concerns were classified to:

1. Fear of the occupation,
2. Fear of the continued blockade, division and security chaos,
3. Fear of marginalization and exclusion,
4. Fear of the future and its impact on youth lives,
5. Fear of poverty and deprivation, and
6. Fear of self.

## 1. Fear of the occupation (settlers, army and police)



**Shuhada Street in Hebron**

Fear of the Israeli occupation and its violent practices against the Palestinian youth is a primary concern that affects the lives of young people and prevents them from living in safety and stability and devote their energy to build their present and future. Young people are mostly concerned with the occupation's continuing violence, aggressions and wars against Palestinians, including arbitrary measures and practices at checkpoints, which have become a daily concern for young people, and the occupation's repression that has always been the reason preventing Palestinian youth from achieving their dreams. A young man asserts that restrictions imposed by the occupation on the freedom of movement and

access and its security measures deprive them of their civil rights, explaining that stress caused by the occupation affects every aspect of their lives. A young woman described this stress by saying, ***“My home and school (Cordoba School in the Old City of Hebron) are surrounded by Israeli soldiers. We are subjected to many violations every day, so that the students feel they may lose their lives in every day they go to school.”*** Another young man from the Old City of Hebron is afraid of forced displacement, saying, “We are afraid of being driven out of our homes and forced to leave our dwellings one day.” A third says, “I fear for my family’s safety because of the violations, especially because they live in an area in contact with the settlers and Israeli forces.” A participant came to accept coexistence with the occupation as long as this would cure the sense of fear of it, interpreting his acceptance as a sign of despair.

A report by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace affirms what young people are saying, stating that “the expansion of Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem-and the rise in settler violence-have further worried and frustrated Palestinians. The burning to death of the Dawabsheh family (in Duma)\* near Nablus has shaken Palestinians’ already precarious sense of safety. The Palestinian Authority has been unable to offer protection from violence to Palestinians in both the territories it controls and in territories under Israeli control.” <sup>7</sup> Palestinian youth in Jerusalem and its environs live a complicated life, especially in Jerusalem Old City, as they are treated as second degree residents and are always facing the risk of being abused, or “detained by Israeli police and army personnel at checkpoints, as well as within the walls of the Old City, making it hard for young people to find stability.” <sup>8</sup> Areas targeted by the Israeli soldiers and settlers (such as Hebron, Jenin and Jerusalem) live in a state of horror. A young resident of Hebron City living close to Kiryat Arba’ settlement gave an example of this, noting that he tries to avoid a route that he used to take previously because of the Israeli soldiers and settlers and in result, he faces great difficulty to move around in his way to and from his home.

## **2. Fear of the continued blockade, division and lawlessness**

The division between Hamas and Fateh over more than a decade and the following Israeli blockade of Gaza Strip pose a major challenge and source of fear for youth in Gaza, reaching the extent of terror as expressed by a young man. The situation threatens with further divisions, persisting blockade, high level of poverty, crime and unemployment, and lack of any opportunities for real development. Furthermore, a young man from Jenin says lawlessness constitute his biggest fear and a young woman who volunteers to support the poor, expresses that she is “afraid that everything will remain closed and we will be as though we are living under a quarantine.”

\* Four Israeli settlers, attacked and burned a house owned by Dawabsheh family in the village of Duma near Nablus, causing the death of both parents and their 18-month infant, only one toddler survived but still suffering from his burns and family loss. The killers wrote racist slogans on the house walls, such as “Live revenge.” Later the Israeli court acquitted one of the killers claiming that he was a minor at the time of committing the crime.

## **4. Fear of marginalization, exclusion and exploitation (social violence)**

The research team noted that young people fear the oppression and interference of the PA security services and the security services of the de facto government in Gaza Strip. They assert that these bodies interfere in their community activities and charitable and political initiatives. A young man expresses these concerns, saying: “My fear stems from the absence of the rule of law that is not being enforced here, and the restrictions imposed by the government on us as young activists.” A female participant recounts her story with her family members working in the security services, saying that she was threatened by her family to refrain from participating and expressing her views through the social media and was forced to cancel her Facebook account. She expresses frustration and hopes every minute to escape from this situation.

Young people feel they are subjected to marginalization on daily basis. One of them said that he is concerned with the ongoing neglect of young people and attempts to control them by political parties, as well as their exploitation by many institutions, in the absence of integrated strategies that cater to them and lead to change and development. In fact, “81 per cent of Palestinian youth believe that opportunities available to them are inadequate.”<sup>9</sup> this is undoubtedly a result of youth marginalization and exclusion from the Palestinian landscape. Moreover, “political factions, NGOs and the private sector do not apply democratic processes internally, which negatively reflects on the role of youth in society.”<sup>10</sup> These constraints imposed on youth prevent them from “participating in political life as before, so they have become isolated, skeptical, frustrated and indifferent.”<sup>11</sup> A young woman says she is marginalized because she lives in the seam zone and thus does not hear of any extracurricular activity run by institutions and societies.

## **5. Fear of the future and its impact on youth lives**

Fear of the future is one of the most appalling fears haunting young people. For them, the future is more of a threat than a time for seeing their ambitions and aspirations realized. According to them, thinking of the future makes them anxious and stressed. They look to the future without motivation. Some of them think the future does not promise them with what they aspire to achieve. A young woman said, “My fears increase every day and my future is lost.” The future was associated with darkness and a move towards the unknown, which expresses their lack of optimism and hopelessness. Thinking of the future is for them akin to being insecure, such as when a young woman states she is afraid of losing the job that gives her the main source of security. One young man expressed concern of the low level of ambition among his peers, fearing that young people will continue to think only of the crises they are currently experiencing (such as electricity, employment, jobs, and crimes, etc.).

## 6. Fear of loss and deprivation

Palestinians in general live under stressful conditions in all respects, negatively reflecting on both children and young people. These conditions have led to an increase in violence against children, adolescents and girls, at the family, school and community levels. Young people expressed bitterness of being exposed to various forms of violence: physical, psychological and sexual. One of them said he is afraid of going to school because of the violence that exists there and because of the prevalence of drug abuse. ***A young woman says: “killings resulting from inter-clan disputes and honor killing and repression scare me.”*** Another young man concurs saying he is concerned with the critical attitudes towards practicing his personal freedom. Young people feel that safety and internal peace are absent in society, fearing the loss of their loved ones or those who protect them. A young woman feels every day that she may lose her life. Furthermore, they feel that society frustrates them and underestimates their potential and that they do not obtain the opportunities they expect because of the prevalence of administrative corruption, *wasta* and nepotism, which deprive them of their rights and suppress their capabilities and competencies.

### Fear of self

FGD findings demonstrated that some young people are afraid of themselves because of their frustration, despair and lack of hope in the future. They expressed their fear of themselves, as one young man puts it, “since we cannot exercise command over ourselves or control our reactions.” Another one is afraid of being pushed towards becoming engaged in violence to an extent beyond his comprehension, seeing that everything around him has become obscure. A third fears of being unable to protect his family and his fellows, especially from the oppression of the Israeli occupation.

## Forms of violence, conflict and insecurity as perceived by youth

Palestinian society experiences various forms of violence, including political, social, and gender related violence, and there are many conflicts surrounding the lives of people, causing great harm, especially for youth, and making security and stability questionable. Youth targeted by this study worked together and thought collectively to identify major forms of violence, conflict and insecurity in their lives.

The research team assessed various forms of violence during the desk review. These same forms were listed by youth themselves, who were even more profound in presenting them. These forms of violence lead us to an important question: Are youth perceived as part of the crisis of violence or are they part of the peacebuilding process? This deep question needs a deeper analysis, but it seems from the statements of Palestinian youth and how they perceive themselves, as well as from the statements of experts, activists and workers concerned with youth, that they are closer to be peacebuilders than being advocates for violence. They are “the population group most exposed to political and military violence, as they have been subjected to killing, injuries, detention, torture and deportation.”<sup>12</sup> Youth personal vulnerability and exposure to violence has been the backdrop and foundation of their discussion on the prevailing forms of violence.

The study revealed that Palestinian youth believe they are exposed to numerous forms of violence, feeling that they are victims of such acts but also stressing their resilience and ability to challenge and confront them. They believe only few of them have been negatively affected by and got engaged in these forms of violence, attributing this to the restrictions imposed on Palestinians, whether they are government restrictions on their activism, Israeli restrictions against the Palestinian people in general, or constraints they may face by virtue of their being Palestinians. A young man who participated in a cultural contest in Italy recounts the suffering and humiliation he suffered during his travel and how he was treated inhumanely and detained at

the crossings for no reasons, causing him to miss his flight. He believes the reason for this is that he holds a Palestinian passport. It is worth mentioning that Palestinians who are fortunate to have an opportunity to travel abroad experience great suffering to the extent of humiliation by the Israeli crossing administration when they depart. Those departing from Gaza Strip describe the matter simply as hell.

The study showed that Palestinian youth have a high level of awareness of rights, considering that lack of enjoyment of their basic rights constitutes a form of violence. They listed forms of violence they experience, including economic violence in the form of low wages, unemployment and deprivation of economic rights; educational and school-based violence in the form of rote learning and inadequate follow-up and attention to students; health-related and psychological violence, as a young man says that “I am treated in the school as an animal;” electronic violence, such as detention on political grounds on the pretext of misuse of technology, as well as the amount of libel, slander, offences and insults exchanged on social media platforms by those holding opposing intellectual, cultural, and partisan positions; family violence, including abusive treatment of children and parental disputes witnessed by children; physical and psychological violence by the occupation and torture of detainees in its detention centers; gender-based violence, such as early marriage and gender-based harassment, slander and extortion; prevalent quarrels and use of weapons in disputes to the extent that weapons have been sold on social media sites; and political arrests and psychological and physical torture in the prisons of the security forces.

Also, several female participants in this study pointed to several cases of violence against women; including verbal, physical, or moral violence. They explained how this violence affects, to a high extent, their movement and community participation either in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

## **Causes of violence in the Palestinian society**

The reasons presented by young people to explain the problem of violence and its forms are consistent with the explanations of psychosocial experts of violence. These reasons were in line with the psychoanalysis theory, the frustration theory, the social learning theory, the socialization school and the conflict theory that are used to explain violence. This in some way proves that youth have deep understanding of their situation. In fact, “74% of the youth in Gaza Strip believe that the Palestinian society is going in the wrong direction,”<sup>13</sup> giving the following reasons for this perception:

## **Conflict related reasons (the occupation, internal)**

- The ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict for decades and the consequences of the continuing occupation (among the most frequently cited reasons by youth).
- Class and religious conflict and conflicting interests and powers.
- Dominance by the government and by strong parties on the weak ones.
- Restrictions on freedoms, mobility, travel and freedom of opinion and speech and arbitrary arrests.
- Discrimination between northern, central and southern areas, between cities and refugee camps, between men and women and between tribes.
- Marginalization and exclusion from decision-making processes.
- Wasta, nepotism, and biases in favor of Fateh affiliates in the West Bank and Hamas affiliates in Gaza.
- Discrimination in elections, when residents of refugee camps are deprived the right to vote and run for offices in municipal elections since they live in refugee camps.
- Discrimination in services and laws even in terms of residency and freedom of movement, with the Jews always able to access what Palestinians cannot.

## Social, psychological and cultural reasons

- The cultural construct that does not accept defeat and encourages revenge, i.e., ignorance and cultural decline (among the most frequently cited reasons by youth).
- The different forms of violence experienced by young people, making them skilled in practicing violence.
- Raising young children on the concepts of violence, such as: “Never come back home beaten.”
- Prevalence of violence at the family level to an alarming extent.
- Feelings of helplessness, frustration and deficiency and the drive to satisfy one’s needs and ego through violence.
- Failure in self-realization.

## Regional and global reasons driving towards violence

- Disappointment from seeing the UN failing to force the implementation of its resolutions and carry out its duties towards the Palestinian people.
- Reductions in UNRWA services.
- Adoption in the West of the Israel-promoted stereotypes associating Palestinians with terrorism.
- Failure to make use of international treaties in the proper way to support our cause.
- Denying Palestinians of entry to several Arab states.
- Difficulty for Palestinians to obtain a visa from various states in the world.
- Difficult and complicated procedures for travel between Palestine and the rest of the world.

## How the different forms of violence and conflict affect youth and society

These forms of violence, conflict or insecurity have posed risks to Palestinian society, particularly the young population. Working collectively, youth by themselves have come to identify how these risks affect them in particular and society in general.



**Youth, Peace and Security focus group in Hebron. July 2017**

As the study findings indicate, Palestinian youth assert that violence has serious negative consequences, which threaten the future of Palestinians as a whole and present an imminent danger for the entire Palestinian national cause. These consequences affect almost all aspects of the Palestinian life. Participants addressed the disintegration of the social fabric, the prevailing insecurity and prevalence of crime. Young people expect that a civil war may ensue if the status quo remains, along with the feelings of frustration, confusion and pessimism that would possess youth and end their hopes

in a better future. Statistics indicate a rise in pessimism, as “the proportion of pessimists among young people increased to 51% in 2016, up from 40% as it was in 2013.”<sup>14</sup> This situation risks transforming youth from partners in peacebuilding to perpetrators or at least silent accomplices in the occurrence and prevalence of violence. They expressed a view that the pervasive violence is what would lead us to a complete failure. The following are the consequences listed by young participants.

## How violence affects youth

Young people affect and are affected by violence. In no way can young people be excluded from the cycle of violence because they are part of the social structure of Palestinian society. There are young people who have already been involved in acts of violence and justify it by the influence of political parties and religious groups on them, as well as the impact of their environment. Yet they believe these and any other reasons do not give anyone the right to engage in violence, because they are still living under occupation and required to channel their energies towards liberation. At the same time, young people consider themselves the most affected by violence and its prime victims, having lost everything possible, while living in a state of disorientation and repeated failures and going towards an unknown future. In the same context, it is worth noting that women face several forms of discrimination, including the personal status law that is applied both in Gaza and the West Bank, the penalties law, and violence against women that includes sexual harassment, and discrimination in provided opportunities.

The daily talk of young people is about their insecurity and violence affecting the country and them personally, with diminished job opportunities, increasing problems, lack of financial resources available to them, stereotyped attitudes towards young people, and limited space for practicing personal freedoms. In such a conservative society like the Palestinian, young women tend to face more restrictions than their male counterparts, being deprived of their rights and having less ability to enjoy personal freedoms, while the effects of the Israeli siege and aggressions add more difficulties to their lives. A young man believes that violence causes a lack of faith in the potential of young people and the need to invest in them to serve the community. Another believes that stability has become a dream and that youth competencies are declining, while their sense of belonging to their community is lost. A young man also cites brain drain and the strong desire among young people to migrate. This is confirmed by data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) on the situation of youth, pointing out that “two out of every ten young persons in Palestine have a desire to migrate permanently abroad (37% from Gaza Strip, compared to 15% from the West Bank) and six out of ten are considering temporary migration (73% in the West Bank and 56% in Gaza Strip)”<sup>15</sup>, while 88.1% declared a desire to travel abroad.<sup>16</sup>

A considerable segment of youth has been reluctant to engage in community activities and was engaged in inappropriate social relations, causing them to suffer many psychosocial disorders. It is a common say among young people that each and every one of them is in need to visit a psychologist, although visiting a psychologist is not culturally common among Palestinians. A young man says, “Personally, I feel like I do not know myself, and I act in a way that sometimes surprises me. I do not know why.” There were certain situations when the concerned person was unable to explain it. An evident example is the story of a young man who was involved in a tribal problem, resulting from an insult to his mother, so he killed and shoot other people (by mistake as he claims) and was sentenced to three year imprisonment. He still cannot explain what happened.<sup>17</sup>

## **The impact of violence on Society**

Through a long history of national action, sacrifice and belonging, Palestinian youth have proved to be the most contributing segment in the Palestinian society. They have been engaged in the resistance to the occupation, have contributed effectively to the nation-building process, and participated in union activities, and led countless voluntary activities. The cumulative challenges have not weakened their resolve. Despite the difficulties and challenges, they continue to contribute but their commitment may be shaken if violence continues to infest society in general and prevail between political parties in particular. They perceive tensions between Fateh and Hamas as constituting the greatest threat to society, expressing their fear of the eruption of civil war.

Young people believe that violence, crimes and conflicts (which are increasing with no limits) have contributed to a decline in economic and social development. They have caused society to lose contact with the world and lag behind, although Palestinians have been among the most educated in the region. Society has become aggressive, inclined to violence and fanaticism and withdrawn. Violence has also instigated several social problems, including drug abuse, family disintegration, and rise of crime and prevalence of fears. Social and interpersonal relations have become restrained, further contributing to the disintegration of the social fabric and increasing fragmentation.

A young woman living in a refugee camp in the West Bank says that she faces difficulties and challenges every day. She notes that the repeated attacks by the occupation forces against the camp result in the death of one or more victims every time. In result, strikes are enforced, the daily life is disrupted and chaos becomes rampant in the camp. Young people react by resorting to violence and vandalism, driven by their emotions without thinking of the consequences. As another young man comments, “The violence of the occupation has led to internal violence,” He suggested that “the PA and the government should have a greater role in activating and maximizing the role of young people in society instead of suppressing it.”

## **Difficulties facing youth and preventing them from living in a safe environment**

Young people speak with pain and sorrow about the dozens of difficulties they face in their lives in general, preventing them from living in a secure and stable environment. These difficulties ostensibly would destroy any resolve that young people may have. However, in view of their various initiatives, interventions and activities, hope seems to be still vivid in young Palestinians, attesting to their exceptional determination and will.

Young participants of the FGDs reported major difficulties preventing them from living in a safe environment, which are centered around the following: division and siege, lack of legal protection for youth, lack of basic services, waste and administrative corruption, injustice and discrimination on part of the governing authorities, poverty and unemployment, violence against women and discrimination and gender-based discrimination, ignorance and cultural decline, and partisan conflicts, which “have largely contributed to undermining internal peace and tolerance within society and increased partisan fanaticism.”

<sup>18</sup> The conditions of security chaos and internal division have been used to promote the exploitation of young people to be “factional zealots” in order to pass other agendas. This constitutes an unjust exploitation of youth. A known youth forum did not find it embarrassing to call this exploitation as “rude and inappropriate for the reputation and history of some of these factions. This is not meant to be generalized but to assert that such practices do exist and anyone can notice them.” <sup>19</sup> It is quite easy to reach young people who have been exploited and are ready to tell their stories, stressing that the lack of credibility, transparency, control

systems and trust within the power circles, challenge and threaten efforts to provide a safer environment for youth. By no means, these bodies are able to provide conducive conditions for youth, to participate in the political process and development. The activist Taysir Moheisen agrees with this viewpoint, saying: “The impasse of efforts to reach a just political solution, and the confusion and lack of strategic vision on part of the Palestinian leadership increasingly drive young people towards violence.”<sup>20</sup>

Young people spoke of the different constraints they are subjected to, such as social norms and traditions, restrictions imposed on adolescent girls and women in their movement, and the limitations to their political participation at the levels of political parties and the public sphere, and government restrictions on youth activities. These constraints limit their mobility, undermine their self-confidence and belief in their ability to effect change and deny them a decent living in a safe environment where they can carry out their activities freely.

They talked about several difficulties, which were already echoed in the earlier section on fears that make young people feel insecure. They revolved around poor economic potential, poverty and unemployment, social and political decline, mobility restrictions, religious, partisan and authoritarian extremism and fanaticism, unemployment among graduates, partisan disputes, poor living conditions, lack of a culture of respect of others’ opinions, reluctance to accept the other, lack of national strategies, lack of programs that care for youth, and finally, weak law enforcement.

Several local studies and articles have explicitly addressed the reasons that prevent young Palestinians from living in a safe environment, including:

1. Lack of a culture of tolerance and the prevalence of fanaticism,
2. Decline of the culture of dialogue and acceptance of the other,
3. Educational curricula that do not respond to the real needs of young people and do not match the demands of the labor market,
4. Persistence of traditional teaching methods based on rote learning,
5. Lack of a law to protect youth rights,
6. Youth marginalization or exclusion from decision-making positions, and
7. Weak involvement of civil society organizations in activating and engaging youth at the national level.

## **Youth demands that make them feel secure and ensure them living in a safe and stable environment**

There are naturally many expectations that young people have from the different stakeholders, some of which they demand explicitly, others they demand hesitantly and thirds they even do not demand at all. This study has been an opportunity for young people to identify their demands in order to live in an environment governed by security and stability. They listed these demands and identified which stakeholders have the duty and responsibility to provide them. These demands reflected to what extent young people are deprived of their rights, as well as the numerous challenges facing them. They testify to the fact that young people really lack access to a safe environment, which is negatively affecting their participation in general terms. Indeed, it was among the most significant aspirations of youth to live in a safe environment. “When asked to identify the major issue that they would seek to solve if they had had the chance to govern for one month, 22.6% said it would be to ensure security and the rule of law and 18.7% said to end the occupation.”<sup>21</sup> The following lists youth demands as expressed by participants in this study:

No	Youth demands	Responsible stakeholders
1	Punishing offenders committing crimes against civilians	Courts, the law, the Legislative Council, executive bodies
2	Freedom of travel and movement	The UN, the occupation, human rights institutions, the state, legislation and laws
3	Providing job opportunities and reducing unemployment	Institutions offering financial and other support to youth, Ministry of Labor
4	Creating a youth framework to represent young people	Youth councils, intellectuals
5	Monitoring of projects and initiatives to ensure quality and sustainability	Consultants, technical experts, networking institutions, donors
6	Ensuring an accessible environment for persons with disabilities	Municipalities, educational institutions, care centers, support and community education institutions
7	Providing youth with support and responding to their needs	Educational institutions, the private sector, the government
8	Enforcing the law in support of young people	Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Legislative Council, institutions supporting and empowering youth, Youth Support Fund
9	Raising awareness of security personnel on their duties towards civilians	Security services, community organizations, Ministry of Interior
10	Upbringing of children and ending recruitment of young people in military activities	Human rights institutions, kindergartens, families, UNRWA
11	Providing a protective shield for youth by official institutions and bodies	Youth structures, civil society organizations, clubs, Ministry of Youth and Sports
12	Raising family awareness to ensure equality among family members	Family guidance and development societies, parents, Ministry of Culture and Information, religious scholars and leaders
13	Providing a curriculum that allows students to have a say in selecting educational subjects	Ministry of Higher Education, Department of Scientific Research, universities, educational institutions
14	Preserving security, human dignity and the rights of others	Security institutions, religious leaders
15	Restructuring partisan and political bodies and structures on sound foundations	Leaders of parties and factions, parties' grassroots, government agencies
16	Supporting and respecting youth views, decisions and political participation	Schools, universities, youth and sports centers and institutions

No	Youth demands	Responsible stakeholders
17	Complying with rights and duties within a free and unrestricted framework	Human rights institutions, human rights consultative centers
18	Designing human development programs for youth	Council of Ministers, donors supporting human resource development for youth
19	Considering persons with special needs in all sectors	All state institutions, the private sector, civil society organizations
20	Supporting and preserving youth personal freedoms	Institutions supporting freedoms and community development
21	Training staff of NGO and public sectors to improve their capacity in dealing with youth and respecting their rights	Consultants and experts in training and capacity building and development
22	Ensuring basic life requirements (electricity, employment, infrastructure, etc.)	Decision-makers, politicians, the government, the private sector, the President, ministries, all community organizations, donors and supporting states, the UN

## Priorities for reducing obstacles to living in a stable and safe environment

Young people understand that it is possible to face the obstacles to living in a safe environment, but at the same time they feel that such aspiration is merely theoretical as long as they do not have the tools for change. Nevertheless, they dream of the day when they can bring about the desired change or at least remove these obstacles and constraints whether imposed by the government, factions, or civil society organizations, or achieve what they refer to as getting rid of all their sufferings. The following are their stated priorities for reducing the obstacles to living in a safe environment:

### Priority 1: Ending the internal conflict

Young people believe that the division has been the largest threat to their lives and that ending it by resolving the ongoing conflict and forming a unity government is their priority to achieve a safe environment. They also demand that the different power circles should refrain from engaging young people in their crises.

Others consider that it is essential to amend the governing authority in order to create a government that understands the requirements of the present situation and appreciate the role of young people.

### Priority 2: Youth economic empowerment and increased opportunities

Young people talked extensively about the deteriorating economic situation. They see as priority now to improve the economic situation, establish projects for economic empowerment and create productive enterprises for youth employment that would provide job opportunities for young people, end unemployment and enhance the chances of young people to engage in a comprehensive development process.

This priority constituted a demand by the majority of participants in the FGDs in response to the deteriorated economic situation of youth, with unemployment reaching 27.2%,<sup>22</sup> as well as the rise in commodity prices, high living costs, high sale taxes, increased electricity costs and low wage rates.

### **Priority 3: Legal empowerment**

Clearly young people attribute all their hardships to the absence of the rule of law, which has brought about the current deteriorated situation for society in general and for them in particular. They explicitly demand that the rule of law is observed and laws are respected and enforced.

### **Priority 4: Improving the situation in terms of rights, freedoms and participation**

Young people feel stifled by the situation. In Gaza Strip, they feel like living in a completely closed prison, while in the West Bank they feel their movement is restricted by Israeli measures that limit their freedom. They demand all restrictions that hinder their activities and initiatives to be lifted and all obstacles to their mobility and access to be removed. A young woman says, “We live in a prison called Gaza. Every day we do the same things and see the same faces. One can imagine what effect this would have on our minds.”<sup>23</sup>

Young people themselves called for exerting continuous pressures in order to obtain all their rights through peaceful means and not giving up. On the other hand, they demanded that the governing authorities should not constrain the freedom of opinion and speech and should grant freedoms to individuals and groups.

Young people want to take part in decision-making and identify the extents of such participation in the different aspects. They have the confidence in their ability to make positive contributions and improve their situation and that of their society. They feel they are more capable and honest than their current leadership to decide what would be the best for Palestine and the Palestinians. They are confident that they have the ability to build a safe society, provided that the following is ensured:

- Empowering young people and enhancing their presence in the national landscape.
- Ensuring that leaders give up their rigid attitude and allow them to participate in decision-making.
- Lowering the minimum age for running for membership in the Legislative Council.<sup>1</sup>
- Developing the national strategic plan and general national directions to allow a more inclusive participation of young people.
- Ensuring that decision-makers embrace their initiatives, projects, ideas and attitudes seeking to effect change.
- Accepting the marginalized and those with disabilities by society, integrating them in social activities and granting them their rights.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 15 of the law No 5 of 2005 on elections provide that, “candidates for the membership of the Legislative Council should have completed the age of twenty eight.” Article 13 of the same law provides that, “candidates for Presidency should have completed the age of forty.”

## **Priority 5: Improving the social structure (integration, development, education, awareness-raising, the media)**

Youth have stated before that the structure of the educational system does not encourage moving towards a safe environment and that they perceive a need to enhance the structure of the educational system as a whole in order to respond to national needs. They focus their attention on the values contained in the curriculum, wishing that school curricula are upgraded and redesigned in a modern way. They call upon all stakeholders that work with and for them to strengthen the role of young people in changing the negative culture of society by responding to their initiatives and raising awareness through comprehensive national programs. Such programs should ensure a leading role for young people and should address the family, school, and neighborhood and university levels. Furthermore, they call upon the media to adopt methods that allow them to become partners in the process of change and to contribute to ending the prevailing local crises.

Young people emphasize that it is not possible to build a safe society without ensuring an integrated infrastructure and superstructure that provide basic services, such as electricity, water, internet, public recreational facilities, health and education systems and social security system. This needs to be combined with support to programs and activities that enhance the role of young people and create real development in partnership between the government and youth.

## **Priority 6: Effective intervention and monitoring by the UN**

Young people anticipate a more effective role from the UN to ensure a safer and more stable environment. They call upon the UN to demonstrate its capacity as the international body that can compel the occupation to end its measures. They also demand that all stakeholders (the PA, Israel, neighboring countries, donors, the International Quartet) to enforce UN resolutions that support security, peace and ending of the occupation. Young people aspire for achieving security and peace in Palestine in accordance with international resolutions and laws.

## **Second: Participation of Palestinian youth in peacebuilding, security and non-violence**

Palestinian youth are active and vibrant. According to participants in this study, young people perceive themselves as partners in the nation-building process and an effective contributor to the desired change, although they feel they are left outside the decision-making circles. Nevertheless, there are young people who assume a leading role in community activities and consider themselves the cornerstone of such activities, while also expressing aspirations for a more extensive role that covers all aspects of Palestinian life.

Some young people do not see any important role that youth groups can play because they are divided and some of them operate under the umbrella of political parties that control their activities. In addition, many activists have been subjected to repression and pressure by both governments in the West Bank and Gaza. A group of young men who have developed a policy paper for a local organization stress that “young activists should not be deterred and prevented from playing important roles in Palestinian politics.”<sup>24</sup>

The researcher Adam Gallagher – Program Administrator for the Middle East Program of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace – referred to the non-violent attitude of Palestinians in an article titled ‘Palestine: a History of Nonviolence,’ where he listed several activities of non-violent resistance that emphasize and reinforce non-violence. He states that there is, “a renewed sense among Palestinians that people power can be an efficacious mechanism to redress long-held grievances. Strategic

nonviolence is gaining powerful momentum in Palestine and the loose coalition of actors advocating civil resistance is growing.”<sup>25</sup> “In the aftermath of 2007, a movement of non-violent popular resistance emerged, shifting the concept of armed resistance to popular resistance against the violations and aggressions of the Israeli occupation and settlers.”<sup>26</sup> The present study has opened a chance for young people to talk about their initiatives and activities related to peacebuilding or non-violence. They perceive their initiatives, activities and interventions that encourage youth participation in public life as laying the grounds for a democratic society that respects the law and encouraging young people to engage in peaceful acts and avoid violence. Palestinian youth describe themselves as eager for peace. The following are selected stories on youth interventions and activities that have contributed to peacebuilding or non-violence.

### **Initiatives towards effecting change**

This study surveyed initiatives carried out by its young participants. These initiatives expressed young people’s eagerness to change and belief in their ability to make a difference in their society. It is noted that the initiatives were mostly voluntary and a few were in partnership with NGOs. They were simple, with a youth-specific character, highly flexible, responding to young people’s real needs. In carrying out these initiatives, youth used techniques and methods that differed from those adopted by NGOs, the government and other stakeholders working for peace. They were suited to their ages and modern culture and their understanding of reality in a different way than adults. It was clear that young people prefer simple and direct methods of working on peace issues, refraining from exaggeration and overstatements. They work on their initiatives by investing all resources available to them, sometimes partnering with local organizations and sometimes working at a limited cost covered by individual donations or contributions from friends. Their initiatives demonstrate that they seek to achieve lofty goals, equipped with determination and a strong desire to effect change in order to make their community a better one.

Analyzing youth initiatives in relation to UN resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security, it becomes evident that they understand the risks of their uncertain future. Their initiatives have demonstrated new methods

that rely on the capacity of youth themselves. The initiatives are also consistent with the main themes of resolution 2250 (participation, protection, prevention, partnership, disengagement and reintegration). The following is a description of some major initiatives by youth:

## **Participation**

Young activists work with their peers through initiatives, workshops and field activities based on an understanding of their needs and proposed solutions. Nevertheless, they face challenges in terms of the need to obtain permissions to carry out the activities, which are at times rejected by the authority. In result, youth participation is undermined when such initiatives are hindered. Youth perceive this as a restriction to their capacity that evidently leads to youth marginalization and reduced participation in decision-making processes.

Young people did not stand by idly but expressed themselves through initiatives such as the Palestinian Youth Legislative Council a unique experience for youth to declare their strong presence, make their voices heard and find their own space to influence and effect change in their society, such space that has never been offered by decision-makers. This Council is a model that simulates the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), which has not been in operation since more than 10 years. Young people in charge of this initiative have been faced with many obstacles, but they agreed that, “despite all obstacles they faced because of division, geographical distance and lack of funding,” they chose not to sit idly. A female activist and member of the Council said, “We will not let down those young people who trusted us and elected us. We tried to make impact in every place.” The Youth Legislative Council is aimed at making young people heard and allowing them to talk about their problems and suffering by participating in various events and communicating with decision-makers, including PLC members and ministers, directly or through the media.”<sup>27</sup> This initiative was supported by Sharek Youth Forum.

## **Protection**

Young people do not feel protected, citing the absence of the rule of law and widespread security chaos as the reason. They engage in their activities within a very risky environment, as their rights and freedoms continue to be violated from time to time. As a result, many young people are reluctant to take part in voluntary work and prefer to carry out their initiatives and protests through social media platforms to ensure that they would not be subjected to beating or arrest while practicing field activities, including protest in public areas.

Young people believe they are weak when faced by the power and authority of security services, because there is no control, the PLC is inactive and human rights institutions are restrained by the absence of the rule of law and democracy.

In addition, several social groups are especially vulnerable, such as women, children, elderly people and the poor, whose need for government protection is increasing. Young people has not stand idly against these challenges but launched several initiatives to raise awareness on the importance of ensuring protection of vulnerable and marginalized groups in the Palestinian society. A group of young women launched an initiative to produce a series of drama-based videos addressing the issue of violence against women, its particulars and forms. The entire production process is carried out by the young women themselves. These videos have become popular among young people and their producers believe they have made an impact on their peers. The aim was to increase awareness of the need to respect women’s rights in order to build a safe and violence-free society for women.

## **Prevention**

Young people believe they do not have an appropriate and supportive environment to implement violence-prevention and peacebuilding activities. They call upon all relevant stakeholders to stop dealing with young people in a patronizing way. They say the reason for this is the lack of a national plan that gives young people a leading role. They also stress that the dire economic situation of youth makes them at risk of getting involved in acts of violence, while officials and decision-makers do not adopt raising awareness and education programs targeting youth.

The 'Basket of Good' initiative is a model of an effort to strengthen the resilience of the poor against the risks of getting involved in acts of violence or antisocial behaviors. Implemented by a group of young people in Jenin refugee camp, this initiative provides assistance to the needy and the poor. However, the initiative leaders have not escaped threats from those in power: an anonymous body demanded them to stop the initiative, accusing them of stealing and abusing the money donated by people under the cover of helping the poor. The activists were frustrated and stopped providing assistance to ensure their own safety. A similar initiative was implemented in Gaza Strip and its young leaders also affirm that they have been harassed in several ways, including by the government, which required them to obtain a permit to carry out such type of initiatives. The initiative "Think of Others" has been active for many years, run by a young man with support from a large group of young people who collect donations from people and distribute them to the needy according to their needs, such as repairing their homes, establishing micro-enterprises, providing them with food and clothing, distributing meat in religious events, as well as many other humanitarian activities that contribute to reducing youth inclination towards violence.

## **Partnership**

Young people believe in the importance of partnership, asserting that they do not act alone but always work in partnership with relevant stakeholders concerned with the specific issue they are addressing. They point out that the work they carry out with each other is participatory in nature. They also build partnerships with service providers and engage the community in their activities and initiatives. Such partnerships extend to all sectors, as they work with the government, the private sector, NGOs, opinion leaders, the elites, and everyone who wishes to support the teamwork of young people.

A group of young people from different districts have launched an initiative titled 'Palestine above All,' with the participation of youth groups, civil society activists and political parties to remind Palestinians that factional disputes distract them away from their main cause and to contribute to ending the division between Fateh and Hamas. Within this initiative, young people displayed posters with the slogan 'Palestine above All' on cars and in public areas and main squares of towns and villages. The initiative was conducted in cooperation between the young activists and Mustakbalna Programme.

## **Disengagement**

In partnership with groups of political ex-detainees and activists from civil society, youth groups in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip launched a public petition titled 'Occupation and Division – Two faces of the Same Coin.' calling on the conflicting parties to end the division. The petition sought to obtain the signatures of tens of thousands of Palestinians. Young and senior participants in this initiative managed to deliver the petition to the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (Fateh leader) and Ismail Haniyeh, then the prime minister of the sacked Hamas government (currently Hamas chairman). Despite the interesting character of this initiative, young people and other participants have faced many difficulties. Some have been dismissed rudely by some people, others have been frustrated by mistreatment and thirds have been subjected to insult. Participants in

the initiatives stressed that the difficulties they have faced mainly came from persons affiliated to the two conflicting parties. This initiative was facilitated by Mustakbalna Programme.

## **Reintegration**

Young activists affiliated to political parties, in spite of their leaders, have been able to launch a ‘code of ethics’ regulating the relationship between the different university students groups in the Palestinian universities based on the principle of freedom of association. This initiative was adopted after the “student councils’ elections were interrupted due to major disagreements between the political and factional blocs competing for seats in the councils. Student activities were prohibited and students were subjected to arbitrary arrests. The prevailing atmosphere was characterized by violence among student groups, denial of basic rights, dominance of partisan attitudes over student activism in universities, violation of students’ rights and freedoms, and violation of the rights and freedoms of student groups.”<sup>28</sup> These challenges have created a difficult situation for young people, especially university students, limiting their ability to intervene, be empowered and be heard. Their issues have become fully in the hands of decision-makers. This is in addition to the prevalence of many examples of violence within the universities, often including physical violence. Since this code was launched in 2009, students became better integrated; tensions in universities eased considerably and a relatively peaceful atmosphere prevailed.

## **Youth initiatives and dialogues on social media platforms**

Social media platforms are a catalyst medium to support and build peace. Yet others consider them a means that promotes violence. Both views present themselves to those who follow these platforms: they can serve as an instrument for dispute between conflicting sides and views, while on the other hand they can be used by youth as a space for communication and self-expression and to better practice their freedoms and express their views freely, despite the risk of being persecuted by the Israeli occupation or by the Palestinian government.

There are many youth initiatives using these platforms to make their peace-advocating voices heard. These include initiatives aimed at exposing the crimes of the occupation and its role in creating an insecure and unstable environment. Social media provide young people with a space for virtual association. Some of them maintain special channels to communicate with young people abroad and they consider these platforms a mandatory alternative to communicating with the world. Young people hold concurrent sessions to blog, tweet or post on their issues.

## **Methods for mobilizing (inactive) young people to participate in peacebuilding**

Peacebuilding and non-violence activities require expanding the circles of participants. Youth can have pioneering and innovative ideas on how to expand the participation of their peers in peacebuilding processes.

Promoting peacebuilding, security and violence rejection cannot rely on an elite sector of active young people only, but rather requires reaching the largest segment possible of young people to engage them in this process. Young participants of this study exhibited a vision of how to integrate their inactive peers and discussed several methods they already use and other methods they aspire to put in use. They expect that the adoption of such innovative methods, as they call them, would contribute to mobilizing inactive young people. This way peacebuilding action would have a popular character and increase its effectiveness and influence. The following are major methods discussed by youth in the FGDs:

Expanding the circle of target groups to raise their awareness of the importance of participation in peacebuilding, whether through pioneering initiatives, activities and projects or by developing small-scale initiatives such as those currently being implemented. Based on their current interventions, young people provided examples of initiatives that have been developed (which they described as small-scale and expressed a desire to expand them to become more inclusive). It should be noted that the some initiatives are not completely new but rather provide a larger and more extensive picture of initiatives they are currently conducting.

- ‘Be the Change’ initiative calling everybody to participate in achieving peace and security, while giving young people the opportunity to play their social role by conducting site visits and talking to families to raise their awareness on various issues in the community. Everyone is required to transfer their personal experience and share it with others at the widest scale possible. This is referred to as direct outreach to young people.
- ‘I am a Peace Teacher’ initiative, where three minutes in every classroom session are devoted to talking on the importance of peace and security and promoting the principles of respect and tolerance.
- An integrated national psychosocial support program implemented by a large number of young unemployed graduates in social work and psychology disciplines. This program seeks to qualify peace activists and reduce the risk of getting involved in violence.
- A national economic empowerment program, offering support to households willing to create a small-scale enterprise, thus improving their living conditions and helping them learn new skills and experiences to help household members avoid violence.
- Developing regional centers in all districts to support and enhance youth capacity and equip them with production skills, which would in the least help them avoid getting involved in acts of violence, then would be directed to become active peacebuilding activists.
- Making use of social media more extensively than it is now to reach young people in any place with peacebuilding ideas, support young talents and involve them in promoting the notions of security and peacebuilding.
- Creating youth councils in every district that would respond to young people and develop and make use of their talents in peacebuilding processes.
- Creating a channel for ongoing communication between youth in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, the diaspora, Jerusalem and young Palestinians in 1948 areas, carrying and promoting a message of security and peace.
- Training and empowering youth teams to build their competencies and expertise in international security and peace in light of relevant UN resolutions.

## **Methods used by youth to prevent the engagement of their peers in acts of violence**

Peacemaking activities and initiatives seek to reduce the prevalence of violence and address its causes. Since some young people are still considered to be part of and involved in violence, “as a result of the division, young people themselves became victims and perpetrators. They are the fighters and they themselves are the victims. Young people have been divided to both sides of the crisis and became desperate and frustrated, which is driving them towards difficult choices. They have been divided in schools, universities, institutions, the community, the family and within the same household. The values of solidarity, unity and tolerance have been replaced by those of exclusion, accusations of apostasy, hatred, growing enmity and revenge. A culture of violence in all its hateful expressions has become prevalent among them and in society.”<sup>29</sup> Society looks forward to the important and critical role that virtuous young people can play to help these youth avoid getting engaged in acts of violence.

Young people active in peacebuilding and non-violence believe they have the ability to reduce the engagement of their peers in acts of violence. They can do so by reaching the different youth segments with awareness raising activities, talks, and blogs posted continuously on social media sites or by organizing meetings and events. They maintain that they have strong influence on their peers. A young woman participant indicated that there are increasing numbers of young people being targeted by voluntary awareness-raising activities she and her colleagues are organizing in cooperation with a local youth organization. The following is an account of methods used by young activists to prevent the engagement of their peers in acts of violence:

- Educational sessions and workshops that are organized continuously, especially those held in marginalized areas targeting young people.
- Videos produced by activists, as well as works of art and drama on peace that promote the notions of partnership and peace.
- Circulation and promotion of success stories of groups that have been victims or perpetrators of violence, presenting them as role models.
- Integration of young people in arts, sports and cultural activities to change their behaviors in a natural way without letting them feel they are seen in a negative way and help them employ their negative energy in useful activities.
- Direct awareness-raising of friends and colleagues about the negative effects of violence, the different forms of discrimination and involvement in violence activities.
- Investing in youth energies and abilities, integrating them in institutions to reduce violence, organizing psychosocial debriefing and rehabilitation sessions for them, and facilitating exchange of experiences among them to allow them learn from each other's lessons.

# **Third: Challenges preventing young people from participating in peacebuilding, security and violence prevention**

## **Factors preventing young people from participating in peacebuilding initiatives or violence prevention activities**

Palestinian youth live a difficult situation in their search for their daily living in the face of a deteriorating economic situation, difficult security conditions, and numerous social and psychological problems, in addition to the unabated factional conflict. In a poll conducted by Sharek Youth Forum, young people reported “diverse means of negative treatment of youth on part of Palestinian factions, up to the extent of exploitation in some cases, treating them as a mere tool to pass the faction’s political goals. This stands in stark contrast with the past, when they used to invest in youth and their aspirations, educate them and encourage them to voluntarily and actively join the political movement.”<sup>30</sup> Youth involvement in any kind of activities and initiatives has become a complicated matter.

These factors have led to the withdrawal of a number of activists. We asked young participants in this study to tell us about the challenges that prevent them from participation. Their answers were as follows:

### **1. Weak responsiveness of community culture towards change**

- There is a social attitude towards peace as relinquishing our political rights and fundamental principles and as surrendering to the occupation, in view of the failures and weaknesses of the peace process.
- The community environment that does not encourage political participation and community activities, especially for adolescent girls and women. There are severe challenges, sometimes up to prevention, in women participation in societal and political events due to family restrictions. For example, many women are prevented to participate in peaceful protests and different youth activities and initiatives.
- Social norms and traditions, which usually prevail when conflicting views and factional disputes arise and a unified voice calling for change is lacking.

### **2. Fears of youth influence on power circles**

- Restrictions imposed by security services on youth activities.
- Lack of respect for the views and initiatives of young people on part of officials.
- Limited opportunities to involve youth at the level of municipalities and the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC the parliament).
- A perception of activities implemented as being only a formality rather than a serious endeavor, and that these initiatives are being used for other purposes than the declared ones, such as for fundraising, at the expense of achieving a national benefit.
- Youth’s frustration with their situation.
- A perception that any peace-related activity or initiative is doomed to fail.

### **3. Weak and unstable environment supporting youth**

- Limited opportunities for youth.
- The economic situation of youth (lack of income) and the volatile political situation.
- Poor economic situation and especially high unemployment and poverty, forcing young people to focus

on searching for their subsistence.

- Young people becoming occupied with the idea of migrating abroad to escape their insecure situation.

## **Challenges facing youth when they participate in non-violence and peacebuilding initiatives and activities**

In view of the number of youth activities and initiatives related to peacebuilding and non-violence and the number of youth involved, one can think that young people are working in favorable conditions. But their reports and stories expressed a completely different reality. Their participation has been faced with numerous challenges, the persistence of which may threaten to reduce and abate youth participation in general.

They work in a climate of restriction, exploitation, frustration, worry, discrimination, and poverty, in addition to other general difficulties facing young people elsewhere. Factors that prevent youth participation and youth-related problems have been summarized by Omar Sha'ban, an expert in youth issues, as being factors prompting young people to engage in acts of violence: "The treatment of young people as if they represent a problem has driven them to become a tool for destruction. They have become responsive tools in the hands of political parties under the deteriorated economic and living conditions. Statistics indicate that 45% of the unemployed are young people. Adds to this the shortage and maldistribution of meaningful recreational means and spaces to spend free time, inadequate role of youth sector institutions, the wide gap between adults and youngsters, the shortage of vocational training centers, early marriage, domestic violence, high costs associated with marriage, migration and drug abuse."<sup>31</sup> The political writer and analyst Yahya Rabah adds to these "the arbitrary measures by the Israeli occupation, as well as collective punishment measures in the form of closures and very harsh conditions at checkpoints."<sup>32</sup>

In light of the above, it is uncertain whether youth's ability to continue can be ensured. Young people realize this very well but they ask the question: what alternative is there? Should we stand by idly or act? We chose to act, and there is no alternative but to act. Otherwise, everything will collapse in front of our eyes. This was expressed by an enthusiastic young man who participated in this study. Young people listed the challenges of engaging in peacebuilding and non-violence activities as follows:

## **1. Restrictions on youth activities**

- Frequent restrictions on youth activities.
- Control by the government in Gaza, where young people are often subjected to arrest and beatings.
- Influence and domination by factions, as well as discrimination and bias in favor of members of the same faction.
- A perception of several official and other stakeholders that activities related to security and peace are a kind of normalization with the occupation, thus officially banning many activities. Similarly, institutions that may finance such projects try to avoid them and refuse to finance these activities or even get involved in them lest they might be closed or may enter in disputes with the de facto government.

## **2. Fear and marginalization on part of victims**

- Often victims of violence fear to reveal what they have been exposed to in the absence of freedom guarantees.
- Young people with disabilities are marginalized, exposed to community violence and treated as being a burden.
- Victims of violence are threatened and forced to refrain from giving testimonies to the media and human rights organizations to reveal the details of their experience with violence.

## **3. Social obstacles: frustration and discouragement**

- Social, ethnic and religious obstacles,
- Social norms and traditions.
- Pressures by the family and society at large (especially on females).
- Low community awareness of the effective role of young people in community development and advancement.

## **4. Poor assets and resources**

- Lack of assets required for success and sustainability in many cases.
- Lack of an adequate number of financing sources for initiatives, forcing them to be self-financed.
- Lack of adequate support to institutions implementing capacity development programs for youth.
- Difficulty to reach marginalized social groups who are the most vulnerable to violence.

## **Fourth: Factors promoting youth contributions to peacebuilding and non-violence**

### **Young people's suggestions to enhance and increase their effective participation in peacebuilding and non-violence**

#### **At the local level:**

- Young people need to adopt a clearer vision for the future, focused on achieving security and stability at all levels.
- All stakeholders should embrace youth experiences in order to generate more ideas and initiatives supporting security, stability and peace in society.
- Respect of religions, tolerance and acceptance of differences in opinions and factional differences in order to ensure a safe environment.
- Avoiding factional fanaticism and acting with a national attitude.
- Assumption of senior positions by young people and their participation in developing, implementing and monitoring plans and policies.
- Launch of youth forums, associations, groups and alliances to lobby with decision-making circles.
- Involving women in decision-making at all social, cultural, economic and political levels.
- Providing protection for adolescent girls in vulnerable areas in their movement at public areas and in their ways to reach their schools safely.
- Raising youth awareness on participation by:
  - Implementing national awareness raising programs for youth, with extensive participation of all community organizations.
  - Producing videos reflecting the situation of young people and encouraging their participation
- Promoting resolution 2250 among young people through:
  - Scenarios and dramas on participation and decision-making.
  - Campaigns and activities involving young people in the different aspects of the nation's life.
  - Diverse radio and TV programs presenting role models of peacebuilders.
- Consolidating youth self-confidence and belief in their ability to effect change through the creation of a Palestinian youth leadership that works with all in a participatory approach.
- Making use of social media in youth mobilization and communication towards establishing a secure and peaceful society.
- Encouraging and facilitating convergence and gap-bridging between decision-makers and the youth.

#### **At the regional and international level:**

- Launching a global youth forum that engages youth from the various countries participated in the global progress study, to exchange experiences and build stronger alliances towards effective participation and better implementation of the UN resolution 2250 across the globe.
- Supporting exchange between youth working on peace and security in Palestine and peers abroad.
- Organizing an international conference for youth to present the situation of Palestinian youth around the world, make their voice heard and allow them to express their views to the entire world.
- Participation in international contests in different countries without discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion or affiliation.
- Organizing international film festivals under the logo of peace and security.

- Communicating the situation, sufferings and difficulties experienced by Palestinian youth to all power circles around the world.
- Holding an international conference for the world's youth to discuss the situation of young people and exchange their experiences.

## **Youth recommendations and suggestions towards living in a secure and peaceful environment**

### **The United Nations**

1. The UN should assume its responsibilities towards youth, adopt and protect their initiatives, and provide the legal frame support for their activism, and provide protection of children, adolescent girls, women, and youth in accordance with the international laws.
2. Exert pressure on Israel to comply with UN resolutions and respect the international laws that protect Palestinian civilians living under occupation, and impose sanctions in case it violates any of the rights of the Palestinians.
3. Deployment of international fact-finding delegations on the situation and sufferings of Palestinian youth. This would be followed by deploying UN forces to sites of confrontation and tension in order to protect civilians from the occupation forces and facilitate their daily movement without any harassment.
4. Further development to resolution 2250 to become obligatory for states to adopt in order to provide protection and support to youth and their rights and impose sanctions on governments that fail to provide such support or violate the rights provided to youth in relevancy of peace and security.
5. Endorse cultural exchange among countries about the experiences of youth in peace-making and security promotion in order to learn from previous experiences and lessons learnt, and Call upon the different countries to increase academic scholarships provided to Palestinian youth in order to enhance cultural exchange.
6. The UN must firmly respond and act against the documented Israeli violations against the Palestinians (documented by the High Commissioner for Human Rights).

### **The Palestinian Government**

1. Combat nepotism, engage marginalized youth in decision-making within the society and government, and activate and implement laws that protect young people.
2. Develop national democratic strategies to ensure a peaceful and non-violence environment, respect social responsibility, and protecting the freedom of speech.
3. Organize the labor market to improve the conditions and opportunities provided to youth to enhance their employment, taking into consideration the values of justice, equality and transparency in employment and job distribution, and oblige the employers for a minimum wage condition in accordance with the Palestinian law in order to ensure that youth and women are not exploited at the labor market.
4. Promote and enhance an economy of self-sufficiency and support entrepreneurship projects for young people.
5. Develop and upgrade the marginalized areas, and provide special services to area C, seam zone, and areas close to Israeli settlements
6. Modify the school curriculum, develop methods to reduce violence among students, and provide training and capacity building for teachers about respecting rights and promoting a culture of peace and tolerance at that would upgrade students' awareness.
7. Protect and empower young people, especially the marginalized, and engage people with special needs to become active and productive to realize their full rights and involve them in public discussions and

policy making.

8. Encourage media to focus and cover youth related issues, including the violence and injustices they encounter and their future aspirations.

## **Human rights institutions**

- Monitor and document the Israeli violations in order to widely expose Israel's practices and violations against Palestinians and take actions against them.
- Educate young people on their rights and duties, democracy, citizenship, gender and human rights.
- Conduct studies and analysis of all forms of violence in order to reduce and eradicate all of its forms.
- Organize workshops that encourage the reduction of violence, and promote peacebuilding, especially in marginalized areas, targeting those at risk of being engaged in acts of violence.

## **Political Parties**

- Consolidate genuinely principles of peace, adopt its practices, and improve the awareness of partisan activists about the values of peace and rejecting violence.
- Update and develop political parties' policies and restructure them to be more responsive towards national needs and priorities.
- Bring consensus from all political parties around a unified national vision.
- Promote a culture of partisan tolerance, acceptance of other views and reject factional fanaticism.
- Abide by a code of ethics (honor document) among all political parties to unite efforts towards national goals rather than factional interest.

## **Future actions of youth towards peacebuilding process in the society**

1. Activate the role of young people through community-based initiatives that would provide a new approach to the implementation of activities and direct interaction in society to consolidate the humanitarian, social and volunteering values and principles of peace.
2. Organize monthly meetings to develop future plans for youth through engagement and cooperation with youth organizations. Also, to take advantage of any opportunity to promote peace combat all forms of violence at any workshop or youth initiative.
3. Advocate and lobby to promote the values of peace and security through voluntary activities and initiatives.
4. Organize meetings and accountability sessions with decision-makers to discuss the importance of engaging youth in decision-making circles.
5. Launch web pages, and use the social media to highlight the role and duties of youth in the overall development the society, focusing the importance of their positive civil participation, and publish success stories of youth who as good examples to follow.
6. Perform meaningful art and drama work about the role of youth in overall societal development.

## **Recommendations specific for this study**

1. Implement the study findings (after being presented and discussed) so that they do not remain on the shelf as the case with other studies.
2. Implement more FGDs to allow for more views and consultations that would support achieving peace and security and strengthening the role of youth.

3. Disseminate the findings of this study as widely as possible, present them to all stakeholders and publish them on social media platforms in various formats (multimedia, text, infographics, images, etc.)
4. Disseminate the study report and findings to scholars, leaders, actors and organizations in order to expand the circle of interest in the role of youth in peacebuilding.

## **Recommendations to enhance youth participation in decision-making**

1. Develop a comprehensive national youth plan, which adopts a participatory approach to needs assessment, planning and implementation.
2. Support individual and collective youth projects, which seek to raise the social and economic capacities of young people and provide them with the required support and guidance.
3. Attract capitals and businesses to invest in Palestine and provide them with the required facilities to help revitalize the Palestinian economy, provide job opportunities and reduce unemployment.
4. Increase attention to vocational training and the development of vocational training centers in line with technical developments and the local needs, thus contributing to the provision of job opportunities for young people.
5. Promote creativity and scientific research skills among young people so that they become inherent in their personalities. This would require a revision of Palestinian curricula in schools and universities.
6. Support and rehabilitate sports and cultural clubs and facilities, which are considered the most sensitive structures to the different needs of young people, and help them carry out various activities.
7. Conduct research and studies and publish bulletins and publications on youth issues, and cooperate with various media outlets to conduct awareness raising campaigns on topics related to youth and children.
8. Create youth lobbies that can monitor enforcement of laws relating to youth.
9. Educate young people on exercising the freedom of opinion and expression and respect for others.

## **Study gaps and future studies**

1. Examine factors that enhance trust between youth and the UN and assess youth expectations from the UN.
2. Examine the procedures and effects of UN interventions to protect young people.
3. Explore ways to sanction states that do not meet the minimum standards of youth protection.
4. Develop youth initiatives and activities and explore ways to institutionalize them and ensure their sustainability.
5. Identify mechanisms that the UN can use to provide protection to young people in order to make sure that they are protected from risks they may face as a result of their interventions and activism.
6. Explore the best ways to achieve a safe and smooth exit for those involved in acts of violence and identify appropriate protection mechanisms for them.
7. Examine proposals to further develop resolution 2250 in order to elaborate and define the relationship between the state and youth, and examine the possibility of making the resolution's provisions obligatory for states and accompanied with strict sanctions in case of noncompliance.
8. Conduct recent studies about violence across youth to become a reference for interventions, while paying attention to classifying violence according to political, gender, and geographical.

# Endnotes

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