

5

✓

ISRAEL/PALESTINE CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND INFORMATION (IPCRI)

P.O. BOX 51358

JERUSALEM

Telephone : (02) 285210

Fax (972 - 2) 289094

January 8, 1991

ROUNDTABLE FORUM ON THE ISSUE OF WATER - Meeting #2

Baskin: Good afternoon everyone. In my review of the transcript of the last meeting, I thought that it was a very productive meeting. I think that we began a process of opening new ideas together and examining together as Israelis and Palestinians who share the same general concern about the present and future water problems of this region. When I was in Washington last month and I spoke to several people in the Congress, AID, the World Bank and in the State Department. There was actually quite a bit of excitement about the idea of this group. This morning I met with Phil Wilcox, the US Consul General and he too voiced his enthusiasm. I think that this group is still in a very premature stage and our major efforts should be directed at involving more people. Due to the refusal of government connected people to participate at this point, I think that our efforts should be directed at involving more people from academia where there are much fewer political limitations. Perhaps through the involvement of more academics this forum will be viewed with less suspicion. One of the serious problems that we face is that the present Minister of Agriculture, Rafael Eitan, and everyone knows what his views are on the territories. It seems that people connected with Tahal, Mekorot, and the Agriculture Ministry are simply afraid to participate. One of the people I spoke with even requested that I stop sending him the transcripts. He said that when he was no longer a government employee that he would be pleased to join this group. It is also important that we enlarge the number of Palestinians who participate and we should together find a way of doing this. We should talk about this afterwards. Of course, until the Gulf crisis clears up it will be difficult.

Rabi: Gershon, as we told you last time, it is very difficult to convince the people now. Maybe you don't know what kind of problems we are facing now. That is the problem, now we are just representing ourselves here, we are not representing the Palestinians or any particular faction. We know exactly the kind of the problem we are facing. We are here to discuss this issue because we are all facing the lack of water together. We have to work together to know what then dimension of the problem is. We hope that next time we will be able to increase the number of people.

Tamimi: We must discuss what the strategy of this group is. We must know better what we can say to our people regarding this meeting. It is difficult for us to invite additional people without knowing exactly what we will do.

Baskin: It seems to me that there are two issues or two frames of issues that we must deal with here. One are the immediate concerns - I would assume that with the water crisis that we are all facing here and the acute shortage of water in various places in the WBG (West Bank and Gaza) these are going to be more severe in the coming weeks and months.

Shuval: Yes, the rainfall doesn't know borders or ethnic populations. We have had about 10% of the average annual rainfall this year. Never has it been this bad.

Baskin: I would propose that we begin to deal with the immediate issues and I would propose is for this group to come up with at the first stage some kind of policy paper or statement of how to deal with the very acute water shortage in the WBG so that we can perhaps avoid what happened last year with a black market of water.

Tamimi: The expertise which exist in Israel in agriculture and the economists. Everyone is working hard to solve their problems. Even in Jordan...

Shuval: How bad is the drought in Jordan? The same as here. They don't depend as much on rainfall as us?

Tamimi: No the same as us. They are also having a dry season just like us. They have a plan to face this problem and they have a plan to help the farmers to face the problem. they will pay 50% of the water costs. But in the WB no one is thinking about even paying 10% of the cost.

Baskin: It is not only an issue of the cost, regarding the water in the WB it is also a matter of if there will be water at all in the region.

Tamimi: Yes and for this reason in my opinion, this is a good time to talk about original peace solutions for water in the region between us, Israel and Jordan in particular.

Baskin: I think that we must separate the two issues, one is the immediate and the other is the future. Correct me if I am wrong, My feeling is that we will encourage more Palestinian participation if we confront the present immediate concerns rather than future issues.

Tamimi: We believe that we can separate the present from the discussion of the future. In the WB in my personal opinion, the problem is firstly the natural problem and then only the political problems. In the Jordan valley the people even the farmer is rich he can not buy water. Because Israel has limited the water. The problem in the WB is different than in Israel. In Israel they have ways to face problems. In the WB we have very limited resources and unlimited military orders.

Shuval: May I make a suggestion. First of all, I would like to say that there are 6 of us meeting, because in the present pre-Jan.15th atmosphere it is difficult to expect dialogues about peace and coexistence. Everybody is very tense - the Palestinians are tense and the Israelis are tense and the tension between the Israelis and the Palestinians is greater today than it was last year when IPCRI held its symposium on water. Even people who are very forthcoming about peace prospects are very pessimistic or hesitant today so it is not surprising and we should understand that it is difficult to get together today. I hope that it is a temporary situation and this wasn't exactly what I would call a good day to have a meeting.

Baskin: We also didn't even know if today would be a meeting at all because there was a call from Hamas to have a strike day today.

Shuval: That's another problem. In the macro the environment on our side and on the other side is not very good. So I would say that the principle right now is keep the fire lit - keep the flame alive - even if it is small. So I am happy to meet today and I am happy that you are here. Let's talk about post Jan.15th strategy. The Palestinians are going to be in a very difficult position particularly if they get dragged into a military confrontation with us. Then it will be very difficult to talk for a long time. But on the assumption that there will not be a military confrontation and that there will not be a military confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians, we have to wait for this period is over. I don't think that we should do anything or plan anything until we see what emerges.

Baskin: Well, I think that we should schedule a meeting and plan for one, our economics group and our Jerusalem group will both be meeting next month. In fact the Jerusalem group has decided to meet every 3 weeks instead of once a month.

Shuval: I am happy to meet but I don't think that anything can be done with the present tensions. It can only be afterward. When that time comes, let's see what we can do to relieve the anxiety of the Palestinians. I am not so sure that a discussion of the immediate rationing problems of the WB would be productive with the Israelis because you'll not be speaking with anyone on the Israeli side who has any authority to deal with that. I am a Professor at the university and I am a free agent. But I don't control the faucet of the WB. I can't even deal with it - I don't even have the facts. The other people who would come would also be in the same position. I doubt if we can deal with that problem. I know that for you it is a very serious problem.

Baskin: Even if the other people who come are like yourself respected academics who might even be listened to by the right people?

Shuval: I would be happy to hear what the problems are. I just am



not so sure that we can come up with a plan that we can implement. If we talk about long-term peace I am not so sure that we can implement that either, but at least I would be in the position to say let's sketch out the global lines that an agreement would be based on. I could say that there would have to be agreed upon allocations and inspections and joint commission - principles of international law. On the local level I don't even know - I would be happy to hear it. If you are suffering then I would like to hear it, but I don't know if I could be effective. Maybe I can.

Baskin: I think that at least if we talk about it - if we determine that the next meeting would deal with specific water problems of the WBG and maybe even trying to deal by sectors - talking about the problems in the refugee camps, the problems in Hebron region, in the Jordan valley.

Tamimi: Or we could talk about the problems of drinking water and of irrigation water.

Baskin: If we can get some kind of dimension of the problem as perceived by the Palestinian water experts, then we would at least have the capability of putting together some kind of document.

Shuval: At least the information would be on record in some kind of way. I would be happy for my own education to hear and understand, I don't know whether - if Weiner comes who deals with national water planning, and if Kally comes, I don't know - there isn't much we can do except say that something should be done about it. I don't reject the proposal.

Baskin: This is also the way to bring more of the Palestinians in - by having a very specific agenda.

Shuval: But they shouldn't expect that Shuval is going to go out and press a button some place and that water will be turned on.

Tamimi: We are also interested in seeing how the Israeli expertise and the Israeli academic people think about how to solve the water problem in Israel. We are interested to know what they are thinking. The Palestinians in the WB have very limited experience in water policy. The British Mandate, the Jordanian government and the Israelis have at no time for the past 50 years - . We know that science has no country and we are trying to learn how the Israeli experts want to deal with the problems. - We have the same conditions the same problems. Last week I read your book -

Shuval: Water Resources Management Under Conditions of Scarcity.

Tamimi: Yes, yes, I learned a lot from it.

Shuval: It was a case study written 10 years ago, but if you read it very carefully, the water crisis of today was predicted in it.

Tamimi: For this reason we are interested to have more information from the Israelis. The Israeli hydrology is in the top in the world.

Shuval: Not always, right now we're on the bottom.

Tamimi: Because now they are thinking politically more than hydrology.

Shuval: No the scientists are still good, but the policy isn't good.

Tamimi: We are interested in learning from the scientists.

Shuval: We need to bring people who have experience in water operations. I have no experience in that.

A discussion continued regarding the desert aquifer - its quality and quantity and its future use potential. Questions were also asked and answered regarding the national water carrier and the recharging policies of the storage supplies during different periods of the year.

The next meeting is scheduled for Sunday Feb. 3, 1991 at 14.00-16.00.