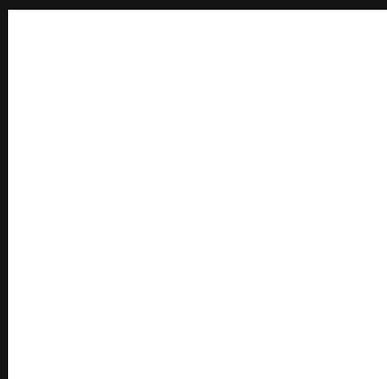
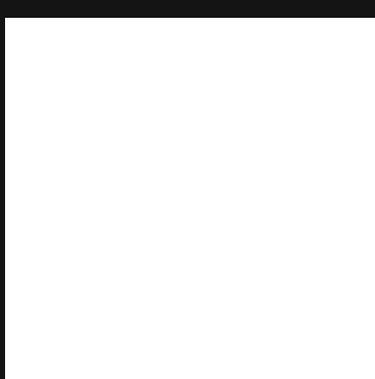
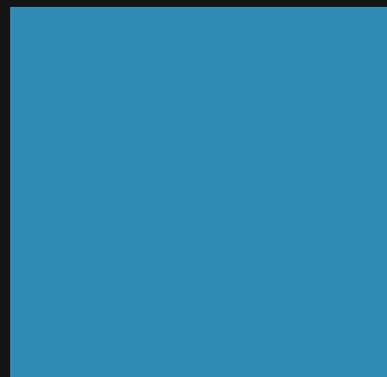
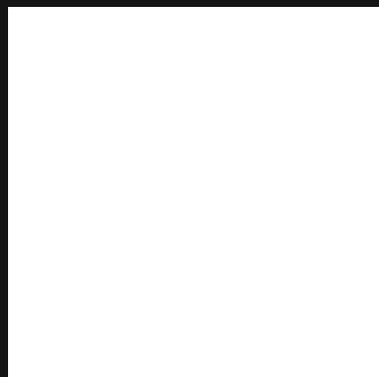




**Maria Vamvakinou MP**  
Federal Member for Calwell



# Parliamentary Friends of Palestine

Study Trip - April 2011

**“The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people carry the legitimacy of the most respected and representative political, judicial and human rights bodies in the world.”**



All images used in this report were captured during the study trip.

The contents form part of a report submitted to Parliament by Maria Vamvakinou MP

**Study Trip Participants:**

**Maria Vamvakinou MP**  
**Sussan Ley MP**  
**Jill Hall MP**  
**Melissa Parke MP**





## Baq'a Refugee Camp, Jordan

The group visited the Baqa'a Refugee Camp in Jordan, which is home to more than 104,000 Palestinian refugees.

During our visit, we were briefed about UNRWA's services to refugees and camp residents.

We visited health and development centres in the camp, as well as the Baqa'a Co-educational School, where we met students and staff.

We also visited the camp's Slow Learners Centre; the Health Centre; a Women's Programme Centre; and an income generation project.

Services for refugees exist within the camp as well as outside, with the Jordanian Government providing services and assistance to refugees through the Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA), which includes assistance in administrative matters.

Unlike Palestinian refugees in Lebanon's camps, residents of the camp have full and equal rights to citizenship, with access to all aspects of Jordanian society.

The conditions of the refugees, along with the environmental, infrastructure, and health problems that are associated with it, reflect the difficult conditions Palestinian refugees face around the world.

There appears to be no capacity for UNRWA to make improvements in the quality of life for the most vulnerable of refugees because of resource constraints within the limited confines of the refugee camp.

By international benchmarks, the health centre in the camp is overcrowded and under staffed, with each doctor having a quota of 100 patients per day.

As the world's longest-lasting refugee problem, there are over 4.8 million Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA, comprising one-third of the world's total refugee population.

# Anglicord's Women Die Waiting campaign is to be commended for its focus on "a more timely and streamlined medical permit process, for people who need treatment and care outside of Gaza"



Checkpoint regime



AusAID funded project



Segregated road system



Separation Wall and watchtower



Illegal Israeli settlements dot the Palestinian landscape

## Preface

The Australian Parliamentary Friends of Palestine study tour arrived in Palestine in April 2011 for an eight-day visit of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza and Israel. It was an informative and rewarding experience.

We met with Palestinian leaders, religious representatives, NGOs, academics, United Nations representatives, as well as visiting various on the ground Australian development projects.

In addition, the Parliamentary Friendship Group met with current and former Israeli Knesset Members as well as Israeli civil society organisations.

Australia has a long-standing and bipartisan foreign policy commitment to a secure and independent Palestinian state existing side-by-side with a secure and independent Israel.

### **Australia is delivering support for Palestine through 4 main pathways:**

1. A 5 Year Funding Agreement between Australia and the Palestinian Authority via the World Bank Palestinian Reform and Development Program Trust Fund for building transparent, accountable government institutions;

2. Direct aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees;
3. Long-term funding to Australian aid agencies working with Palestinian civil society on a range of projects in the West Bank and Gaza; and,
4. Education funding through the Australian Leadership Award Fellowships and Australian Post-Graduate Scholarships.

The group learned first-hand about the importance of resolving the Final Status Issues of Borders, Security, Settlements, Jerusalem, Water and Refugees.

The group witnessed first-hand the difficulties experienced by Palestinians in their daily lives under occupation - from checkpoints; closures; home demolitions; settlements; the separation wall; the permit system; the two-tier system of roads and access; control over water and agriculture; as well as the crippling effect of the blockade on Gaza.

It has been instructive to hear first hand from Palestinian farmers about the severe economic and social effects on families and communities, of losing significant farming land to settlements and the effects of the Wall, and to then have access to their remaining land severely restricted through the system of permits.

We were told of the lack of access to water, severely impacting Palestinian communities.

Young Palestinian students explained to us the difficulty of crossing multiple checkpoints in order to attend university.

At Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem and the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza, the group met with Palestinian women with breast cancer who were experiencing difficulty accessing treatment for what is the leading cause of cancer related deaths amongst women in Gaza.

In various meetings with Palestinian National Authority (PA) officials, it was noted that the PA has presented policy positions on all final status issues and actively participated in peace process negotiations their various forms, which ranged from proximity talks, direct talks, and parallel talks.

Palestinians and their President Mahmoud Abbas have reaffirmed their commitment to peace and their readiness for statehood.

In the view of the PA, the Palestinians have presented Israel and the international community with a historical compromise, accepting a state on 22% of their historic homeland.

The Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, the representative of the Palestinian people, reaffirmed their commitment to two states, Palestine and Israel, living side by side within secure and recognised boundaries.

As articulated in UN Resolutions, the vision of a peaceful settlement to the Palestine question is met with the reality that “it has been more than sixty years since the adoption of resolution 181 (II) of 1947, and more than forty years since the occupation of Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, in 1967.”

As a result of the ongoing Israeli military occupation, and despite twenty years of official negotiations with the State of Israel, the sovereign base of a future Palestinian state is being eroded.



Meeting at Jericho Municipality

This reality is weakening the role of the PA in the eyes of the Palestinian people, with a view that its authority continues to be eroded without political progress. The promise of peace remains unfulfilled because the negotiations as a process have become both a means and an end, rather than the framework of international law directing talks towards a just settlement.

This reality is having a serious and negative impact on peace and stability not only in the region, but is posing a threat to global peace and security. Failure to resolve the Palestine question will make it difficult to manage the strategic relationship that Australia has with the region.

Observations lead to the conclusion that the ‘final status issues’ in fact serve as the basis of a just and comprehensive resolution and as such, must be addressed immediately. The occupation of Palestine remains the sole overriding obstacle to a just and peaceful settlement.

The continued building of 'facts on the ground' which impede outcomes for peace are visible through the manner in which the separation wall and its associated regime is built in Occupied Palestine; through the illegal annexation of land for settlement construction; and through the associated road networks and checkpoint regime; all of which, according to the UN "are contrary to international law...[and] are aimed at altering the character, status and demographic composition of the Territory." This reality poses a serious threat to the prospect of a just and lasting outcome for peace.

The nature of these violations of international law are visible through the illegal Ma'ale Adumim settlement, which the group visited, and the associated road network which aims to cut East Jerusalem from the West Bank, as well as severing the West Bank.

The group was received by the Mayor of Jericho during a briefing about the situation in Jericho and the Jordan Valley, describing the Israeli procedures that have halted the development process in the city and its surrounding areas.

Australia's efforts in working towards a comprehensive and durable peace in the region, and in promoting the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, must work towards what the UN describes as a "just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Palestine question in all its aspects, and in accordance with international law."

In meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, the President acknowledged Australia's contributions and active interest in promoting peace.

The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people carry the legitimacy of the most respected and representative political, judicial and human rights bodies in the world. Israel, as the occupying power, must begin to comply with what the International Court of Justice describes as "its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law."



Israeli checkpoint regime



Dome of the Rock, Occupied East Jerusalem



The separation wall inside Bethlehem

**“In two short years, this project has shown some very real on-the-ground progress for Palestinian families. It is encouraging to see farming families actively, and proudly, working their land, especially as the land holds such enormous symbolic value for the Palestinians” – APHEDA – Union Aid Abroad**



Meeting with Palestinian President Abbas



Meeting with Faith Leaders, Jerusalem

# Palestinian Prime Minister

In our meeting with Palestinian Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad, the Prime Minister spoke of the substantial erosion of the terms of reference of negotiating principles.

The PA has adopted a proactive approach towards economic development to build and improve its institutions as a transition to a viable, contiguous Palestinian state. However, without a comprehensive peace settlement that sees an end to the occupation, economic development is unsustainable, as Israeli authorities control the permit system and capital flow that would allow for the development of social and economic infrastructure in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt).

Prime Minister Fayyad acknowledged the importance of aid assistance packages from Australia, emphasising however, that the sustainability of development projects cannot be maintained through reliance on foreign aid alone. Building institutions in an area where the occupation serves to deny the establishment of a state renders institutional development untenable.

The Prime Minister promoted a political agenda of strong security, good governance and economic opportunity, which were outlined in his plan 'Palestine — Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State'. This agenda is being carried out despite the crippling blockade on Gaza, and the increasing fragmentation and restrictions imposed on the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

## Jerusalem Heads of Churches and Grand Mufti

In Jerusalem, we met with Jerusalem Heads of Churches and their representatives, as well as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine, Sheikh Mohammad Ahmad Husein.

The Heads of Churches and the Grand Mufti noted that the emphasis on education in Australia places us in a good position to provide direct assistance to Palestinian educational institutions.

In March, the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, Suheil Dawani, with whom we met, had his residency permit cancelled by the Israeli Government. As a result, Bishop Dawani and his family were unable to travel, and the Bishop's ability to carry out his duties had been greatly diminished as a result of the Israeli decision.

The Israeli Government's policy of revocation of residency permits in Jerusalem has a particular effect on the Palestinian Christian population.

The various faith leaders put forward that the Occupation has created contradictions and exclusivity which have a negative effect on the Christian population, which has a dwindling presence in Jerusalem.

All entry into Jerusalem is conducted through a system of checkpoints. However, it was noted that while the physical checkpoints and military presence which are visible throughout the oPt prohibit freedom of movement and access, the bureaucratic structure of laws, policies, and decrees that are a part of the Israeli permit system have an equally overbearing role in the denial of access and movement.

The faith leaders argued that there was a deliberate and systematic attempt to rid Jerusalem of its Arab population through a mandatory permit system that changes the character and profile of the city.

The Lutheran Bishop, Munib Younan, President of the Lutheran World Federation, condemned attempts to politicise religion, and attributed the conflicts in the Middle East to the political reality.

The visit coincided with Easter celebrations, a time when Palestinian Christians were denied access to their holy sites in Jerusalem.

# Israeli Human Rights and Peace Organisations

We met with representatives of the following Israeli human rights and peace organisations:

- Breaking the Silence;
- Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD);
- Rabbis for Human Rights; and
- Machsom (Checkpoint) Watch

These organisations discussed the effects of the Israeli occupation and the broad range of policies that contribute to the ongoing human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

## Augusta Victoria Hospital

The Augusta Victoria Hospital, located in East Jerusalem, serves Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza. The group's visit focused on the hospital's cancer treatment facilities, as the only hospital providing these forms of treatment for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

The group met with the hospital's CEO, Dr Tawfiq Nasser, who chaired the meeting. Dr. Omar Abdel Shafi, Senior Surgeon for mastectomies, was also present, along with other medical and hospital staff.

**Some of the reasons for late stage detection and inability to obtain appropriate treatment are due to:**

- limited medical services inside the Gaza Strip;
- Israeli Government control of Gaza's borders and restrictions on access to essential oncology medication, medical equipment, and personnel qualified to provide oncological services;
- no radiation therapy being available in the Gaza Strip. All Palestinians requiring radiation therapy must travel to Egypt, Jordan or Israel for treatment. Radiation therapy is unavailable primarily due to Israel's objection to the importation of radioactive materials into the Gaza Strip, and also to the lack of expertise in handling such equipment;
- limited access to treatment outside of Gaza;
- any patient requiring medical treatment outside Gaza must first gain permission to travel from the Israeli Government; and,
- The referral system for the medical treatment itself was managed by the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah. The demand for oncology treatment is high and treatment is expensive.

Anglicord's *Women Die Waiting* campaign is to be commended for its focus on "a more timely and streamlined medical permit process, for people who need treatment and care outside of Gaza"; as well as its emphasis on the need "for all drugs on the WHO Essential Drugs List to be supplied and to be made available in Gaza"

Source: Anglicord

## Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions

We met with the General Secretary of the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), along with Palestinian trade union officials and representatives to discuss the conditions of Palestinian workers.

The meeting discussed the need to address issues relating to labour laws and the Union's position towards Histadrut, Israel's organisation of trade unions. The PGFTU put forward that Palestinian workers are forced to pay their union dues to Histadrut for services and benefits, without having their rights represented.

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refugee problem, there are  
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## United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)

The group met with Filippo Grandi, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, and Dustin Okazaki, the Special Assistant to the Commissioner-General.

UNRWA's mandate is to provide humanitarian development assistance to the over 4.8 million Palestinian refugees in Occupied Palestine and the surrounding region.

In fulfilling its mandate in the oPt, UNRWA faces the same challenges arising from the occupation, which governs every aspect of the lives of the Palestinians.

It is important to note that under international law, Israel as the Occupying Power is responsible for the human rights, protection and assistance for refugees under its occupation. UNRWA has assumed this responsibility.

UNRWA has welcomed Australia's contributions which have tripled through a multi-year commitment to UNRWA's core budget, as well as Australia's support for UNRWA's emergency relief in Gaza.

Australia's multi-year commitment provides an important framework for a stable delivery of services for the most vulnerable Palestinians. Australia's consistent support of UNRWA's work and its commitment to increasing its contributions makes it one of the Agency's most important donors.

# Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA Projects

Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA is working in partnership with MA'AN Development Centre to carry out a multi-year Rural Livelihoods and Food Security through Capacity Development Project. The group visited the Tulkarem district in the West Bank, where the projects are located in 7 small villages in what is locally known as the 'Kafriyat' area. A number of these villages are located beside the route of the Separation Wall and have lost much of their agricultural lands behind the Wall.

Our field visit included viewing the impact of the Separation Wall on the area and its impact on the affected communities who rely on their agricultural lands for their livelihoods. We visited project activities, such as agricultural land rehabilitation, beehives production, water cisterns construction, greenhouses, and also visited a local women's committee in Kufr Zibad village.

APHEDA's project works in two rural areas of the Occupied Palestinian Territories: Tulkarem (West Bank) and Khan Younis (Gaza Strip). Project activities revolve around two basic elements: food security - in particular, strengthening food security options at the household level for poor rural Palestinian families; and capacity building - supporting small, local community-based organisations to better serve their communities.

Through AusAID, the Australian Government has provided A\$6 million in funding for five-year food security and capacity building project.

Source: APHEDA – Union Aid Abroad





Caged Palestinian homes



TIPH Observer



Segregated road system



Armed settler



Rubbish thrown on Palestinians

## TIPH - Hebron

During our visit to the southern West Bank city of Hebron, we saw the most confronting elements of the occupation and illegal settlements.

We participated in a briefing and walking tour of the Old City, conducted by the Temporary International Presence in the City of Hebron (TIPH).

Hebron has been divided into two areas, H1 and H2. H2, which encompasses one-fifth of the city, is under direct Israeli military control and includes the Old City.

It is the only city outside of East Jerusalem where illegal Israeli settlers live amongst Palestinians, rather than in self-contained settlements.

It presents a confronting situation where some 400-500 armed settlers have exclusive access to the principle thoroughfare of the Old City. Israeli army outposts are visible on rooftops and within the city, with the Old City resembling a ghetto administered through a system of segregation.

The Israeli military has welded shut the doors of Palestinian homes and shops. This has resulted in a situation whereby Palestinian residents cannot exit their homes through the front door along Shuhada Street, but must go via another route which requires exit through a back door system on to rooftops across adjacent buildings. Palestinians have been denied foot or vehicle access to the streets which their homes are located.

Sections of Hebron's streets are divided by barriers, where a broad section of the road is reserved exclusively for illegal settlers.

In other sections of the city, the municipality has set up wire mesh across walkways in order to protect Palestinian residents from garbage and other material, sometimes flammable, that is thrown at them by illegal settlers who live on upper floors immediately opposite and adjacent to Palestinian homes.

# Bethlehem University

The group travelled to Bethlehem University for a tour of the university and discussions on the difficulties facing students and academic staff.

We met the University's Vice Chancellor, Brother Peter Bray and students from the University, who reflected the diversity and pluralism of student life in Bethlehem.

The University's website notes that "the University's story is one of people committed to pursuing their higher education – perseverance and courage in the face of adversity and injustice. The curfews, travel restrictions, military checkpoint harassment, and the negative impact of the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, are factors faced by the University's enrolment of 2,936 students, most of whom are full time, and 11,470 graduates."

## Recognising a Palestinian State

Our meetings with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Palestinian officials involved discussion around the forthcoming vote at the UN on recognising Palestine as a member state of the United Nations.

The impediment to a just and lasting peace remains the lack of a political solution to the conflict and the UN vote in September is seen as a vote on the UN's commitment to the rights of the Palestinians to a state under international law.



Bethlehem University



Checkpoint



ANZAC Day Service



House demolitions