

Opening Statement of Irish Aid to JCFAD, 18 May 2021

International Development aspects

[Cáit Moran - Introduction]

Thank you Chair.

I wanted to set out briefly the context for Ireland's development and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people.

Ireland's objective is to achieve a just, enduring and stable peace in the Middle East. This foreign policy goal frames and shapes the Irish Aid approach to the region. Ireland's programme of assistance is an integral part of Ireland's contribution to a sustainable peace.

Ireland's vision for peace in the Middle East - a vision shared with our EU partners - is for the realisation of a negotiated two-State solution with an independent, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian state, living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

Aid from donors plays a vital role: however it cannot substitute for the ending of the occupation, which alone can fully unlock a future Palestinian state's potential. This understanding underpins Ireland's engagement in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Ireland's aid programme there is delivered in the context of a continued deterioration in the situation on the ground and a steady rise in needs amongst the Palestinian population. The situation, as we have seen clearly in recent weeks, is volatile and unpredictable. Minister Coveney set out Ireland's position on the escalating violence at the UN Security Council on Sunday 16 May.

The occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel continues to be the single most significant obstacle to Palestinian development. While aid from donors plays a vital role, it cannot substitute for the ending of the occupation, which alone can fully unlock a future Palestinian state's development potential. This underpins Ireland's approach, both in our bilateral

engagement and through multilateral channels, including at the EU and at the United Nations.

Ireland's position is based on a firm commitment to a negotiated two-state solution that ends the occupation that began in 1967; with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, on the basis of international law, including relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

A series of negative trends on the ground, in particular the continued advancement of settlements, demolitions and threatened evictions in the West Bank, are undermining the potential for a successfully negotiated conclusion to the conflict. Ireland works hard to address these issues based on international law and the agreed international parameters.

My colleague, Feilim McLaughlin, will speak now on the Irish Aid programme.

Feilim McLaughlin:

Thank you Chair.

As my colleague has just set out, Ireland's overall policy aim is to assist in securing a lasting and just political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to support the negotiation of a two-state solution with an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state, living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

Ireland has had a long-standing commitment to this objective. Ireland was the first European Community Member State to adopt support for the two-state solution as official policy in February 1980.

Our development cooperation support to the Palestinian people flows from this policy and aims to contribute to maintaining space for the two-state solution.

This work, part of the Irish Aid programme managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs, focuses on four areas:

firstly on supporting state-building efforts;

secondly, on provision of humanitarian relief;

thirdly on the protection and promotion of human rights; and,

fourthly, on support for Palestine refugees.

Building the capacity of Palestinian governance institutions and civil society is an important underlying theme of our approach.

The Irish Aid Palestine programme has been in existence for just over two decades – since the year 2000. This year, Irish Aid plans to invest almost €16 million in the oPt.

We, and Ireland's Representative Office in Ramallah cooperate with UN and other multilateral partners, civil society organisations, humanitarian agencies and the Palestinian Authority, in delivering the programme.

Overall, the EU and its Member States are consistently the largest donors to the Palestinian people, with total funding estimated at over €600 million per annum in recent years,

In the area of state building, Ireland's particular focus is on strengthening the quality of education, which will be essential to the long-term prosperity of the Palestinian people and a Palestinian State.

The Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Education has a particularly important function in a young society, where nearly 40 percent of the population is under 14 years of age.

The Ministry aims to provide comprehensive and safe access to quality education across the occupied territory. Our view is that a robust and effective Ministry can help to foster social unity across the oPt and is indispensable in raising the skills and knowledge base of Palestinians. Education also serves an important function promoting critical-thinking and enhancing job opportunities.

Ireland's aim is to build the capacity of Palestinian educational institutions and by extension, to empower the Palestinian population. Our main vehicle for this is what is known as a Joint Financing Arrangement.

This is essentially where we and a number of other countries pool our support to the Palestinian Education Ministry. We support them in areas like curriculum development and educational reform. Ireland spends €3 million a year through this mechanism.

We also have a scholarship scheme for Palestinian students, where we bring promising individuals to Ireland to study for a Master's degree. Again, the aim is to build the capacity of Palestinian society by giving individuals the knowledge and experience they need to make a positive contribution in the future. We presently award 25 of these Ireland Fellowships per year.

The promotion and protection of human rights in the Palestinian territory is a fundamental pillar of our work. We recognise the indispensable role of civil society in promoting and protecting human rights and the rule of law. Respect for human rights, accountability and transparency facilitate peace and stability and contribute to better governance.

Our **Human Rights and Democratisation Scheme** supports both Israeli and Palestinian NGOs in five priority areas: freedom of movement; rule of law; rights of prisoners and detainees; women's rights; and democratic development. Our Representative Office works with partner bodies and has developed strong relationships over the years. Our total funding in this area in 2021 will be €750,000.

Of course, you have just heard from representatives of the West Bank Protection Consortium we, along with DG ECHO – the branch of the European Commission responsible for humanitarian aid and a number of other EU member states, are members of and donors to the Consortium. We have supported them since 2017 in their work to protect vulnerable Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. As you have heard, the Consortium provides material and humanitarian assistance and legal aid. Our budgeted contribution in 2021 is €200,000.

Another pillar of our approach is our support to Palestine refugees through UNRWA, the UN Relief and Works Agency, which provides education, healthcare and humanitarian relief to Palestine refugees. There are approximately 5.7 million registered refugees living in the occupied Palestinian territory and also in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs signed a three-year partnership agreement with UNRWA in March. Under the terms of that agreement we will provide UNRWA with €6 million per year to the end of 2023.

We also provide annual funding to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, **UN OCHA**. We have provided €500,000 in 2021. That include €300,000 to a Humanitarian Fund, which can be drawn on to respond to humanitarian emergencies.

Finally, Mr Chair, to refer to the impact of the COVID pandemic. As with all of our developing country partners wherever in the world, the main issue in relation to vaccination in the occupied territory is the global shortage of supply.

As members will be aware, Ireland is supporting the COVAX initiative, which aims to deliver 2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines to 92 low and middle-income countries, including the oPt, by the end of 2021. COVAX has also negotiated options on a further 1 billion doses.

In March, the EU announced it would double its funding to COVAX from €500 million to €1 billion. When taken with the commitments of individual Member States, this brings the entire EU pledge to COVAX to €2.5 billion.

In February, COVAX confirmed that the occupied Palestinian territory was a priority participant in its programme. The first COVAX shipment, containing 61,440 doses, was received in March.

COVAX deliveries to the occupied territory in the first and second quarters of the year were projected at 308,000 doses. According to the WHO, 416,000 people in the occupied Palestinian territory have been vaccinated with supplies from COVAX and other sources. I know the Palestinian Ambassador spoke to this point in more detail when you met her last week.

In addition to our COVAX support we have provided additional resources to organisations working in the occupied Palestinian territory since the outbreak of the pandemic.

They include UNRWA, the UN's Humanitarian Fund, the World Bank and Oxfam. We have also provided funds an EU mechanism known as PEGASE which gives direct support to Palestinian citizens.

To conclude Mr Chairman, Ireland's support to the Palestinian people through the international development programme has a number of aims – to help maintain the space for a two State solution; to build the capacity of the Palestinian people through the provision of quality education; to contribute to ensuring that human rights and accountability are upheld; that humanitarian relief is provided to those who need it and that the needs of Palestine refugees are met.

Thank you