



Remarks by UN Deputy Special Coordinator, James W. Rawley, on the occasion of the opening of workshop “Developing National Disaster Inventory Management System – Disaster Losses Database” Ramallah, 24 February 2013

Y.E. Dr. Said Abu-Ali, Minister of the Interior

Brigadier Mohammed Issa

Mrs. Margareta Wahlstrom, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction

Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to pay tribute to the Palestinian Civil Defense and its more than 14 years of service to the Palestinian people. Its 1000 dedicated people are at the front line of response when a disaster or an emergency affects the communities of Palestine.

During the storm events of 7-10 January that affected 12,000 people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the State of Palestine’s Disaster Management apparatus was put to the test. Overall, Palestinian authorities including Civil Defense and other Palestinian ministries, together with Palestinian Red Crescent Society, were able to mount an impressive initial response to the affected communities, despite limited resources.

In this context allow me to also pay tribute to the important role played by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society supported by IFRC, the UN (UNRWA, WFP, UNICEF, OCHA), and national and international NGOs, all of which responded to the needs of the communities on the ground.

The experience of this storm was a good test that highlighted both the strengths and the challenges that the system faces to reduce risks, mitigate vulnerabilities and respond when the disaster strikes. In particular, it was noted that there are a number of gaps in Disaster Management capacities on the ground that leave Palestinian communities in a vulnerable position in the event of a sudden-onset natural disaster. Based on this experience, allow me to offer a few reflections for discussion in the interest of improving further national capacities in disaster risk reduction.

- Strengthened coordination and information: It could be useful to explore an overall standardized approach to facilitate the active engagement and support of the international humanitarian community, in line with the Hyogo Framework for action. A stronger coordinated approach in terms of defining roles and responsibilities, information gathering and sharing, reducing disaster risk and coordinating the provision of humanitarian response could be helpful.

- Second, better use of the international capacities: There are existing comprehensive long and mid-term programmes aimed at strengthening disaster-related management in Palestine (particularly through the Hyogo Framework). Nonetheless, there seems to be a need to enhance collaboration among the national players to develop a national coordination mechanism to fully leverage the humanitarian community's capacities.
- Third, and this is a sensitive issue, it may be useful to consider putting in place a protocol with the GoI to facilitate access – in case of natural calamities - to all areas in oPt including areas behind the Wall, East Jerusalem and connecting West Bank with Gaza Strip. Such a protocol with the occupying power could facilitate reception, access and delivery of international assistance directly through borders with Jordan and Egypt, and indirectly via Israel.
- Finally, allow me to suggest that you discuss ways to provide greater support to communities and local governments to face the challenges associated with disaster risk reduction and response, to enhance resilience to cope with these types of natural events.

I want to acknowledge the important coordinating role of the Palestinian Civil Defense established in the current law #3 of Civil Defense, in case of a major disaster. For its part, the international community, and particularly the United Nations, has been working on capacity building. Indeed five UN agencies in Palestine are collaborating to support relevant Palestinian entities. To that end, a DRR Working Group was established in August 2012 with the participation of UNDP, OCHA, UNOPS, WFP and UNWRA.

The UN DRR initiative focuses on:

- Strengthening collaboration between the UN and the State of Palestine
- Developing a protocol of cooperation between countries in the region to facilitate timely and effective response in Palestine
- Building urban search and rescue capacity
- Increasing awareness on safety measures and community preparedness
- Strengthening Emergency operation centers and the early warning system, and increasing the logistic capacities to respond to disasters.

In closing, I wish to invite this seminar to reflect on DRR as a whole. While parts of the disaster risk reduction framework are critical to the humanitarian agenda (such as preparedness and early warning systems), we need also to think in terms of development to fully mainstream the risk reduction agenda so that the planning, finance and sectoral line ministries take ownership for reducing underlying risks, forging an “All of Government” approach with partners in Civil Society and the International Community.

The UN stands ready to support your efforts in this regard. Shukran.