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| **:: Summary** |  |

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|  | **Participants:** |  | Maha Abu Samra, Field Training Officer, UNRWA; Pamella Mills, Program Development Officer, US Consulate; Jamal Al-Aref, Deputy Middle East Representative, ANERA; Michele Auga, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Jerusalem; Raymond Connelly, Retired; Khalil Assali, Voice of America (Radio Sawa); Dr. Arafat Hidmi, Makassed Society, Jerusalem; Elias Zananiri, Journalist, RF1, Jerusalem; Subhi Al-Aref, Medical Student; Suzan Nammari, Program Specialist, American Consulate, Jerusalem; Nick Kardahji, Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi, PASSIA, Jerusalem. |
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|  | **Summary:** |  | The speaker briefly gave an introduction to his work in post-conflict environments in the Balkans and in New York City, before discussing the psycho-social problems prevalent in Palestinian society as a result of the Israeli occupation and the IDF’s attempts to crush the Intifada. The subsequent discussion focused on a further analysis of the current crisis and the connection between the lack of a political solution (or prospects for one) and social and psychological breakdown in Palestine. |

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| **:: Dr Woodall’s Talk** |

The speaker began by outlining his professional background, some of the projects he had been involved with in the past and how he had come to be interested in the situation in Palestine . He described how he had been asked to go to Croatia by the United Nations in the early 1990's to investigate the psychological impact of the conflict. He met women who had suffered horrendous abuse in the so-called ‘rape camps' and helped to establish a working group (the ‘Resilient Responses to Social Crisis' group) back at Harvard to investigate the traumatic effects of such violence and how they can be dealt with.

Following the attack on the World Trade Center in New York , Dr Woodall was asked by the City of New York to develop programs that would help New Yorkers, especially children, come to terms with what had happened and help them deal with their anger and fear in less damaging ways. Dr Woodall cited the statistic that ‘hate crimes' in the United States had increased by 1700% following the September 11 th attacks, an example of how psychological trauma can lead to destructive social phenomena.

Dr Woodall's conclusion from his experiences in the Balkans and New York was that large-scale psychological trauma caused by conflict situations cannot be dealt with on an individual level, by treating each victim separately. Rather it is necessary to consider a broader approach one which encompasses three distinct aspects, a political aspect (i.e. the need for a political solution/remedy), a social aspect (i.e. the need to address problems at the level of the society as a whole) and thirdly a psychological aspect.

In other words post-traumatic psychological problems can only be satisfactorily addressed by tackling their political and social causes, and conversely, a successful peace initiative must take into account psychosocial factors (perhaps the ‘Truth' commissions established in post-Apartheid South Africa are a good example of this). Dr Woodall was critical of attempts to define individual reactions to traumatic events within a purely medical framework, e.g. by describing them as instances of a particular disorder or syndrome such as ‘Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' (PTSD). In his view this fails to capture the wide-ranging social, political, economic, religious etc. dimensions of catastrophic events that all have an impact on the psychological state of an individual and influence their ability to cope with what has happened to them.

One of the major consequences of traumatic conflict situations is that individuals become alienated or detached from themselves and feel unable to deal with strong emotions. Fear, terror and rage become overwhelming and lead to worries that one is losing ones humanity. Hence violence can be dehumanizing not just because the acts of violence themselves strip away individual dignity and self-respect, but also because the emotions they produce can lead to those individuals believing that they are no longer ‘normal'.

In the post 9/11 environment in the United States , widespread fear and anger translated into an extreme and rigid form of nationalism that regarded dissent as ‘unpatriotic' or ‘un-American' (a phenomenon which has undoubtedly benefited the Bush Administration). The projects which Dr Woodall is engaged with in New York City are designed to try and prevent or limit the effects of such destructive social tendencies.

Dr Woodall hoped that by coming to Palestine he would be able to offer insights into the kinds of structures or initiatives might be required to help Palestinians overcome the psychological trauma they have endured as a result of the conflict. 

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| **:: Discussion** |  |

One question asked of Dr Woodall was, “is Palestine a fundamentally different kind of conflict”? Many participants expressed the view that the nature of the conflict in Palestine is unique. The Israelis have succeeded in total collective punishment that encompasses every single individual in Palestine making the suffering comprehensive and absolute. In addition the conflict seems to be without end, and few people have any confidence in the notion that peace will be achievable in the near future, producing widespread feelings of despair and powerlessness.

Dr Woodall agreed that the Israel/Palestine conflict appears intractable and there often seems to be little, if any, grounds for optimism. However a possible way forward is to look for individual and collective strengths and seek to enhance or promote them, and to try and build a sense of unity around shared values.

The participants raised a number of further points:

* The conflict/occupation involves the uprooting of the indigenous population. Children growing up in Palestine witness their physical environment being destroyed and their culture and traditions being systematically undermined. This poses a threat to young people's sense of ‘belonging' or their roots.
* As a result of the checkpoints, the closures and curfews, the invasions of cities and refugee camps by the IDF and so forth, there is a complete lack of stability. Hence it is difficult if not impossible for Palestinians to make any kind of plan for the future, because they do not know what is going to happen from one moment to the next.
* A new phenomenon is starting to emerge in Palestine – that of unaffiliated gangs of youths who refuse to recognize traditional structures of authority which they consider to be discredited and powerless. These gangs take an extreme rejectionist stance, opposing any kind of accommodation or settlement and there is a real danger that they are becoming uncontrollable.
* A sign of how deeply the feelings of despair and hopelessness run, is that whereas in the past it may have taken six months for Hamas to persuade a person to blow themselves up in a suicide operation, now they can do so within a matter of days.
* Moderate secularism is increasingly under threat as its leadership is discredited or deliberately undermined by the Israelis, and desperate Palestinians turn to more radical options. Furthermore individual families are facing enormous pressures and young people are often influenced much more by forces outside the home (such as the gangs mentioned above), leaving parents feeling that they have little control over their children.

The above points serve to highlight the major problems affecting Palestinians at both an individual and a social level. The nature of the conflict and Israeli actions and the lack of any genuine desire on the part of the Israelis to seriously address Palestinian concerns makes attempts to achieve peace seem futile and pointless. In this kind of climate, participants wondered what impact projects such as those Dr Woodall has worked on in the past could have.

Dr Woodall closed the session by agreeing again that prospects seemed bleak and felt that only by the imposition of an outside military force to separate the two sides, would there be any hope of a peaceful settlement. He argued that Palestinians and Israelis are not capable of reaching an agreement unaided and require external pressure to do so. At the same time, there is a definite lack of political will in the international community to provide such pressure.