**Summary**

Several points were noted:

a) previous examinations of this issue have had conflicting results.

b) Refugee camps in Gaza participate in municipal elections, but in West Bankthey don't. This creates two different systems for the same population.

c) Refugees tend to express concern about getting involved because it is seen as an erasure of their right of return. Some say that they just want UNRWA to help them until they return to their homes, and that they don't want to get involved.

The concern is that UNRWA is reducing its services and expected in the near future [State of Palestine] will be asking that the PA take over some of its responsibilities, such as health and education, and that refugee camps will be in really dire situations if they do not coordinate with the adjoining municipalities in meeting their most basic needs.

It is essential to stress to the refugees in the camps that the proposal for them to join in local elections is in no way attempting to undermine or erase their right of return. This right is sacred and will not be touched. Involvement in local municipal elections is merely intended to encourage their participation in their present situation.

So if we are to conduct a referendum, what are the questions that should be asked, how we ask them, and how do we sell the findings to the residence of the camps.

The speaker (Dr. Sari Hanafi) noted that the preparation before the referendum through meetings with the people in the camps, and the involvement of the Ministry of Local Government are extremely important. We need to stress that the camps will remain regardless of whether the refugees stay or return to their homes in Palestine. Experience in other parts of the world has shown that refugee camps become slumps after the refugees leave; so the issue of their involvement in municipal politics is no way related to their right of return.

The camps that are inside cities should become involved in the elections of the municipality in which they are. The camps that are outside cities should have elections for committees.

It was noted that the refugees in the West Bank are the responsibility of UNRWA, but the reduction of UNRWA services has led people to the PA. The concern is that once the PA starts to provide the services, UNRWA will disappear because it will become redundant. It is important to ensure that UNRWA does not leave as long as the refugees remain. However, the PA should also provide the refugees services since they are also Palestinians and citizens like others in the OccupiedTerritories.

The representative from the Ministry of Local Government noted that the ministry cannot take away the responsibility for the camps from UNRWA. There is a committee in the camp that is elected and that does not replace UNRWA or the PA. There is a difference in how to deal with camps inside the cities and those outside the cities.

He also asked why residents of the cities affected are not going to be asked as to whether refugee camps should be involved in their municipal elections. He noted that we already know that some will refuse. The Ministry does acknowledge that problems within the camps exist and it is not saying that the camps should remain as they are. He noted that the Ministry of Local Government is already working with the committee that deals with refugee issues within the PA on these matters.

Regarding the proposal that elected representatives from the camps going to Municipal councils, it was noted that this would not work because we cannot expect the enforcement of the same laws and regulations on the camps as on the city.