**The Session:**

During the meeting, the following questions were asked:

* How do Palestinian youth perceive democracy and rule of law projects?
* Is the Palestinian society more democratic than it was ten years ago? (If it isn’t, then why is that the case? If it is, then how is it more democratic and what has been achieved so far?)
* Is democracy a priority for Palestinians at this particular time?
* What could be done to make democratization efforts more successful in the future?

Participants mentioned that with the Oslo Agreements, a conflict arose between the non-governmental sector and the Palestinian Authority, with the latter attempting to marginalize the role of the NGOs. They added that the establishment of the Authority resulted in people becoming dependent on it, which weakened the role of the civil society.

Also mentioned was the fact that although the Palestinian Government was formed after democratic elections, the outcome was nevertheless a negative one: the domination of a single party and the existence of a kind of autocracy and widespread corruption against a background of so-called ‘democracy’. The participants added that in light of the fear that exists, which is due, in part, to the Israeli policy of targeting Palestinian political activists, it is difficult to even contemplate the future, especially one involving a Palestinian multi-party system, not least of all because thus far, the Palestinian multi-party system has not been able to recruit effective people.

Whilst comparing between the two Palestinian Intifadas in terms of youth programs, the culture of democracy and participation, participants emphasized the importance of distinguishing between the two cases. In the first Intifada, they said, there was greater participation on the part of the civil society because of the non-violent nature of the resistance, in which everyone was able to participate. The nature of the current Intifada and the level of bloodshed and violence involved, on the other hand, have limited the number of people taking part and led to increased frustration, be it on the political, economic, or psycho-social level. As a result, the absence of the rule of law and the insufficient nature of public participation in governance activities during this Intifada were mentioned as two of the problems requiring immediate solutions.

As to the specificity of Jerusalem, some participants, who mentioned that Palestinian civil society organizations in Jerusalem are closely linked to those in the West Bank, especially in Ramallah, felt that the question of Jerusalem is not separate from that of the rest of the Occupied Territories. Other participants felt, however, that the question of Jerusalem is unique, especially given the racist attitude of the Israeli Municipality when it comes to Palestinian Jerusalemites and the policies of Judaization involved. They noted, amongst other things, that the increase in identity, delinquency and social problems in Jerusalem - such as those involving school abandonment, drug addiction, the harassment of women, etc – is the result of such policies and yet another problem requiring an immediate solution.

Related to the constraints facing youth activists and organizations in Jerusalem are the contradictions that exist in terms of the desired liberal ideas and the rules laid down by the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian social structure, which in many cases result in Palestinian youth becoming extremely confused.  Also mentioned was the fact that Palestinian children, as well as being deprived of happiness and a real sense of belonging, often feel repressed and oppressed, especially when, in striving for a better life and their personal and collective freedom, they frequently find themselves in front of closed doors, which leaves them feeling even more frustrated. As a number of participants pointed out, for many young Palestinians, social events, especially wedding celebrations, seem to be the only recreational activities now available.

Participants acknowledged the fact that youth represent the raw material of the Palestinian society and agreed that investing in the youth sector in order to produce competent leaders is of vital importance; they noted, however, that this will be no easy task, especially in light of the fact that youth account for some 60 percent of the society. Participants involved in organizing recreational activities in Jerusalem mentioned, for example, that when activities include a large number of participants, it is difficult to follow up their needs. Meanwhile, others mentioned the fact that the general state of frustration that currently exists in the country as well as the problems relating to the current political situation make it extremely difficult to implement programs of any kind, regardless of the number of participants. They further mentioned that youth need tools that empower and support them, such as training and educational activities for delinquent adolescents. They also mentioned that children and youth need access to sports clubs, playgrounds, trips and educational activities as by engaging in suitable recreational activities, they are somehow able to counterbalance the negative effects of the hardships associated with their daily lives.

Participants agreed that it is difficult to identify the needs and priorities of youth, which keep changing from one year to another; one year, for example, Internet courses could be considered a priority, whereas the next year, it could be studying English or leadership training that is deemed more important. They also agreed that when it comes to income-generating projects, the role of the private sector is of great importance.

At the end of the meeting, the participants stressed the need for similar meetings. They suggested, however, that there should be a greater number of participants, that topics should be specified, and that there should be a greater amount of active participation on all levels. The participants also expressed their desire to see more networking and cooperation between the different stakeholders, saying that although it will undoubtedly take time to ensure that the necessary changes occur, with some hope, persistence and cooperation, the amount of time could be reduced significantly.

**Recommendations:**

* Participation on all levels should be increased and the civil society empowered in order to improve the prospects for democracy and the rule of law in Palestine;

* ‘Leaders’ should be considered moderators or introducers rather than a center of authority. Adults should not attempt to direct youth to where they want them to go; instead, they should help them to develop their characters and knowledge so that they will be better equipped to make their own decisions and initiatives. Youth leaders in particular must be brave in their ideas and challenge the current state of despair, thereby helping us move from a state of frustration to one of hope and joy;

* Youth should be directly involved in voluntary work and in the decision-making process (they should have their own representatives at the Palestinian Authority and there should be greater cooperation between the Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sports and the different youth organizations), not least of all, because this would help them to acquire a greater sense of belonging. Providing youth with the necessary training and skills is a necessary step, whilst unemployed and delinquent youth should be helped through income-generating projects;

* More recreational and educational programs (trips, sports, cultural activities, etc.) should be organized so that youth would be able to fill their time in a productive manner whilst learning more about the ethics of democracy, the rule of law, and the Palestinian history and identity, especially in light of the fact that all the programs of the Jerusalem Municipality are based on discrimination and Judaization;

* Differences should be respected, and programs, which should not be based on imposed agendas/values, should encourage freedom of opinion, independent thinking, and innovation;

* Participants mentioned that in their opinion, Jerusalemites in general are currently not motivated to join political parties, not least of all because while the Israeli army has a tendency to target politically affiliated youth, the structures of the various parties do not encourage youth to join them. Another problem mentioned is the fact that being a member of a political party sometimes results in one becoming confined to its ideology, which might not necessarily reflect one’s personal convictions and be flexible enough to adapt with changing circumstances. Participants stressed throughout the session that more than anything else there is a need for Jerusalemites to work cooperatively and independently toward a common agenda and escape from the current state of despair and division;

* A holistic approach should be adopted, while additional cooperation is needed between the various stakeholders in order to ensure that plans and visions are clear and easily understood by everyone;

* A committee should be established to follow up issues pertaining to youth in Jerusalem and there should be greater cooperation between the various organizations working with youth in the city, which should network with one another, coordinate their work and provide a suitable framework for the overall effort to improve the situation of youth in the city.