



NATIONAL
DEMOCRATIC
INSTITUTE
FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

**Constituency Relations:
A Two-Way Street**

*A Workshop for the Members of the
Palestinian Legislative Council*

*Bethlehem
October 25-26, 1997*

Constituency Relations: A Two-Way Street

A National Democratic Institute for International Affairs Workshop

**The Nativity Hotel
Bethlehem, West Bank
October 25-26, 1997**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On October 25-26, 1997, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) convened a workshop for Members of the Palestinian Legislative Council at the Nativity Hotel in Bethlehem on "Constituency Relations: A Two-Way Street." This document is a report of the workshop deliberations.

The Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) has been meeting regularly since its inaugural session on March 7, 1996. While PLC members have always seen one of their primary roles as that of serving and representing their constituents, institutionalized practices for effective relations between legislators and the public have not yet been forged. To address the ongoing concerns of PLC members in this regard, NDI organized the following workshop. Sample constituency relations manuals were translated into Arabic and distributed to members at the workshop, and later to PLC district offices.

The West Bank and Gaza are divided into sixteen electoral districts, and Council seats are allocated based on 1995 population figures. While some districts have only one member, most are multi-member constituencies. Gaza City, for example, has twelve members. Every member within a particular district is elected in, and technically responsible to all constituents in, the entire district. This poses a significant challenge for effective communication between the different legislators in each district and the electorate for ensuring that all constituents' complaints are answered in an organized and coordinated fashion.

In addition, there are stark differences between the districts in terms of the development of offices, resources and staff capacity. To date, not all of the districts have opened PLC official constituency offices, and even where these exist they are often not used by all of the members, due to political and personal differences. In most districts, there are members with varied political affiliations, which makes the feasibility of a shared office virtually impossible. In some cases, members have opened offices with their own resources, but not every member can afford to do this.

In addition to staff and resource constraints, the overall political situation also poses a significant challenge for constituent relations. Israeli government-imposed closures on Palestinian areas impede travel between these areas. At times, Members are unable to attend Council sessions.

Rationale and Program Goals

This workshop followed previous work undertaken by NDI and the PLC, which included an assessment and report of the first two months of the Council, and a workshop held in May, 1996, on constitutional issues and the Basic Law. NDI's current work with

the Council, including this workshop, is part of an eighteen-month legislative development project that is funded by the United States Agency for International Development. NDI's program is designed around a series of workshops led by international participants on different components of legislative development, including the role of committees, plenary procedures, legislative-executive relations and constituent relations. For these workshops, comparative legislative materials in Arabic are distributed to Council members.

In addition to the workshop series, two study missions have been organized for select groups of PLC members to visit other transitional legislatures to meet with MPs and to see sessions first-hand. To supplement these activities, NDI disseminates materials in Arabic, and provides on-going consultations with Council members, including requests for information about legislative issues in comparative contexts.

The goal of the workshop on constituent relations was to bring together a select group of legislators from other countries with PLC members to discuss the various facets of constituent relations, to show that there are many methods and tactics available to develop effective relations with the public, even with significant resource shortages. An additional goal was to impart the notion to members of the need to work both individually and collectively as legislators, as well as with the executive, to address concerns and solve problems of their constituents.

To facilitate discussion and present models from other legislatures, international participants from Canada, Ireland and South Africa were invited to the workshop. They were: Steve Ashton, Member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly (Canada), Michael Creed, Member of the Irish Parliament, and Mohammed Enver Surty, Member of the South African Parliament. Myrna Phillips, Director of NDI's program with the Council, served as chairperson of the workshop.

The workshop also featured presentations by PLC members Sabah Ta'mari and Marwan Barghuthi, both of whom have developed effective constituent relations, as recognized by their colleagues. They shared with the group some of the components of their work, including the organization of regular town hall meetings, computer tracking of constituent complaints, conducting demographic surveys of their constituencies, as well as working with the Executive on policy issues arising from constituent complaints.

The agenda for the workshop on constituent relations was organized to cover the following questions:

- What practices can be introduced to PLC Members to forge more positive and constructive links between those members and the public?
- How can the constituents best be served by their elected representatives, who have significant resource (money, time, political) constraints?
- How can members distinguish between individual constituent complaints

and issues requiring a change in [public] policy?

The program began with PLC members sharing their experiences regarding constituent relations, in order to put the issues into context. PLC members expressed frustration with lack of adequate time and resources to effectively handle constituent concerns, as well as with the difficulty of sharing constituent offices with members of different political affiliation. Other issues raised included the lack of media coverage of Council, and individual member activities; and the absence of clearly defined relations with the executive, including institutionalized mechanisms for information-sharing and transparency. In addition, members noted frustration that they will never be able to fulfill the heightened expectations of the people, nor solve many of the complaints that fall outside their jurisdiction (e.g. settlements, closures).

Summary of Workshop Discussions and Results

The internationals shared with members strategies to foster effective constituent relations, even with limited resources. These ideas included: communication through newspapers, press releases, leaflets, individual member newsletters, and sending excerpts from important speeches to interested groups of constituents. The internationals stressed the importance of borrowing and pooling resources with other members, as well as lobbying the legislature to allocate more resources to members.

The internationals also emphasized the importance of using public legislative hearings as a tool for fostering relations with constituents, as they represent opportunities for members to both share information with, and receive input from, interested constituents.

In addition to these techniques, many of which can be implemented at low cost, the internationals also spoke of the importance of balancing among member's legislative and constituent responsibilities, and personal time. Devoting one day a work, or on a bi-weekly basis, for example, to constituency work, will help members schedule their other time more effectively. The internationals also emphasized that it is often as important to spend time in the constituent office, as it is to attend an important community event (e.g. a wedding of a big family) or visit constituents' homes. They cautioned, however, that since constituent work is an ongoing process, and there are always problems to solve, and events to attend, it is important for the member to have a grasp of time management and to set priorities.

Another issue discussed at length is how members can work most effectively in a multi-member constituency, where members are of differing political affiliation. PLC members expressed frustration that citizens often go to different members with the same complaint (because members do not always share information with each other). This is exacerbated, according to members, by a lack of clarity regarding the policies of the

executive, so often clear answers cannot be given to constituents.

With regard to the concern regarding multi-member constituencies where the members of different political stripes must share a general district office, PLC members discussed with the internationals the idea of each member receiving an individual allowance from the Council for constituent relations. That would allow members individual constituent offices, or pool resources with other members of the same political affiliation. The internationals supported this suggestion, as they noted that in their own experiences, sharing offices with people of different political affiliations would never be considered.

NDI is thankful to all those who participated in the workshop, and is hopeful that this report will be beneficial to the development of effective, responsive and accountable constituent relations between members of Palestinian Legislative Council and their constituents.

CONCLUSION

As PLC members are still developing strategies to bolster relations with their constituents, they noted that the workshop represented an important and useful opportunity to exchange information and experiences with other parliamentarians who faced many of the same challenges – scarce resources, lack of time, conflicts with the executive over policy issues, political differences – when they developed strategies for serving their constituents.

One theme that was very clear throughout the discussions was that while there are certain responsibilities every elected official has in terms of representing their constituents, there are a variety of strategies that can be employed to strengthen these relations, and many of these can be undertaken with few resources. In any case, however, it is important for members to have well-trained staff who can assist and support them in responding to constituents.

One of the suggestions raised by several PLC members is to give each PLC member a constituency allowance, with which they can either open an individual office or pool resources with other members from the same political party. Given the apparent difficulties inherent in having members from different political parties share an office, this is an idea that the international participants and PLC members alike agreed should be considered for the future.

WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS

Saturday, October 25, 1997

Myrna Phillips,
Director, Palestinian Legislative Council Project:

I would like to welcome you all today. You have told us that Constituency Relations is an important issue to you, so, we have brought three international guests to discuss this issue. The title of this workshop is "Constituency Relations: A Two-Way Street." We thought we would start by giving you an opportunity to present the issues to our internationals you consider to be the main challenges before they speak. What are your major challenges in working with the constituents? I would like to introduce our international guests:

- Mr. Enver Surty, Member of Parliament from South Africa, a member of the National Council of Provinces and of the African National Congress;
 - Mr. Michael Creed, Member of Parliament from Ireland and;
 - Mr. Steve Ashton, Member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly - Canada.
- And now, I will open the floor to you.

PLC Member (MPLC): The main problems in developing constituent relations include:

- limited time;
- limited period I can spend in my constituency because organizing meetings of the PLC takes up a lot of time.

We spend four to five days a week outside of the constituency, so the direct relationship with the constituents is limited. The second problem is that constituents focus on personal problems and judge the PLC member by how s/he can solve these problems. The PLC is not an employment office. The third problem is that the people are frustrated with the authority. Our jurisdiction as PLC members is limited; thus, the question is what can elected PLC members do for the public with respect to the malfunctioning of the executive and the security forces, and the overall need for money?

MPLC:

I am a member from Gaza. The Gaza constituency is large with a great number of voters, it faces a lot of problems with respect to different neighborhoods. The PLC member has limited time to devote to constituents. We also find that the MPLC can not reach out to his/her constituency. He cannot carry out activities because the means are not available to all the PLC members. The third problem is that the member can not address the Israeli policies and closures. Moreover, the socio-economic problems that result from this limit incoming investment. So, the personal requests of constituents are numerous and members find difficulties in meeting the needs of people. Finally, the media is not readily available. Members cannot put forth views in the media as the media only focus on formal issues. In

general, the local media does not give adequate room for any opposition voice.

MPLC:

I come from one of the poorest, most overcrowded regions in Gaza Strip. The Palestinians face suffering because of the Israeli policies. The socio-economic conditions are worsening and there is an inability to establish financial institutions, so we face many problems. The PLC constituent offices have turned into employment offices. Also, there is a lack of infrastructure and overall underdevelopment. So, people come to the PLC members with problems of basic needs, as well as with problems regarding the peace process, closure and the immobility. The Members are prevented by the Israelis from attending meetings and meeting with their constituents.

MPLC:

The problem we face is that the constituents do not understand the role of the PLC. There is confusion about the role of the municipalities, the PLC, etc. In Mid-Gaza, for example, there are big infrastructure gaps and people expect the PLC to solve this. Also, the lack of access to media services. Thirdly, we face a problem with the corruption in the Executive Authority.

MPLC:

I want to thank NDI and our guests/friends. We are here as parliamentarians and we have a unique situation. We are trying to build democratic institutions. Regarding building the PLC as a democratic institution, there is the problem with the Israelis but we should not find excuses. We should study new legislation and demand more accountability of the Executive. The main task for us is to set our house in order. In addition, we need to conduct baseline surveys in our constituencies to understand the problems.

MPLC:

I would like to thank NDI and guests. I want to focus on four issues:

- One problem we face in all constituencies is ambiguity regarding the role of the PLC members and the role of the Executive. The constituents want the MPs to play an executive role and this causes problems.
- The PLC's relations with the Executive until now are not characterized by complementarity. The Executive ignores the problems raised by the PLC members.
- We work in conditions less than the ideal due to the political situation.
- In the PLC, there are recommendations, resolutions and decisions, but we do not enforce them.

MPLC:

In general, my main point regarding the problems we face as members are the following: Before the election, people thought that many problems and difficulties would be solved

after the elections. The expectations were high. In the absence of precedent for the PLC, the relations between the constituents and the members are undefined. The people are confused about the difference between the PLC and the Executive and who is responsible for what.

Also, the problem of primarily having an oral history. Things are not written down and there is no follow-up, there is lack of documents, newsletters, use of press, etc. This is a major problem. Another problem is the ambiguity in policies of the Executive. The PA still has no authority of law and this creates problems in constituencies. If someone comes to me with a problem, I might not know how to respond because of ambiguity in policies.

Most PLC members arrived at the Council as part of a party but there are not clear parties in the Council and this poses a problem. With respect to constituency relations, there are no clear divisions in the constituency so every member represents everyone. We are used by the constituency to consolidate legislation. Another issue that I face in my constituency is that we are multi-partisan yet we work together. I think the PLC members need to emphasize that the PLC is not party work. In our office, there are no official documents (e.g. laws used by the Executive). The lack of written policies of Executive makes it virtually impossible to respond to complaint's requests from the public and hold the Executive accountable. The MP does most of the work and he needs to use more volunteers.

MPLC:

I do not want to repeat what my colleagues have said though I share their problems. I am from the largest district in the West Bank and the second largest overall (after Gaza). We face problems because everyone comes to every representative with their problems. If labor was distributed, it could help us achieve our work together. In our office, we used to fill out forms, and found it was the same people coming again to the office. So, my question is whether it is better to visit people than receive them in the office. I also used the Fateh Higher Committee offices in villages. The problem that some of our colleagues mentioned is that the people come with private issues and see us as responsible for dealing with them. Also, with respect to staff, even if there is qualified staff, there are cultural expectations that the member (not the staff) should respond (matter of respect). This adds burden on members.

Also, Hebron is large. In addition, we, as Fateh PLC members, heighten the expectations of the people. Perhaps it is harder to be the opposition. We try, as Fateh, to go to ministers and solve the problems. Hebron is a wide geographic area, occupation, people presenting problems to all members, but even with all of these issues, there can be progress. People want basic problems solved (e.g. unemployment, roads) and do not care about the Basic Law. The concerns of the constituents can be put on the agenda of the relevant ministry. Maybe grouping the complaints by policy (e.g. health, education), not by region, would be better.

MPLC:

The people in the villages wake up early to work in the Green Line, come into the office at all times with their complaints and concerns. We are all in need of good concepts. We as PLC members understand what we are facing: for one, the public misperception of the PLC members. I do not agree with this view. We need to be fair to the public as long as this situation continues. We should not be unfair to the public. Why did we choose to be PLC members in the first place. Maybe it was we as PLC members who had misconceptions. We as PLC members cannot work by conventional methods. Also, we moved from the stage of revolution to the PA. Intellectuals say this is different but I think it helps us. There were principles, concepts developed under the PLO revolutionary period that makes our job easier (than for returnees). I think I am lucky to have lived through this.

With respect to the performance of the PLC members, we face similar problems in Bethlehem as those expressed by my colleague, with respect to the office versus field work. As for working with the Executive, it is the work of the PLC member to interact with the Executive. There are issues regarding personal qualifications, being able to work in offices and in the field. I believe that many citizens would be appreciative of this flexibility.

Ms. Phillips:

Thank you. We will have more time in the afternoon to further discuss this. Our first guest is Mr. Steve Ashton who will discuss how he moved from a close election victory to making his constituency, Thompson, a solid one for the New Democratic Party [NDP]. Also, he is the Opposition House Leader in the legislature of Manitoba, he has been elected five times. I would like to welcome my friend and former colleague.

**Mr. Steve Ashton,
Member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba:**

After hearing, seeing your constituencies, I want you to see where I come from [Video tape about Ashton's constituency, Thompson, shown].

In the few days I've been here, I wanted to let you know, I have seen Palestine on the road to freedom. But, nothing can compare to trying to develop a democratic institutions under occupation. One of the eight communities I represent has no roads, I can only get there with an airplane. The ministries are in the capital and Thompson is eight hours away from the capital. Unemployment in some places reaches up to 90 percent, and some areas lack power and water systems.

I decided personally to focus on the constituency, although now I do work heavily with the legislature. I would like to share some ideas, many of the specifics of which would not work here, but the principles will.

When I first got elected, there was no constituency office or staff, and I was given \$1,000 [constituency expenses] annually as an MP. I had to invent ways to get things done, do things on my own. My constituency was dilapidated. People think of Canada as a developed country. But in many regions, it is primitive. You must find a balance between servicing the people and spending too much money. I want to mention cynicism towards democracy in Manitoba. People tell me I cannot get things done. I tell them I will try. Sometimes people do not thank me until the next elections. My attitude is to try my best. It is a challenge in democracies to keep people motivated. People take these freedoms for granted.

I titled my presentation today "Communication" because that is what the crux of constituency relations is about. People phone me at 11:00 p.m., come to my house. In the aboriginal communities, it is a sign of disrespect to interrupt, people talk for hours, which means that it takes longer to get things done.

Communication:

I find any way to communicate: newspapers, leaflets, calendars of activities, etc. in order to remind people who their representative is. Make sure people can reach you if they need to. When I was first elected, what I realized is that people do not usually see their representative again until elections.

I make a point of going into my office for not more than a couple of hours.

- 1) I go visit people in their homes. I do not ask people for their problems. I ask them what their concerns are. Ninety percent of the problems are something I cannot solve.
- 2) Written versus oral culture. I try to write everything. Letting someone know in writing that I am addressing their concerns is important, even if it is just a short paragraph. I write back to people.
- 3) I hold office hours in Thompson. This separates people who are willing to contact staff for the details and then touch base with me briefly. I also publicize my office hours, so people know when they can see me.
- 4) I meet with the community as much as possible in meetings.
- 5) I make my own newsletter for my constituents. Our party has a newspaper. I also do a newsletter for each community so they know what I am doing specifically for them.
- 6) Surveys. I survey everyone, all the villages, using the high school graduates to conduct the survey. Not just about the problems but concerns. It is very effective, and in villages where people do not read, I do it orally.
- 7) I provide newsletters to trade unions (interest groups).
- 8) In our legislature, only opening sessions are recorded, so I record other sessions, send the topics out. Publicize when you raise people's concerns on their behalf.
- 9) Media. I send out press releases. If they are not published, I give them to constituents. I tell them to complain to the papers. If they do not use the press release, I publish it in

my party's paper or my newsletter.

I want to stress the importance of resources. I borrow resources, pressure the legislature to get more resources.

- 1) There are too many places to visit so get volunteers to visit the places you cannot visit.
- 2) Letters are expensive to mail, volunteers deliver letters.
- 3) I didn't have an office for seven years, so I would borrow space. It is good not to have a fancy office.
- 4) I often attend meetings where I do not speak, just listen.
- 5) I borrow a photocopy machine from unions, etc. People were glad to donate "in kind" support.
- 6) I ask interest groups for lists of people.

I do not send the entire transcript of sessions; rather I will send the index. We built resources over time, now, I have a part time office-person and a small office. I am quite frankly encouraged at the work you do given the circumstances you face.

Ms. Phillips:

I will open the floor for discussion.

MPLC:

The situation might be vastly different here. We represent a national legislature, not just a provincial one. Citizens see us as responsible for everything. The citizen might come to the Members and not everyone is responsible for that issue.

Some council members devote much time to the legislature itself. I also believe your experience is quite different. We go to the constituency offices once a month. The nature of the work makes it difficult to have set office hours. It is probably better if we had our own offices rather than shared ones. Voluntary work is important and members have support. The staff in the shared offices are not for individual members.

There is no sovereignty of law, no standards, no criteria. Who do you help, support? Is data accurate? Is the person looking for a job deserving of employment? There are no guidelines. We should not blame the constituency, it is our burden.

Mr. Ashton:

Canadian provinces have sovereignty over health care, education, infrastructure – very decentralized. In terms of our committee, we used to sit five days a week, but now we meet for four days so we can also work in our individual districts.

We used to have multi member constituencies. The fault is never with the constituents. It is difficult to deliver results, but people will understand if you are trying. Communication

is crucial, since it makes people realize the work you have done.

MPLC:

Thank you for the information Mr. Ashton. You have explained important tips for strengthening the constituency relations. Perhaps the conditions are different, as we are only partially independent. Our starting point is resource availability -- our citizens go to different members with the same problems and each member gives a different answer.

Ms. Phillips knows about the differences. As my colleague mentioned, people even contact Members outside of their own district. We spend 80 percent of our time on official legislative business, and this is not enough.

Mr. Surty,

Member of the National Council Of Provinces in South Africa:

I respect the situation here, much like the struggle in South Africa. There are two key issues. The first is national -- the political aspirations must be raised. In working with the constituency, you are dealing mostly with the national issues. Peoples' quality of life is a major issue. The third difficulty is the situation of the legislation. It takes major time to scrutinize draft bills. How do you have time to deal with the national aspirations, official legislature business and people's needs?

Within three years, we passed 200 bills in South Africa. That changed the content and form of the government. We passed a constitution that was transparent, involving many people in its drafting. However, for this process to succeed, we had to work towards improving lives.

How do you work effectively in the constituency given these problems? The only way to do it is to allocate specific time for constituency work, especially given distances between constituencies. There is also a time issue. The life of a parliamentarian in South Africa, the ANC is busy, working full time, with enormous responsibility. The notion of a commitment, and the need to recognize the needs of the people is important. We are aware of your challenges to suggest strategies, put issues in the right context.

MPLC:

I have some quick comments regarding Mr. Ashton's comments. He comes from an area which is similar to the area we have here in terms of needs. We face many problems regarding the media. While some Members get press coverage, there is no full coverage of the PLC on TV. Regarding our newspapers, they aren't professional or big enough to handle the PLC's activities. The Members need to contact the press themselves to get coverage.

The issues you raised with respect to time constraints are very important. Some PLC

members are very active in the constituencies but not in the legislature and vice versa. Some Members are active in both or inactive in both. Maybe the least active has a better chance in being reelected. I think we share similar experiences as South Africa. We consider the ANC a twin of our struggle and we have a lot to learn. How can we be connected to constituents? I understand that we have more than what Mr. Ashton has (offices, computers, cars) and we have a lot of privileges. We have a problem though in achieving work in the PLC, as we only meet 18 hours per month. I do not think we are a legislature that works. I am very active in my constituency -- visit refugee camps, schools, etc. My priority is to serve members of the Fateh party. These are the people who come to me, they are my natural constituency. As this area is small, we can travel in short periods of time.

Mr. Ashton:

I come from an area where party is really strong. Party discipline is strong, and limits what I can say in the legislature. The communication is the key with the Executive. Also, some issues are across party lines. I also want to mention South Africa as a relevant model, probably the most relevant.

What you have achieved so far with respect to the establishment of institutions is remarkable. I am very impressed with what you are doing.

MPLC:

Regarding what Mr. Ashton said with respect to communication, I completely agree with him. Many of us thought of developing newsletters, calendars, etc. but there are a number of constraints. I wish the problem was the distance, but in fact, closures are a huge obstacle. Gaza has become a separate country for us. The closure of Gaza equals a siege. PLC members have a VIP status [to ease travel], but we do not want to be perceived as privileged. Regarding our opposition, it is different here because it is outside of the system of this institution. The opposition here wants to present an image, corrupt image of the PLC which poses a big obstacle to members vis-a-vis their constituents. We, as PLC members, are always complaining and this makes constituents pessimistic as well. It is our job as members to come up with solutions. The relations between the PLC members varies and this also affects our work with the constituents.

MPLC:

In our context, political allegiances have a big impact on constituent relations. The opposition, moreover, is potentially strong. The problems will repeat themselves unless we address them. The means of communications with the constituents are difficult and people visit non official offices more than official ones. In this respect, methods of informal communication are important. In addition, PLC sessions need to be broadcast on TV. In addition, the PLC, as my colleague said, should meet for a longer time.

MPLC:

The communications between the constituents and the members can be unique for each situation but the objectives should be clear. If reelection is the goal for some and building democracy for another, the methods will be different.

MPLC:

Let us focus on the topic, not just all of our concerns -- funding, staff are other subjects. Let us focus on constituency relations, and the relationship between the Council and the people as the whole. There are differences in the experiences presented. I cannot face a constituent who asks me what I have done about closure and settlements or about a bill I have passed. There are two levels of relations. The member-constituents and the PLC-public.

Ms. Phillips:

I will ask Mr. Ashton to summarize.

Mr. Ashton:

This discussion has been tremendous. I am learning a great deal, and would like to mention one thing from a personal perspective. I think a balance should exist between the goal of getting reelected and the broader goals. There is a saying in English: "think globally, act locally." I believe in the rights of the Palestinians. There is no problem between representing your values and your constituents. The conditions of Aboriginal people in Canada is similar to refugees here. I cannot do as much as my party can but I can represent them. When I help one person, I am contributing to the big picture, building one road helps build the state. I commend your efforts, it is exciting for me. Thank you.

Mr. Surty:

How do you get the people to understand your limitations as a legislature? Many legislators are limited in their power. Why cannot you disseminate the information without traveling? I think you can, and I would like to see these issues raised.

Should communication be oral or written? A new discipline must emerge that involves more formal communication. The dynamic of communication is important for people's understanding of the legislature's limitations. In South Africa, we had provinces with contradictory laws. You must make your constituents understand the barriers so they appreciate your efforts. In the limited time of your efforts, understand the capacity you have to create a good government.

Ms. Phillips:

I would like to introduce Mr. Creed from the Republic of Ireland. He brings to us the experience of working in a multi-member constituency.

**Mr. Michael Creed,
Member of the Irish Parliament:**

Thank you very much. I am very pleased to be here. There is probably no international experience that matches yours, but I implore you to stay on track because the achievements will be great.

Historically, the political situation is somewhat familiar. I understand the words peace process, negotiations, etc. The title of this workshop also applies to those sorts of international exchanges and I hope the international community begins to recognize your plight. I have been asked to deal with three items: staffing, funding and multi member constituencies. I think that perhaps the greatest problem is that you cannot fulfill all of the public's expectations.

I was first elected in 1989, and have never had resources for constituency relations. I drew on the infrastructure of my party at first to develop outreach in my constituency. It has taken eight years of my parliamentary life to develop constituency relations and seventy years of the independence in Ireland. The adequate resources I received for constituency outreach was achieved through lobbying within parties to get those resources.

No individual feels comfortable making demands especially when the constituents' problems with resources far exceed yours as the member. Please consider solving these problems collectively, rather than in isolation. You must be unapologetic. It is also a service to the executive. The better you are in conveying the needs of your community, the better the executive knows your communities' needs.

In Ireland, we have up to five Members in a district. The common good is improving the lot of your district, but there is an element of competition. The objective is to seek reelection, but you can still work together constructively.

Casework: How do you divide your time between the parliament and constituent casework? You must provide adequate time to listen to your constituents. Casework is essential to being well-informed about your people.

Saturday - Monday are days I devote to constituency work. It is very labor-intensive, but I find it very fulfilling. I work with the farming community and I believe I am a better representative because of the structured time with the constituents I have established. We organize hearings, and find groups that represent my community, which can address committees in Parliament to insure their needs are heard. We also organize hearings with the public interest groups. This serves a need because if the individuals and the groups feel they are not being served, they will turn to undemocratic methods.

In areas where we do not have jurisdiction, we have the moral authority to articulate and amplify the needs of our constituents. The settlements and the closures outside your legislative framework and mandate can be publicized by you. This will diffuse the discontent, but more importantly will bring the matter to authorities who do have

decision-making abilities. Casework: types of problems we face include: housing, unemployment, etc. Some problems aren't just individual ones; therefore, they become policy issues.

Multi member constituencies: if someone comes to me, and I have the capacity to solve the problem, I will handle it myself, but there are also collective policy issues for which we work together. For example, issues that come up in public meetings, might require a policy initiative from one or more members.

Mr. Surty:

While there are more constraints for you than in South Africa, one similarity is the mass democratic movement here during the Intifada (similar to South Africa). During this time in South Africa, we developed five core values:

- 1) any valuable government should be people-centered;
- 2) the political/legislative process must be people-centered. Consulting, interacting with people needs to occur at the grassroots level;
- 3) transparency is essential in our work to inform the public of our activities;
- 4) part of the nation-building process is recognizing the diversity (social, economic, political);
- 5) peace and stability are necessary ingredients for economic and social development.

I was a negotiating member in the constitution, drafting process, Bill of Rights. Our Bill of Rights is based on human dignity, equality, etc. The Bill of Rights must represent values and aspirations of the people. A consensus was ultimately achieved. This progress which I described is a broad outline of constituency work. But before I begin on these topics, I should first give background.

South Africa has nine provinces; I come from the North West province which is the size of Israel and Palestine together. We have a system of proportional representation. I represent the entire North West province which is inhabited by three million people. Given that our country is so huge, we found it necessary to ensure that in the legislative process, people are engaged. We have a bicameral assembly; the National Assembly is directly elected, and the NCOP (National Council of Provinces) is elected by provinces.

The NCOP has both national and provincial powers. When we embark on legislative process, we use hearings. On a given issue, committees would contact NOGS, civic groups, etc., and this is important to know how people feel, what is important to the people. As our constituencies are so large, we have to strategize to handle issues.

The resources we have for the constituent issues are limited (equivalent to NIS 2000 per month). Therefore, we grouped together other members of the same party to pool resources. People from the same party have similar goals. In my constituency office, there

are national and provincial Members.

Because we have a calendar and set aside certain weeks for constituent work, we know how much time is allocated for constituencies. A lot of field work is involved in our relations with the constituents. It is important to utilize already-existent structures. When we go to constituencies, we usually go in a group with MPs, ministers, local officials for these meetings and people are informed, notified about these meetings through written or door-to-door notices.

Our office is in an urban area and there is always a member present. The MPs visit door-to-door, organize meetings, all types of strategies, especially the "people's forums" at least once per month to inform the people about the activities of the government. At those forums, local and national politicians are involved. Policy formation can come from casework in content of your struggle now, and the conditions you face with respect to limited jurisdiction. You can do this in two ways:

- 1) motions, i.e., putting the independence of judiciary bill on the table, getting the media involved.
- 2) the Basic Law. Stet drafting our Bill of Rights, there were two million submissions of suggestion from the public. This represented a very transparent process and there is an opportunity for you to do the same.

It is important to start discussing issues with constituents and seeking advice from the international community. The International Parliamentary Union is a good forum. Seeking this type of advice (internationally) also informs the world of your plight, situation, and restrictions.

MPLC:

As Michael mentioned, the limitations we face are legal. As legislators, we did not behave as common people, and were not active on a grassroots level. We have seen that it is good to be detained and mistreated to gain support among citizens.

However, we embody the importance of Palestinians because we are mistreated and helpless. But we also cannot get too involved in settlement issues. The Israeli occupation does not just threaten our land, but obstructs the democratic growth of our society. I enjoyed your presentations because they confirm the unity of mankind for freedom and democracy. These are common objectives that we all share. We cannot become engulfed in parliamentary and technical issues. Our duty is to combat occupation.

MPLC:

In the presentations made by Michael and Enver, the issue of local organizations (NOGS) was raised. Are you dealing with these bodies in all areas of legislation or just in areas of their interest?

Mr. Creed:

I invited the representative groups who were most informed and affected by the legislation. I invite active members of these groups who are from my constituency. The public you represent need you to articulate their issues, and this is part of your responsibility. The results will not be immediately tangible but you must keep trying.

Mr. Surty:

There is a recognition of your limitations as a legislature, but you must create a framework to govern your society.

The basic law includes:

- 1) democracy;
- 2) human rights;
- 3) civil society;
- 4) separation of powers.

This indicates that the society reflects law and order. Within the confines of your limitations, you can still aspire to bring about change. As for NOGS, we have national, provincial, and local government. We have ten local governments represented in the national government (Council of Provinces). It does not make sense to talk about overwhelming issues but you must try.

MPLC:

Our rights, as Palestinians, are continually violated, and even laws that we approve are not respected. Michael, is the budget of the constituencies independent or is it their right to discuss the national budget?

Mr. Creed:

I engage my constituency in budgetary debate. I also arrange hearings on a parliamentary level between my constituents and the members. Issues that only my constituency face are handled locally.

Mr. Surty:

In terms of local government budgets, there is no infrastructure, clinics, schools, etc., people are unfamiliar with this type of planning. There must be an integrated plan. What are the costs of these jobs? Publicizing this controls people's expectations. Councils in local government must consult with the community. This gives us accountability.

MPLC:

Our members face limited funding sources. What are other means to fund constituency work? Each constituency office has at least five Members [in fact, some have fewer], who have different party affiliations. Some are connected to the Executive and are more

powerful than others.

MPLC:

Is there an issue on which you pressured the Executive by using constituent pressure?

Mr. Creed:

On the question of constituency offices and fund-raising, I agree full-heartedly that sharing an office, particularly with people of different political parties, is very difficult. When I started in 1989, I had no assistance, now I have my own office. The most desirable situation is to have individual offices, though a committee in Parliament on Parliamentary affairs should deal with funding of constituent offices.

Members, unapologetically, have to work to gather resources and can do this collectively through your Council Affairs Committee. Prior to state assistance, I would ask in the community for assistance (e.g. community groups).

Mr. Ashton:

There is no parallel to the Palestinian situation. I want to address some of the specific questions regarding putting pressure on the government.

- 1) when my party was in the government, I wanted to get an extension of my school, I brought together the minister, other officials, etc. the minister directed the department to build the school;
- 2) when I was in opposition, the road situation in my district was very bad. What did we do?
 - petitioned;
 - raised the issue in the question period;
 - used the media – e.g. "the government is ignoring our road situation."

There are different ways to handle the issue of funding. We have 23 MLAs (members of the legislative assembly) in the same party. We pool resources and put it into caucus. Members who want to be independent can receive funds individually through our equivalent of the CAC (Council Affairs Committee), which let us know how much money we have each year. We also have individual and party affiliations. My suggestion is to give the CAC a mandate to create a legislative budget for members and parties.

MPLC:

We do not have budgets for the individual members.

Mr. Ashton:

This is what I was talking about. People do not know how resources are, or should be, allocated.

MPLC:

Mr. Ashton, what are the communication methods with the government and opposition.

Mr. Ashton:

When your party is the government, the pressure is internal. There is the legislative party caucus in which you must agree with your party, come to a consensus. In the opposition, you can achieve change. Leaders do not want opposition to be successful but you can use the public opinion to your advantage. The resources to a member must not change according to power – everyone must have the same salary, etc.

In the Parliamentary debate, the government members have inside power but the opposition has a great voice to protest. It is easier to be in opposition but more gratifying to get things done in government.

There is cynicism that politicians are involved in power and glamour, but in reality their hours are spent improving things.

MPLC:

You mentioned that you gave a six-hour speech. Is the opposition viewed positively when this is done?

Mr. Ashton:

I gave a six-hour speech because 70 percent of Manitobans disagreed with the sale of the telephone service, but the government agreed to sell. We opposed this and felt that we needed to reflect the interest/passion of the people. The government always does things outside the will of the people. The legislature must keep the government on track.

MPLC:

In Canada, representatives receive stipends, one of the major problems we face is unemployment. A lot of people do not want to work. How would you compare the situation in Palestine versus Canada, because in Canada, the government gets a lot of money, whereas our PA does not have a lot of revenues (outside of foreign aid)?

Mr. Ashton:

The programs are important and they take a long time to develop (e.g. health care took ten years in Canada – something that the US has been unable yet to achieve.) In Palestine, people need political and economic democracy. The people take this for granted and international community has to play a more committed role. In South Africa, the international community was important to freedom movements in terms of raising awareness.

MPLC:

Some of my comments are aimed at letting our guests benefit as much as we do regarding

economic democracy. We, PLC members, must emphasize education. Sometimes we have to stand up against our constituents to tell them what is right, even if it angers them. This is an integral part of our work.

MPLC:

I have small questions:

- 1) We get many social invitations from constituents. How do you choose which events to attend?
- 2) Do all letters issued by the constituent office need to be signed by the member?

Mr. Ashton:

I have a problem because I used to sign all my letters but there are now times when it is impossible. Now, I always sign personal letters but staff sign some too.

Regarding events, this is difficult. Weddings are very important but so are other smaller things (opening of an office for example) and I cannot attend all. I have to prioritize. National holidays, weddings, social events, etc. are very important.

Mr. Creed:

I try to sign most things. Sometimes the secretary does. The invitations are the yardstick, I use to decide on invitations of the level of exposure I would likely get. This may sound cynical but in a highly competitive environment, this is important. Some social events (e.g. retirement party of political party worker) are very important. But time must be reserved for your own family too.

Mr. Surty:

It depends on the content of the letter – if it is an invitation or an informal request, the staff can respond, but on a complex issue, I will always sign and generally write this letter. Also, the letter has to be well-written so the capacity of your staff is important.

Regarding the functions of an MP, there are two issues:

- social duty,
- political duty.

It is important to balance the work, maintain good social relationships but there are political duties too.

Ms. Phillips:

I used to look at the invitations and divide between general provincial issues versus specific issues and would definitely go to the social events of groups that supported our party such as labor unions, women's groups, etc. I always put constituency events before

provincial events.

I also want to talk about the qualifications of the staff, and the importance of having people trained and trustworthy which is particularly important in the PLC district offices where staff is shared. How they deal with casework, public relations, etc. is very important.

I think you have a very unique situation in that respect and I hope we can spend time on this tomorrow. I was in the legislature when the Legislative Management Commission was developed and also participated as a chairperson when I was Speaker. During these meetings, we decided all of the details of funding constituency offices, as well as the operating rules (e.g. using legislative not party letterhead). All of these details were determined in this committee (money for furniture, staff, etc.) which is similar to your CAC. When I was the Speaker, the MPs had to submit bills and I had to sign them so... there was oversight and transparency.

MPLC:

Ms. Phillips, as a member, who did you represent?

Ms. Phillips:

I represented an inner-city constituency with people wealthy and poor, very mixed, aboriginal, immigrants, single parents, etc. I didn't have to travel far between the Parliament and to my constituency (they were in the same area).

I agree that voters tend to be fickle in cities. I originally come from a farming community that votes the same party, always. We had a member from our party that represented a constituency since 1942, he lost one term only (four years), with forty years of service. It was a transient area but people were connected to their member. He would give out leaflets, even in the coldest weather. Mr. Ashton did the same, four seasons a year, visiting constituents.

I lost the election because political winds were changing, but I served my constituents. In the end, pension or not, if you have accomplished things for your constituents, you have served them well. I also enjoyed being a Speaker, upholding the laws of the legislature.

Mr. Surty:

In South Africa, the rural communities must be visited, although it is difficult. Radio, TV are helping tremendously. You cannot assume how people will vote, so constant communication is critical.

MPLC:

Time management is very difficult. While this is an important workshop, there are other things occurring at the same time. There are many things we must attend. Modern

communication and staff do not exist here, which adds a burden to the individual member.

MPLC:

We must communicate with our constituency. They do not call our offices. I speak for the disabled, and went to a presentation but cannot spend all my time on this issue. There are protests all the time, they do not coordinate with me. I do not want to be blackmailed by my constituents.

MPLC:

Can you publish the resolutions of your legislature without formal permission?

Mr. Ashton:

Everything in the legislature is public knowledge. The Hansard (written record) contains everything. There are no restrictions on what I produce. I can distribute a bill and ask people what they think. You must publicize everything possible. In Canada, the Hansard is on the Internet, (even though no one reads it!). However, summarized information is more digestible. Use the Council notes if available. If the government produces something good, I will publicize this.

MPLC:

How do you convey votes on legislation?

Mr. Ashton:

People are entitled to know how you vote and who attends the meetings, the plenary, the committees, etc. Also, people should be able to find out your legislative allowance, how you spend the money.

MPLC:

In terms of voting on important issues, like women's rights, is it the constituents' right to know how you vote? Is it not a necessity that votes should be taken by name?

Mr. Ashton:

Yes, of course. If people elect you on a platform, they should know if you are following it.

Mr. Surty:

It depends. Sometimes we vote by party, not by name; but the plenary is open to the public, so people can see for themselves.

Ms. Phillips:

In Canada, even if we do not have roll call vote, and it is a general vote, it is assumed that the government will vote a certain way. Even on a general vote, that is not by name, a member can then request a recorded vote. I find it disturbing how you vote. No one knows what the consensus is. There is no recorded vote. Then it goes to the committee,

they do not know how members in plenary voted on certain amendments.

Sunday, October 27, 1997

Ms. Phillips:

Today, we have presentations regarding constituency work from:

Mr. Marwan Barghuthi who has a shared constituency office in Ramallah; and
Mr. Salah Ta'mari, who works in one private and one shared constituent office in Bethlehem.

They are going to share their experiences regarding their constituency work. It is important to gain the perspective of some people who are trying to work here on constituency relations. I would like to welcome Mr. Marwan Barghuthi to discuss his constituency work with you.

**Mr. Barghuthi,
Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council:**

I share an office with four members who belong to the same party as I (Fateh). I do not think members with different political affiliation should be together. Seventy-five percent of my time is in the Fateh office and 25 percent is in the Ramallah PLC office.

It depends on the member, how he wants to work, prioritize. There are three main areas in which to work: in the Council, in the committees and in the field. We feel these areas are prioritized differently by different members. Some play no role in any of these areas.

I believe because of the interest in politics here, there are three areas in which the PLC Members work: politics, legislation, and public service. Work as a PLC member includes:

1. political issues, holding executive accountable;
2. working with constituents;
3. drafting and passing legislation.

My constituency work is in Ramallah. I cannot just give time in Ramallah because of my work in Fateh [as the Secretary General of the party]. First, I attend to people in Fateh, the prisoners' families, martyrs'; many of the former prisoners are looking for jobs.

The general public visits I conduct include about 81 villages and refugee camps. There are individual problems. They present their issues. I also meet with NOGS, academics, professors, political parties and the opposition. We share comments on legislation, activities, and learn their positions on issues.

I work and meet with the Fateh committee in each village. I also go to public meetings

with village councils as well as with women's organizations, youth clubs, etc. I have visited 64 out of the 81 villages in Ramallah so far, and have held meetings there. I do not believe in meeting people in the constituency office. I spend time during the day in the Fateh office and I organize meetings, research.

Some of my colleagues do not believe in going out to the field, but I think we must go to the people. People do not differentiate between members, ministers, government, Fateh, etc. Through these meetings in the past one and one half years, there have been three issues in my constituency. Over 74 percent of complaints related to the areas: 1) confiscation of lands; 2) employment and closure; 3) and services to villages and camps - schools, roads, etc. But no one talks of the Basic Law, the constitution.

Academic people discuss the Basic Law because they do not have the more basic concerns like water. The most important bill for people is the Civil Service Law. Many people are employed by the government and I must work for the will of the people. I listen to people's suggestions, they respect the Council, criticize the cars. Perhaps they are right.

What about the follow up to these meetings? The President, public institutions? There are human rights concern issues. I submitted 183 cases in the first year requesting health care treatment for constituents.

The second issue of concern is schools, especially for girls in the country. There is little education in the rural areas. People are not totally illiterate but do not go beyond the fifth grade. I am concerned with this. The Ministry of Education is prioritizing female education but we must understand this to follow it up with appropriate action and legislation.

We follow up these issues regularly. I use the plenary sessions to raise the issues to Members; also in the corridors during the sessions. The PLC meetings are useful to get papers signed for people's entry into hospitals. I spend my time at the Fateh office and visit people in the field. I also attend special occasions to meet with people. It is also good to cooperate with organizations like PECDAR, the donor relations organizations. Sometimes, emergency programs for workers are introduced that some Members do not follow up. I believe that we can achieve things. We are successfully pursuing PECDAR programs. Each member represents the people. My constituency is owed these services.

There are activities with women's organizations, from whom I received many votes. I devote attention to the women's issues, the municipal committees, lobbying for appointment of women in local councils. In brief, I want to summarize. There are three axis: Council, committees and constituency. Being active in one-third is not sufficient, even two-thirds. The members must reach a balance. I do not accept absence from many of these things. As for the fields, the priority is the political one. Some Members do not follow up enough. This is not acceptable. Each member must also focus on and understand

legislation, even if they are not a member of the committee reviewing given law. The third is public issues, local councils issues, etc. Each member can work in constituencies. With visits, you find that some villages do not want anything. In the 1950s, under Jordanian rule, the representatives never visited us. Constituents can contact us to complain about the Executive. It makes up for the limitations of the PLC. The Legislative Council is not just a meeting hall.

Ms. Phillips:

Thank you. I will now ask Mr. Salah Ta'mari to speak.

**Mr. Ta'mari,
Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council:**

Thank you. What governs my work is two factors:

1. My background, former experience, e.g. working with student unions.
2. My membership in Fateh movement. I am one of the longest serving members (but I ran as an independent). Therefore, my incentives were more than those of other members.

I saw elections as a challenge. I am a returnee so I am like a tree that wants to extend its roots. During the previous elections, I wasn't able to organize a campaign -- I had to go directly to people. Results were excellent. I got twice as many votes as other candidates in my district. A cross-section of people voted for me which means I am responsible for everyone. I am a member of Fateh but I have no organic affiliation at the municipal level, only at a central level. I refer to committees for advice in my every day work.

I had to find a way to reach out to the electorate through meetings, outreach, etc. In my first months of the PLC, I began monthly open meetings with constituents, ministers, etc. The objectives of these meetings are:

1. To give an opportunity for citizens to meet with me.
2. To give an opportunity for citizens to meet with officials, ministers, security officials and express their opinions.
3. through these meetings, I focus on a cross-section of people, so everyone is aware of everyone's problems. We are a small district but there is socio-economic and ethnic diversity.

In my district, there are diverse cultures. So, how does each group view the concerns of other groups? These monthly discussions raise awareness of everyone's problems. The local media (three TV stations, radio) cover these meetings which creates a greater impact. Citizens, in these meetings, play a big role. I talk at these meetings about what the PLC is doing, bills, etc. I also use it as a forum for discussion of issues of importance to the constituency. Another goal relates to the historical place of the PLC -- I want to leave

a sound heritage for those who come after me.

That is why I track citizens' complaints, including their solutions, on the computer. A PLC member should devote 24 hours per day to this, and the process should be transparent. I hope I have succeeded in this along with my colleagues. In order not to drown myself in details, I will not spend a lot of time on an issue only important to one person.

[Ta'mari explained that he had developed surveys of the villages (e.g. number of schools, if there is water, electricity, etc.)] These surveys are also used by the Land and Settlements Committee and allow us to avoid extrapolation and base our work on tangible realities. We have also offered this survey to the Ministry of Local Government. We also developed forms for casework, complaints, solutions, etc. We take complaints seriously, I used to call the minister directly but now I double check the facts of the case.

Regarding the PLC constituency office, I didn't want to move offices, since I already had staff, volunteers. I think there are advantages and disadvantages to PLC district offices.

The disadvantages of official PLC district offices include:

1. It is seen as another part of the Executive;
2. What is the exact role of the staff and where is the dividing line between the member and his staff? (e.g. staff who think their role is to monitor the member). This is a big problem.
3. How can we avoid turning each of the constituency offices into a cover for less active Members in the district (e.g. if only two of the four members really work).

It is a moral dilemma -- is it the role of the Council to explain to the constituents that there are members who are disengaged in the district?

The advantages to separate offices are:

1. The public has access, can have a place they can go with their complaints. There is a difference in resources. Why does Hebron have better resources than we do?
2. The constituency office gives us little choice, as members, and there are staffing problems and shortages. If a staffer is inefficient, it is hard to get rid of him.

In Bethlehem, the land is a big issue, as we are most affected by settlement activities. Bethlehem has international status so I need to talk to international parliamentarians and need good staff to do so. Some problems I face in the district are with Council members. Sometimes we shed doubt on what we do and show shortcomings of other members. This, while destructive, is hard to avoid. Also, there are differing perceptions and lack of coordination among members.

I sometimes go to the constituency office for twelve hours per day, but we need harmony among the Members. We need to coordinate amongst ourselves -- there will be some competition between members but we cannot be petty. There is a need for a moral commitment. We have different experiences, backgrounds, but there are similarities.

Ms. Phillips:

Thank you very much. There are some points I would like to review. The shared offices with different political affiliations are very difficult. One of the things we should look at, the question of how is the money allocated for these offices; is it available to be used independently, or can Members choose to share offices, but with people of their party? I will open the floor to questions.

Mr. Ashton:

What Sabah and Marwan are doing can serve as models anywhere. The Council is truly part of a process for autonomy. You would be in the top ten percent of active members in Canada. I have some points. The first is the conflict of roles, when groups do not coordinate. The Basic Law is very important, but, of course, the many unemployed and hungry people have other concerns.

The surveying is amazing. You know what is occurring in your district. The public meetings are also very impressive. What kind of attendance occurs at the monthly meetings? What contact occurs through outreach? I too discover people who abuse my position -- do not always believe what you see.

Mr. Ta'mari:

Citizens find the monthly meetings, especially those living in distant villages, as an important invitation. About 100 people attend, I always hope no more than 700. Often, the ministers follow up on the monthly meetings at distant villages. At the last meeting, the handicapped people were visited by the Minister of Health. The last time a minister came to the village, he asked where the media was. People were surprised. They have grown more able to communicate with high level people though.

Mr. Barghuthi:

The degree of participation is good. Meetings conducted by members are attended by 25-40 people, representative of the public. Sometimes, I attend only Fateh meetings. There is criticism though that these meetings do not include women. There are other meetings (with different sectors: land owners, etc.). My economic understanding is limited but I believe forces are sometimes working against investments. People are taxed 78 percent of their income. After a meeting with the Minister of Finance, I discovered that the figures were not accurate. Sectoral meetings have 15-20 people, representing a much larger group.

Members have different focus. Some work in the mosques, some members work many

hours in the constituency. I respect members who work hard for the constituents, like getting roads, electricity, schools, etc. It is important to get ministers to see different areas. We had a meeting which was attended by 53 local council leaders and the Minister of Health.

It is important to visit all the groups to keep everyone happy. Sometimes it makes conservatives angry when I visit women's associations. If I conduct a meeting in a village that I am helping, it is not wrong to involve the media.

MPLC:

These frank discussions are very important. Listening to each other helps. In the PLC, the political situation is the core. In addition, we are working in a Legislative Council for the first time. We try to cover all three aspects of our duties. I think there should be central decision-making. I believe the offices should be equipped, but we should not have to spend too much time on this, we should not work as our own suppliers.

The new census will be very useful. We try to work collectively (all four members in my constituency,) to visit groups, schools, etc., so that the public will feel our collective effort. We cannot solve everything, but whatever we can do will help. Our remarks reflect the concern of all of us that we can never do enough. At times, we only have nice words to say, as do the ministers.

Perhaps, the collective offices create sensitivities among members. Some use them more. Staff help some more than others. We should have individual offices but without this, we should lobby the Executive Authority for more equal service.

MPLC:

The Council Affairs Committee is meeting at 3:00 p.m. tomorrow – we should talk about this issue.

MPLC:

I want to talk about the outreach to the people. This is an art in itself. We should exchange experiences, but there is no model. Dealing with the masses is dependent on the members and the constituencies. There are fixed principles, though. The presentations by Marwan and Sabah were very interesting. I am from the north, I cooperate with my colleague (two-member constituency). My constituents knock on my door at 6:00 a.m. and 12:00 midnight (because they are farmers). My house is my office. The other point is that politicians have their own style. Each one of us has his abilities. Another point, is that due to the nature of situation, time is limited, so, we intensify working hours as much as we can.

First, Hebron is a huge district, with many Members interacting. Other districts are small. In my constituency, I have a program, meeting people to pray on Friday in the villages. I

meet with the village councils, elders, etc. We visit the diwan and we discuss their concerns. I meet as many people as I can -- teachers, employees, etc. In the 30 villages in my constituency, I also use a questionnaire. In terms of events -- meetings, funerals, weddings, etc., I created a volunteer committee whose members attend on my behalf if I cannot go. In villages, there are activities, including protests of settlements, school openings, etc. I participate in visits from donors, ministers, like a local ambassador. I visit the villages during floods, seasonal events, the output of the harvest, but I also do my duty as a legislator. I spend time in the cities more because it is easier to get around.

We are surrounded by Israel and closures which create unemployment, I check the markets so I know exactly how much people suffer. I use the local media. I am on TV twice a month talking about the PLC, and people call in directly with questions and comments.

In the city, when there are numerous activities (i.e. sports events), I have to be there. I work with the governor who is a colleague. The main point is that constituency work is an art and is different for everyone.

MPLC:

I think that the experiences of Marwan and Sabah are pioneering ones. I want to talk about the joint committees. I think everyone uses the form that Sabah explained, there is a need for good staff.

In the joint offices, any deputy can work on any issue, following up each others' work, working collectively. There is a need for a central council in each district to coordinate this. In addition, the youth sector, clubs have been neglected. I have built four youth clubs in my district.

MPLC:

I think there are three topics that are now being discussed. We need to separate the issues (strategies, forms, content of the relations with the constituencies).

Most methods of the communication are not new, so there is no need to reinvent strategy; but content differs in what should be included. For example, I agree with Sabah and his methods -- field visits, public meetings, using media, personal visits, attending social functions, using volunteers, etc. All of these are good comprehensive strategies.

Regarding the constituency offices, I think the CAC should study a recommendation that I will suggest: set a budget for constituency work that allots money equally. If members want to group together they can, if they want individual offices, then they will have individual offices.

I would probably open my own office, assuming I would get the same funding as everyone

else.

MPLC:

There is already a budget.

MPLC:

Yes, there is a budget. My suggestion is that MP or group of MPs would submit official resources. This is my suggestion to the CAC.

In terms of the content of the relations with the constituents, I disagree with Marwan. I see two issues in this area:

1. The balance between the individual vs. the group problems: we cannot solve the health problems of the entire group. Marwan spoke of health and education, but he didn't mention how he appoints Fateh people to the Executive. This affects his transparency. The balance between general public concerns and individual ones is of critical importance; and,
2. The balance between the national and district concerns.

I appreciate my colleague's [PLC member, Salfit] ability to bring attention to his district, but this isn't a substitute for dedicating time to national concerns. We formed a committee of MPs from Ramallah, including the Ramallah governor and the local ministry. As a group, we summon members of the Executive and question them on policies. Therefore, there is a balance between the public and individual concerns.

Both Barghuthi and Ta'mari spoke about these relations only in one way (i.e. how constituents keep us busy, not how MPs keep constituents busy). I think part of MPs' work is not just to legislate, but to get citizens involved in this process. If I have a program, I want to get support, and sometimes it is a matter of telling them the policy.

In these two-way relations, there is a weakness we all share and that is strong oral culture, not dealing with written documents, newsletters, etc. For example, the office hours of the members of the Council are not published in the newspapers. People come to our house because of tradition, but we should not be imprisoned by that, we need to change people.

MPLC:

I said yesterday that sometimes we do more than our tasks as MC's, more than we need to do. The budget is one of the most important activities of the Council, particularly with oversight. The 1997 budget was based on "just distribution of projects and funds" focusing on urgent development areas. These are legislative decisions but are ignored.

The PLC does have a budget for the constituency offices divided into stationary, staff, etc. There is no equality of distribution because of differences in the size of the constituencies,

the number of members, etc. So, I support the suggestion to allocate money to each member. I hope that in our work as MC's, we set legal precedents as well as legislative ones on which democracy can be built in the future.

When we began, we opened offices similar to the post offices, the staff would collect the papers. These contacts have [complaints] because of visits to schools. I think this is the key, particularly meeting with teachers, hearing their problems and bringing them to the PLC. Also, important are visits to rural areas, meetings to mosques (very important in our community), and the same applies for sports clubs. There are many methods to communicate, but, the most important issue to people is security, psychological stability. Without this, everything falls apart.

I agree with Mr. Barghuthi but disagree regarding the Basic Law. I think it is very important – any grouping without a law is chaos.

I have a question. What is the percentage of those who visit your offices from the constituency?

Mr. Barghuthi:

There are guidelines for means of communications. The details are different. The difficulty is the equanimity towards all sectors, rather than giving more attention to one sector. I had to work within the Fateh movement because that's how I got elected. It is a base of support. Another colleague wants laws that do not provide equal opportunities.

My position in Fateh is more important than my position in the PLC. I got the least number/percentage votes from my movement. There were problems. I must serve these people. there is no difference between substance and means of communication. We cannot avoid our responsibilities. I have an example; a family came to me with a three-year old child who became blind from cancer -- I got a decision from the minister to transfer him to a new hospital. But the minister didn't have the authority, so I had to go to the President. I want to safeguard the Executive Authority but combat corruption in it. I am proud of my service to Fateh and the public.

Mr. Ta'mari:

Thank you. As I said, the concept of outreach is very important. It is a two way street. The constituency must be answerable to my demands. For example, for laws that are being discussed, I distribute copies of the bills and receive comments. I am helping change policy on development and construction and used input from the public to do this.

A very important hospital has been closed, and we want information about this. I see myself as a link to the committees. The exiled, the prisons were arenas for struggle, like our homeland is now. This objective is permanent for us and we will use all means. The establishment of an independent state is the permanent goal and our work in the PLC

isn't a job but a purpose in life.

In closing, I learned very much from my colleagues in other districts. The number of cases I have dealt with is about 1300 (recorded and documented).

Mr. Surty:

I feel very humbled today hearing what your constituency work entails. This is a big sense of pride. I think what would be appropriate to do here is to highlight certain areas and suggest mechanisms that can be put in place. There are certain tools members can use.

What has also emerged is that the primary functions of a member are political, legislative, and public service – working with constituents. A constituent must always be heard, even if their opinion isn't necessarily right. The integrated approach like what Sabah mentioned, is what we are doing in South Africa. For example, we conduct surveys to determine the priorities of the communities.

Also, important is the notion of a two-way exchange with all the stake holders in the process, as well as an integrated and cohesive approach. I am also pleased to have heard examples about women (52 percent of South Africa's population are women) and it maybe interesting to note that in the ANC, there is at least 30 percent female participation and this is essential. What Marwan said is at the heart of the legislative-executive relations. This interaction (formally and informally) is critical. The most important function is as a public servant which includes everything, not just being a legislator. Nelson Mandela told us he wants to interview each MP to review the constituency work he is doing (e.g. comparing surveys to realities).

The NOGS play an important role in developing democracy. They have skills that will facilitate the interaction with constituents by providing training. In South Africa, we interact with the NOGS on a very democratic basis.

Regarding what to do with a councilor who fails to fulfill his role, there are legislative rules, the party whip system in South Africa. The role of staff in this is very necessary. Reports evaluate the work of the members, by holding members accountable to his or her constituency. We have reports each month presented to the party chair.

The party caucus is another mechanism to ensure that members are fulfilling their responsibilities. In addition, institutions in Parliament and in party organization ensure this accountability. Another point is that members should not forget that they represent a party. For example, a member cannot refuse to work with a constituent for political reasons, but still there is responsibility to their party. These cannot be divorced from each other, and this is part of the work of the public member.

Regarding the supreme law, one should look at integrating the work of informing the

public to build the civil society. Sabah has provided us with useful tools, these reports are very useful and can be expanded. It is important to have a two-way focus in this process. I think one should pay attention to what another member was saying regarding the access need for a public service act. One must look at a domestic problems in a transparent and integrated way.

What has also become clear is the importance of the media (how to use it effectively, different methods.) The point is that MPS should be able to utilize print and electronic media to articulate the needs of the people.

What is clear from what Sabah has said was the two-way process of communication. You are developing a core of soldiers for your new battle. In the ANC, public servants (national and local) and people at the grassroots must be empowered, reflecting the notion of building for the future, building new politicians.

Regarding the constituency offices, the positives and negatives were raised; one negative was that they are seen as offices of the Executive. This can be overcome with educating the public, relationship between the staff. The negatives are not disadvantages, they are just challenges.

The positives are many, including the higher public access (notion of having an office in a central place). Also, I have to agree with the suggestion to reallocate funding for constituent work, giving each member a certain amount individually. I think this is a useful exercise and good for the democratic development.

Perhaps I will conclude with a note about accountability:
How do you as an MC create a perception that you are independent and the Executive is accountable to you? The budget process is probably the most important, and accountability must be ensured. In South Africa, before the budget is passed, there is a consultative process, including provincial leaders. This is important because South Africa, like you, has differences between areas. The notion of equitable distribution because of this consultative process before the budget is very important.

It has been a singular privilege for me to be here and I have conviction that you will be able to handle anything as legislators.

Mr. Creed:

Thank you. Mr. Surty provided a very comprehensive review. The three of us do not have prescriptive solution. There is no blueprint and experiences differ. There are four key principles at issue, tracing back to what the question of the role of a member. Legislation is important. At the Council level, a mechanism must ensure that members attend to legislative duties. The minimum obligations must be met. Sanctions must be used when members are not disciplined in this.

You have a high level of people involved in legislation, at the same time, people have high expectations. In the West, there is a good deal of apathy. It is likely tiresome to deal with constituents all the time. The second major role is being a public representative. It serves democracy to represent your constituents, even if you cannot fill their every request. There is a moral authority to do so. I would like to conclude by thanking NDI and the members. I learned a great deal and wish you success.

Mr. Ashton:

I would like to conclude with some themes: I am impressed with the recognition of democratic governance here. Western countries have apathy toward the government, even though we have the institutions.

Whether you pass a Basic Law or help an individual person, they are both worthy goals. I am also impressed by the respect for the differing opinions, critical and self critical analysis is important.

I see you representing the people. The casework is crucial. People wonder why they should serve constituents who worked for them. In every legislature, some people do not uphold their responsibilities. This detracts from the overall goal. Whatever you can do is working towards a solution. Everyone's demands are different. Our offices do not have to be opened, but the money is available. I am struck by the lack of collective resources. I think public relations are really lacking here. You need staff on this.

I have one person in my office but I work through my party. There is weakness in not writing things down. Protocols are useful, written response is very useful to then show to people.

MPLC:

What was said by Mr. Mr. Surty makes me want to speak again. It is critical for us as PLC members to distinguish between individual complaints and issues that require policy action (e.g. employment of ex-prisoners) issues that are of national policy concern must be handled appropriately.

Ms. Phillips:

What is being raised here is another issue -- the government policy -- issues from constituencies turned into legislation. I would like to make some observations:

Mr. Barghuthi:

I would like to thank everyone for the very important remarks made. We have a great collection of experience from this. I agree with my colleague that establishing institutions is very crucial, but we must also tend to individual cases. This is a duty of Members.

Ms. Phillips:

I would like to summarize points made and then create an action plan for you to adopt in

your constituency work.

1. Adopt and use your own style;
2. Arrange strategy for the meetings;
3. Develop research capacity (staff/volunteers), perhaps in committees;
4. Follow-up on casework. After interviewing people in detail, and then divide the follow-up work;
5. Educate constituents on democracy (civics) and highlight the unique role of the PLC, as a democratic institution in Palestine;
 6. role of the PLC and role of Members,
 7. teach people Parliamentary procedure for things like public meetings in order to influence future generations;
8. Interact with the Executive regardless of party ties. The Executive is often seen as the opposition here. Taking constituents' needs to the Executive must happen;
9. Balance national and local issues. The national issues are a good source of coalition-building among the PLC members;
10. Use the public meetings as a forum for discussion (legislation, getting feedback while bills are being discussed.)

One point about staff – there are problems in shared offices as some staff are closer to some members than others. Standards, therefore, must exist. Candidates for staffing must be qualified. The parliamentary offices are not involved in casework in most countries (especially in the high positions such as the Speaker's office), so it is critical to have capable, organized staff working in your district offices.

MPLC:

How does this work?

Ms. Phillips:

1. People can call the party caucus leader and complain if the member is not handling the casework;
2. Money: find members in your party with whom to share offices, review the division/allocation of money;
3. Media, technology and oral communication -- use this technology. You can get to constituents via mail and E-mail -- mail legislation and put it on the Internet and if there are closures, constituents will still have access to information;
4. Take advantage of human resources.

Ms. Phillips:

Thank you very much, and good luck in your important task.

APPENDICES



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**CONSTITUENCY RELATIONS
"A TWO WAY STREET"
BETHLEHEM -- Nativity Hotel
October 25-26, 1997**

Saturday, October 25

10:00 NDI Welcome

Introduction and Overview -- Myrna Phillips, PLC Program Director

10:15 Opening Discussion: Outline of Challenges

-views of PLC Members

11:00 Presentation by Steven Ashton, Member of Legislature (Manitoba, Canada)

- communication/information
- socio-economic discrepancies between districts
- servicing from a distance

Discussion with PLC Members

12:30 Lunch

1:30 Presentation by Michael Creed, Member of Parliament (Ireland)

- staffing, funding
- multi member constituencies
- casework, individual and groups, legislative-executive interaction

Discussion with PLC Members

3:00 Break

3:15 Presentation by Enver Surty, Member of Parliament (South Africa)

- public meetings/hearings
- policy formulation from casework

Discussion with PLC Members

6:00 Adjourn

7:00 Dinner at the Sababa Restaurant (across from the Bethlehem Hotel)

Sunday, October 26, 1997

9:00 Presentation by PLC Members -- local strategies and methods of constituency work

Marwan Barghuthi

Salah Ta'mari

10:30 Break

10:45 Discussion with PLC Members

12:00 Lunch

1:00 Issues and Solutions:

shared offices

shared constituents

funding (salaries, equipment, supplies)

active vs non-active members

personal vs policy issues

developing policy issues with colleagues

other issues

3:00 Summaries

3:30 Adjourn

INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES

The Honorable Steven John Ashton

Mr. Ashton was first elected to the Manitoba Legislative Assembly in 1981, and re-elected in 1986, 1988, 1990 and 1995. Mr. Ashton served as Government Whip in 1981-1982, as legislative Assistant to the Minister of Labor from 1982 to 1985, and as Caucus Chair in 1986. Mr. Ashton is a sessional lecturer at Inter Universities North in Manitoba and was elected President of the University of Manitoba Students' Union in 1978-79. Holding advanced degrees in both economics and political affairs, Mr. Ashton has served as Opposition House Leader in the Government of Manitoba from 1989 to the present.

The Honorable Michael Creed

Mr. Creed has served in public office in Ireland since 1989, when he was first elected to Dail. He served as Fine Gael Spokesperson on Health between 1989 and 1993, and then as Fine Gael Spokesperson on Youth and Sport from 1993 until 1997. During this same time, from 1993 to 1997, Mr. Creed also served as Chairman of the Fine Gael Parliamentary Party Committee on Enterprise and Economic Strategy, and was Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Small Business and Services from 1994 to 1997. Mr. Creed has been a member of the Co-opted Cork County Council since March of 1985. Formerly a farmer by profession and holding an advanced degree in Legal Studies, Mr. Creed has spent much of the last decade as a full-time public representative in Ireland.

The Honorable Mohammed Enver Surty Surty is a Senator in the African National Congress, in which he serves as the Parliamentary Whip in the North-West Province. Mr. Surty serves on the Justice, Environmental Affairs, and Tourism Committees in the legislature, and is an alternate member of the Water and Forestry Committee. Mr. Surty played a key role in drafting the South Africa Constitution, including being responsible for negotiating and coordinating all submissions to the Bill of Rights on behalf of the ANC. He is also currently assisting in the development of the Rules and Procedures for the National Council of Provinces (the Second House of Parliament). Mr. Surty is an attorney by training.



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The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. The Institute works with courageous democrats who are struggling to promote peaceful political reform. It establishes partnerships with political leaders who have begun the difficult task of building stable pluralistic institutions and creating better lives for their citizens.

Democracy depends on: legislatures that represent citizens and oversee the executive; independent judiciaries that safeguard the rule of law; political parties that are open and accountable; and elections in which voters freely choose their representatives in government. Acting as a catalyst for democratic development, NDI bolsters the institutions and processes that allow democracy to flourish.

Since 1983, NDI has compiled a remarkable record of achievement. Strictly nonpartisan, the Institute supports the efforts of democrats in every region of the world to:

Build Political and Civic Organizations: NDI helps build the stable, broad-based and well-organized institutions that form the foundation of civil society. Democracy depends on these mediating institutions, which link citizens to their government and to one another by providing avenues for participation in public policy.

Safeguard Elections: NDI is the world leader in election monitoring, having organized international delegations to monitor elections in dozens of countries worldwide, helping to ensure that polling results reflect the will of the people.

Promote Openness and Accountability: NDI responds to requests from leaders of government, parliament, political parties and civic groups seeking advice on matters from legislative procedures to constituent service to the balance of civil-military relations in a democracy. NDI works to build legislatures and local governments that are professional, accountable, open and responsive to their citizens.

International cooperation is key to promoting democracy effectively and efficiently. It also conveys a deeper message to new and emerging democracies that while autocracies are inherently isolated and fearful of the outside world, democracies can count on international allies and an active support system. Headquartered in Washington D.C., with field offices in 38 countries, NDI leverages the skills of its highly committed staff by enlisting volunteer experts from around the world, many of whom are veterans of democratic struggles in their own countries and share valuable perspectives on democratic development.

