

Part II: Further Findings

II) Mobilization and Preparation for the Debates According to Moderators

“We utilized many methods in inviting people lest we forget anyone. The Association of the Palestinian Community assumed the task of inviting people, for we, in Britain, have a single community association headed by myself as an elected chair. We invited everyone on the basis that they are part of the community. We don’t treat people as a political party, because there aren’t any clear institutions”,

(Moderator, United Kingdom)

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I) Mobilizing for the Debates

a. Preparation Meetings and Introductory Visits

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Some people appeared at almost every meeting ever since the project began. Initial meetings were held with the Project Director with the presence of the most active people. More information and clarification were provided until we received some written statements. This project created a discussion and a dialogue between people. We faced some obstacles toward acceptance of project, perhaps logistical ones, i.e. obstacles that have to do with the geography and nature of the country, the long distance between cities, and coordinating the meetings and dates. (*Moderator, Sweden*)

The supervising team of the project in Syria decided to go through the planned steps, and to create more dialogue through holding discussion panels in which as many active people and teams in the Palestinian camps in Syria could participate. This was in order to discuss the project goals and the best methods to launch the project in a correct and scientific way in accordance with its mechanisms, goals, and methodology. The team work has indeed expanded to comprise a handful of groups working in the field of defending the Right of Return, such as the '48 Group to defend the Right of Return, the Federation of the Right of Return Committees, the Democratic Youth Federation, Bisan Club, the Women's Committee in Defence of the Right of Return, Al-Shaja'a Club, in addition to a number of intellectuals and active people in the field of defending the right of return.

The new work team devised an instructive plan to present the project. This plan started with a number of meetings and seminars to explain

the project dimensions and to raise questions. Unfortunately, we were rather surprised the day that followed the meeting [with groups opposed to the project], with the official decision prohibiting us from continuing the discussion of the project in Syria. After that, the project work team held a meeting to discuss the decision, and it was decided to freeze the work of the project until things were clarified and to wait for new developments that would allow the resumption of the work. (*Moderator, Syria*)

b. Dissemination and Explanation of the Project to the Community by Local activists

It is noticeable that there is no authority in Lebanon which can decide to forbid such meetings. Therefore we faced no problems in holding these meetings. Yet the basic problem is the authority of Palestinian society itself; the authority of active powers who opposed the project as individuals. What I mean is that we can't implement the project in Lebanon without the main leading units in the existing fields in the camps. Therefore it mustn't be thought that we could easily launch the project without starting an intensive and extensive discussion and debates campaign with the officials in the political, social, union, and public fields in Lebanon refugee camps. We achieved some success in this area. Yet we faced another basic problem. This time it wasn't because of those who publicly oppose the project, for their influence is weak and they are unorganized in our social reality in camps. Instead, their conversations and discussions about the necessity of being cautious affected others, and so did the campaign aimed to raise questions about the project's goals. So the problem was not with those who oppose the project, but with those who were inclined to suspect the project. In fact, this made us develop

our working techniques. This was the first stage of the project in Lebanon. (*Moderator, Lebanon*)

As for existing structures, there were several attempts to establish structures and associations for the community, but they didn't last long. Four years ago, we managed to form a Palestinian community on a national Norwegian level, based in Oslo, and chaired by [Palestinian Activist in Norway]. It was effective until last year. One year and two months ago, a conference was held for the community, and a new leadership for the community was elected. Yet the community is not happy with it, because it has not done anything that would benefit the Palestinian community. As for the other structures on the Norwegian scene, there is the Right of Return committee, which is an alternate member in the Confederation of the Right of Return in Europe. The members of the administrative body have union, organizational, and national experience. They were selected as members because some of them lived for a long period with the Palestinian community, and some are among the founders of the Palestinian community in Norway. Civitas was first suggested at this conference.

[A senior Palestinian activist] gave a positive idea about the project which encouraged us, and what encouraged us to work and cooperate to achieve success for the project was the attendance of a member of the Civitas team to our networking conference last year, which was held in Denmark. He suggested a Confederation for the Right of Return in Europe, after that people were convinced that the project is positive and can promote all the Palestinian entities, sectors, and institutions, which work for the refugees' rights. We agreed that he should come and present the project, and host it in Norway as a preliminary visit so that he can personally explain it to the

Norwegian senior activists and coordinate with the Right of Return committees. The Civitas team member came to Norway, and we held a meeting for the members of the Palestinian senior activists who live in Norway. *(Moderator, Norway)*

The main difficulty we faced was the problem of accepting the project since it is financed by a foreign body- the European Union- and therefore suspicious. The President of the Community, who was recently elected, attacked the project although we invited him when the Civitas team came for the first time and he discussed it with us. There was also the problem of the wide area of the country and the difficulty of communicating with people, for you have to contact every person individually. Time was also a problem in terms of holding the qualitative and general meetings and booking the halls. And in order to explain the issue and the practices made, special bulletins were distributed by mail for all the relevant areas. We explained the project to many senior activists and community leaders in the main cities on the phone, and we made personal consultations. Nine preparatory meetings and four general meetings were held. *(Moderator, Norway)*

We faced some difficulties in Toronto. The Palestinian community is scattered in the big city. Its members are not connected with each other. But some people who've lived together for more than 20 years founded associations as a means of communication for the community. Those people were against the project and they were like a barrier separating us from the community. We call them the old guard. It is almost impossible to know the number. And we faced a difficulty in talking to the women. The women whom we were able to communicate with were less likely to participate in the project than the men who

were invited to the meetings. The youth are active in the Right of Return committee in Toronto, and the response from the older people was relatively cold because they were invited by young men. *(Moderator, Canada)*

In America, we had five preliminary meetings. A lot of questions were raised in the meetings in Washington and Michigan. I saw the importance of raising these questions, because the majority of the attendants don't know about the project and its goals. While organizing the public meetings the Civitas project was attacked furiously, not like during the preliminary meetings where only questions were posed. Some attendants who came to the preliminary meetings in New York and other areas approved of the Civitas project, and they were among those who first suggested to hold Civitas meetings and who made the preliminary meetings successful. But later, they didn't say that they support Civitas and they didn't show their approval, rather they remained silent. So the problem emerged of how to satisfy people. What happened later [after the preliminary meetings] was a sensitive issue. Civitas and the credibility, goals, and intentions of the project were attacked. They questioned the project's patriotism and said that it aims to cancel the Right of Return for the Palestinian refugees and to create alternatives to the PLO. They wondered why the European Union would support such a project, and said that the EU has never offered anything to support the right of the Palestinian refugees to return, so why would it suggest such a project now, and they questioned the intentions of the European Union. The point I want to say is that at the beginning of the preliminary meetings, all the preliminary meetings were positive I think. What I am saying here is a personal analysis and it is not necessarily 100% correct. This is my analysis,

and perhaps others would have another analysis [of what happened].

Maybe the problem emerged because there were people who didn't suggest or initiate the idea of the Civitas project, or the idea of finding out what the Palestinian communities abroad want or how to contact the others, and what are the structures they want to achieve communication. So maybe they opposed the project and tried to thwart its meetings because they hadn't thought of it themselves.

As for the statement of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine that was issued from Syria and which you must have heard of, I think that the refusal that came from Syria was under pressure from those who opposed the project in the United States after the Washington [preliminary] meeting. This was not at all expected. The people who live in America are a minority, and maybe two or three exercised pressures on Syria to issue a statement condemning Civitas. *(Moderator, USA)*

In Denmark we devised a work plan to make the project a success and to present it to the community, and hold meetings, along with communicating with the rest of the community members to tell them about the project and its goals. We created a small work team which was composed of three people. And we conducted a demographic survey of Denmark to locate the concentrations of the Palestinian community in Denmark and know where most of them live. We also distinguished large Palestinian areas from small ones.

According to this demographic survey, we devised a plan to hold eleven meetings. We decided that it was necessary to hold these eleven meetings, and we decided that if we have time we should hold secondary meetings for the community to inform it in a more extended

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manner about the project. The work areas were a little complicated, especially because some areas were near and others were far from where we live and work. We used e-mail to invite as many people in Denmark as we can, and we also used mobile messages and telephone calls.

We would go the nearby cities one day before the meeting date, or one week before the meeting to hold a preliminary meeting. We talked honestly and concisely about the project and its goals to the attendees, and we asked them to hold a public extended meeting for the community members in the city.

We prepared all the necessary papers in order not to face any problems. Even the invitational flyers for the public meeting would be made ready; with all that remained to fill in the name and the date in the mailings.

We didn't face problems in holding such meetings because there are a lot of associations and committees in Denmark. I want to say that they are small associations and clubs limited to a few of the community members and don't include all the community members in this or that city. You can see this all over the Denmark. We also didn't face any problems in terms of the meetings' places, for all the halls were all available to hold the meetings at the time we sought. We rented a hall just once, but the rest of the meetings were held in the community clubs and associations.

Many people mentioned the mosques. We also used the mosques and we used to go to the Friday prayer and ask the Imam to talk to the people for two minutes after the prayer to tell them about the project and its goals and to invite them to attend the Civitas meetings in the next day. We used this method in four big cities. We would go to the Friday prayer and after the prayer we would ask the Imam his permission to talk to the people about the project and to invite

them to attend the meeting the next day. The people responded positively, but we didn't go to certain political bodies. We went to the people, and we didn't care about Fateh or Hamas. This is not important in Denmark.

It wasn't important who dominates this association or that club, or to which political or organizational trend you are affiliated. We went to all the people and to all the categories which attended the meetings. What was important to us is that there are Palestinian gatherings for the Palestinian community, and we didn't care much about the background of the club or the political community. This is our way of work. *(Moderator, Denmark)*

We started the implementation of the project early. We held three meetings in July 2004 with the presence of our colleagues after the Cyprus consultation meeting last November [in 2004], and we devised a plan for holding more than 25 meetings differing in their size and type according to their aims. The plan was to be implemented in the gathering places of the Palestinian refugees. We were supposed to bring them to Amman. We applied to the Jordanian government to have its permission to implement this project, but we have not received an answer yet. Until now, two meetings were held with our efforts. We held two meetings, one for men and the other for women. Our approach for categorizing the meetings be they the five preliminary meetings in July, or the meetings held last month, depended on our direct relations with the Palestinian gatherings, not on the effective political powers in the Palestinian society. We haven't contacted Hamas or Fateh or any popular or democratic front. There were merely direct contacts between the study team and Palestinian society with its associations and with the neglected individuals in it. We hope to get the

permission to start implementing this ambitious plan which we devised several months ago. We don't expect to face trouble after the approval of the Jordanian government to implement the project as a result of our strategy which depends on direct relations with the refugees. *(Moderator, Jordan)*

I found out about the Civitas project during a conference in 2004 organized by an alternative centre in Haifa about the Palestinian immigrants and refugees. I met the Project Director who talked about the project and I agreed with her to embrace the project in the Netherlands. I talked several times on the phone with the Civitas team and we organized three preliminary meetings with some brothers in the Netherlands, one of the meetings was attended by the Project Director and the Project Coordinator. This was with the aim of organizing a large and extensive meeting for the community, where three questions we put in last November were to be discussed. We didn't face any problems or difficulties like those that our brothers faced in the other European countries. In the Netherlands, we have a group from Hamas and Fateh, but we decided not to ask any of them when organizing this meeting, because both fronts have no influence in the Palestinian community. Hamas prevails among the Turkish and Moroccan communities, and has a weak influence on the Palestinian one... Fateh is weak and insignificant and has no influence on the community. Therefore we decided to invite them for the meeting on the basis of having the choice to come or not. They came without objections and contributed in the discussion and asked the Project Director and the Project Coordinator some questions. *(Moderator, Netherlands)*

We utilized many methods in inviting people lest we forget anyone. The Association of the Palestinian Community assumed the task of inviting people, for we, in Britain, have a single community association headed by myself as an elected chair. We invited everyone on the basis that they are part of the community. We don't treat people as a political party, because there aren't any clear institutions, but I felt that they are trying to find excuses not to come, they didn't bother to invite people whom they know. I wish that they have done that, for we [in the APC] are known for having national credentials, and we wouldn't work on a suspicious project. To invite people, we used mail, website, e-mails, messages, and phones. The community members were not great in spreading the word. The problem does not lie in the institutions, but in the people themselves. We faced a problem in mobilizing for this project: there was no food, and this is the first thing people asked about! This doesn't mean that we had a small number of attendants; on the contrary, there were about 60 active people who are always on the front line. There is an important matter; there were women present, and also some from the upper classes of the Palestinian community. (*Moderator, United Kingdom*)

Gaza first heard about the project from some who criticized it, and some of them were concerned about the refugees. We met a group from those who were interested and we discussed all aspects of the project. A senior activist in the West Bank called us saying that they would like to implement the Civitas project in Gaza, and we said that it is a good idea. We invited the public and the activists and the refugees. There are some people in Gaza, the West Bank, or abroad who don't like anyone but themselves to speak about the refugees – and if they do talk, they talk about restructuring and

about betrayal. We are still obsessed with the idea of the leadership and the father figure. We held a meeting with people from the effective powers. The discussion was objective, and almost all of us had the same opinions, except for two of us. One of them raised the slogan "Islam is the solution", and that Israel should be attacked with missiles. The other gave a rhetorical speech and walked out of the meeting. (*Moderator, Gaza*)

c. Debates and Community Meetings

The work team in Lebanon chose to implement the maximum model, by holding extensive meetings and discussion panels in different regions, and to return again to hold more extensive second meetings.

We started the preparations, and advertised heavily and pushed towards discussions before holding the extensive meetings. In Lebanon, there are five main regions; each of them includes smaller gatherings. We started with the South, and an extensive public meeting attended by more than 225 participants was held. It included all the political powers, parties, youth and women unions, and the intellectual categories. This meeting broke both the actual and psychological barrier that could prevent people and all the parties in general - political, unions, youth and women - from participating, because the 250 people who came from al-Rashidieh camp to attend the meeting were representatives of the associations, unions and political powers, in addition to the popular committees. As a result, the first meeting, which was carefully and quietly prepared, was a great success. And it led to the success of the rest of the project's activities, since the project attained its legitimacy from the first meeting, through the representatives of the unions, popular committees and political powers. Even those powers which officially opposed the project were forced to

come and participate in these meetings because of its activity. We had our method, which was holding workshops about the project goals whenever we finished an extensive meeting in a certain region. These workshops addressed workers, women, and youth. We also held public meetings.

This method of holding workshops and meetings proved later to be a big success. Three workshops were held for these diverse groups and spheres. We did the same in Tripoli, where the general meeting was bigger and more extensive and attended by more people. The political groups, unions, and public, participation were far larger. The number of attendants was between 350-400 participants, such that we even faced a big problem in trying to end the discussion in the same meeting. This was followed by six workshops, and three more in Al-Beddawi camp, and in Nahr el-Bared camp. All the work techniques previously agreed upon were also approved in these meetings, in terms of the questions [to be asked at the meetings] and the classification of groups for the workshops, in addition to questioning the conclusions and re-discussing them again. All this was documented through video and by the minutes of the sessions.

After Tripoli, we held the same meetings in Baalbek itself as well as Baalbek [Wavel] camp. The general meeting was attended by about 120 people, and was followed by two discussion panels. Things went relatively well in Baalbek, where not only the Palestinian powers in Baalbek [Wave] camp were involved, but also those outside the camp, which are in the surrounding villages of the Baalbek region, within a range of nearly 45 km. There are Palestinian gatherings scattered in a number of small villages in Al-Beqaa area. This was the first meeting to include all the effective and active people who work in this wide area where many Palestinian people live.

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The work then shifted to Beirut. An extensive meeting was held in Burj el-Barajneh camp attended by about 70 people. Some preparatory and technical mistakes which related to the location of the meeting and contacts took place. It was supposed to be attended by at least 200 figures. These mistakes limited holding such extensive meetings. We were able to obtain this number of attendants through workshops that were later held in Burj Al-Barajneh and Mar Elias camp. These meetings went in the same direction as the ones outlined before, so it is needless to discuss them again.

The last region is Sidon. Following the general progress of the project, and the wide and dynamic response that the project launched, as well as its relations with the Palestinian society, we noticed that some centres and Palestinian political powers and organizations in Sidon region were preparing and waiting for such an extensive meeting to be held in order to attack the project. Hence it was decided not to hold an extensive meeting in Sidon, because the provocation level in Ein el-Hilweh camp resulted in physical fighting. That's why we decided that the small syndicate meetings could abort the provocation. This is why the extensive meeting in Sidon was cancelled, and was the reason behind moving towards holding workshops on women, students, and worker levels. These were good workshops in which a controlled, limited opposition participated. This means that those who came in the aim of spoiling this extensive meeting did not succeed in achieving their goal in this frame.

There is another thing. The institutions of the people with special needs asked for their own workshop to discuss the project. Of course, this was not planned in the framework, and the response was quick, where representatives from all such institutions attended the workshop. I think

that when we review the recorded video about this workshop, we will find it perhaps the most important one, with a specialized nature to discuss their problems, needs and demands, despite the fact that it wasn't equally taken into consideration like all the other workshops.

There were two ideas in the final stage: holding an extensive meeting upon completion of the project, or replacing it with an extensive workshop attended by two or three of the most active people from each meeting held in Lebanon. When carefully studying the status of the project, and the fieldwork carried out, it was thought to be easy to hold an extensive meeting attended by 400 Palestinians on Lebanon level. However, viewing it from the angle of any practical advantage that could be obtained; this would be a boring repetition of the four extended meetings previously held in the regions. Therefore we suggested nominating two or three people who attended the 22 workshops and syndicate meetings to participate in an extensive discussion panel with the aim of exchanging expertise and attitudes and concluding results from all these panels and meetings held in Lebanon. *(Moderator, Lebanon)*

There are many precautions you should take when implementing the project. Saudi Arabia is not the ideal country in which to implement such a project. First, you should have a clear permission. Second, how would women be involved in discussions in such a conservative society? Third, there is a gap as well as mistrust between the community and our Embassy for many reasons. Also a Palestinian may not go to the Palestinian Embassy if he has a Jordanian passport; he goes to the Jordanian Embassy, for he would be questioned if he went to the Palestinian Embassy if carrying a Jordanian passport.

In May, people travel for holidays. We made important preparations during this period. We went to the Embassy and got permission because it supervises the work of Al-Quds Open University, and we need to involve its professors and lecture rooms. We also contacted the popular committees chaired by [Royal Official]. People wanted to contact [highly respected senior Palestinian community member], rather than the Ambassador, because he is more friendly and useful. Four preliminary meetings were held in Dammam and Jeddah, and two were held in Riyadh with the objective of answering questions, and thus reassuring those who support the project. We were asked, why did the European Union finance the project? Why is there a need for civic committees with the presence of the PLO, and why it is being raised now? We concentrated our efforts on answering these questions. Some expressed their willingness to cooperate with the project, and some did not show up. All the questions were answered. Interests ranged between politics and other concerns. Among the political concerns was the issue of the Right of Return. In Jeddah the discussion focused on local concerns like the prevention of Palestinians from owning property, and prevention of girls from going to universities. *(Moderator, Saudi Arabia)*

The majority of the community lives in Montreal, Ottawa, Halifax and Vancouver. We held preliminary meetings with the Project Director and the relevant associations at the community level in Ottawa. We held several meetings in one day, among these were public meetings, women's meetings, men's meetings, and children's meetings (aged between 10-14 years old). In Montreal, they gathered a group of Palestinian asylum-seekers in Canada, most of them coming from the Lebanon camps. Women participated and they raised

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the issues that concern them. It was clear that everyone was eager and able to discuss, and they want to continue the work. (*Moderator, Canada*)

There are some effective existing civic structures in Sudan, for example a council for the Palestinian community. At first, there was some sort of balance in the council between different political frameworks, but then it turned almost completely towards being part of the Hamas movement. The Palestinian Students' Union and the Palestinian Women's Association also leans towards Hamas. In this way, political weight in the Palestinian community was for Hamas and for the Islamic trend in general. Because of this, I had to deal with these structures directly. Therefore I met with the Palestinian Ambassador in Sudan, and I talked with Hamas's representative, Fateh's representative, and a representative of the Islamic Jihad in Sudan. I also met with some independent bodies who are respected in the community, and who have influence among the community, albeit to a lesser extent than the other sides.

The only opposition I faced in the beginning of my work in the project was from Hamas. Before finishing my discussion with the Hamas representative, he interrupted me saying: "As our grandmothers say, you can't be happy with something that comes from the West." I told him that I don't need him to remind me of what grandmothers say, I need real participation from him in an official way. I asked him to give me an answer after a thoughtful reflection and after consultation with the political office of Hamas, but he kept postponing the answer. The rest of the organizations participated immediately after they agreed on the project. Some independents, respected ones, also opposed the project but they said that they won't hinder it or incite people against it, although they have their reservations.

Unfortunately, the project continued to be postponed while awaiting Hamas' final opinion – for more than two months in the first instance. Then, I met with them, with the presence of the members of the political office in Sudan, and they agreed not to oppose the project, and said that they will participate like the other Palestinian powers since they are part of the national Palestinian powers in Sudan.

After setting the meetings dates--we were planning to hold a meeting for the students, and another for the women, and a third for the community in general- we were surprised to find out that the Hamas representative in Sudan broke the agreement and told us that he would personally try to thwart the project if he can, and he would get back to us after we discussed with him more.

We established a good relationship with the Palestinian Ambassador in Sudan who approved the project, especially after knowing that Abu Mazen had agreed as PLO chairman. But he also personally didn't have any objection. So, we discovered that the Hamas representative broke the agreement and we were forced to postpone the meetings again, until he answered us. The members of the political office of Hamas came and we held another meeting with them, which lasted for two hours, in which we discussed the project, and its articles and goals. The Hamas representative attended the meeting, but he didn't speak at all.

The result of the meeting was that they agreed to work on it within the national context. A representative was then chosen to form a work team from the existing national Palestinian frameworks in Sudan to continue work on the project and to hold the meetings. Invitations were distributed and handed out to the existing structures and figures that currently represent

the community. More than forty invitations were distributed.

Also the embassy distributed lots of invitations to people. The Islamic Jihad movement and the General Union for Palestinian Students received these invitations. After distributing about forty invitations, the Hamas representative in Sudan asked for an additional 200 invitations to distribute, so I copied additional invitations. But two days before reserving the meeting hall, I was surprised to receive a phone call from Hamas representative telling me that something had happened and that he wanted to talk to me in this regard. And I was surprised that the 200 additional invitations that he asked for were not distributed, and he apologized saying that Hamas will not participate in the meetings dedicated to this project.

Of course the other Palestinian structures and powers and community follow him, because he promised to arrange the meeting to make the project meetings a success, and he said that a meeting for the community's council will be held to tell them about the project and its goals, and that a meeting for the General Union of Palestinian Students will also be held, and another one for the Women's Association to tell them about the project and its goals.

After the Hamas representative refused to participate, I started to study the issue to prove my case and challenge the excuses of the Hamas representative in Sudan. I did that among the community members, and the General Union of Palestinian Students and the Women's Association. I personally talked with the leadership of the General Union of Palestinian Students which refused at first, but approved principally later. But after the Hamas refusal, I was surprised to learn that the leadership of the Union started to postpone its approval, and then the Union's President refused to participate.

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As for the Association of Palestinian Women, after giving their approval, they told us that they won't participate just one day before the meeting's date, and after we reserved the meeting hall. This happened while we were discussing with them the details of transporting the women to the meeting hall, and taking them from their homes and returning them.

The Women's Association called us and apologized, and we knew that they took their instructions from the Hamas representative and its political office and preferred not to participate in the project, as did the Union [of Palestinian Students].

Worse still, on the morning of the meeting date, he [the Hamas representative] sent mobile messages inciting people to not participate in the project because it is "suspicious!"

I personally and quickly started to call some students and the leaders of the Palestinians student movement in Sudan, and eventually they provided us with some students, and we managed to gather 20-30 from the community members who represented all the categories in the community. Some embassy's employees, and people from Fateh, and some students attended the meeting. *(Moderator, Sudan)*.

As for the meeting that was held in Detroit, it was moderated by Hassan Nawash. He played an important role in supporting the Civitas project, and his attitude was positive, describing the project as a positive one which helps serve the issues of the Palestinian community and the refugees including the Right of Return, and he explained that it helped in creating the civic structures to enable the Palestinian community in America to communicate with its national representative, the PLO, and with the Palestinian communities in America, and between the communities and the

state governments in America and the concerned institutions that work for the refugees and the right of return.

We managed to hold a meeting in Detroit which was attended by 30-35 people. The meeting wasn't extensive, but I think that it was positive and very different from the meetings that were held before, because it seems that the people that attended the meeting were different, and they included Americans from Palestinian origin; their points of view were different, and we want to gather as many opinions as we can.

The important thing was that the political line remained constant. Everyone demanded the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their country and properties and everyone agreed with the basic axis which we consider very important as Palestinians and that we can't renounce whatever the price is. It is very important to hold another meeting in Detroit because if a meeting is held with the support of the mosque in Detroit, it will be attended by far more people than this first meeting. *(Moderator, USA)*

[Local Palestinian Activist], who lives in Chicago, played an effective role in holding the Civitas meetings and activities. She insisted on working despite the problems she faced. The problem we faced was that people did not tell us that they don't want this project or that they oppose it. The problem is that there are certain people who say to you that they will work with you to make Civitas meetings successful but in fact they don't perform any activities. Also, some of them are, as I previously mentioned, connected to the opposition in Washington from the Popular Front.

The results concluded by this meeting had not been addressed in any previous meetings. Some people presented what they want to do in Chicago and the way to communicate with all

the community members in Chicago and with the Palestinian communities in the United States. They talked about their fears after September 11th and how have fears gotten worse.

In America, the events of September 11th became a reality that was imposed on people, and on all the Palestinian communities in America. These events caused fear for everyone without exception, whether Palestinians, Arabs or Muslims in general. The events of September 11th created a new reality and conditions in America that are different than those lived before. *(Moderator, USA)*

In the 1990s, political activity, whether at the Greek level which supported the Palestinian cause, or the active Palestinian level, were greatly reduced. After the Oslo agreements, issues on the Palestinian scene in Greece were confused. Activists did not know what to do after the Oslo agreements. There had been always activities, but big differences emerged between the activists themselves, and also between the Palestinian community in Greece, and these differences were bigger than the previous political and national activities.

At this time, the Civitas project was presented to the Palestinian community in Greece. I heard about the Civitas project from the internet and from other people, and I was interested, so I called the Project Director and the Project Coordinator, and contact between us became constant in order to start working on the project in Greece. At first, the Project Coordinator wanted to come to Greece to explain the project's goals, and he came indeed. But before that, I discussed the project and paved the way. At first he talked with the Palestinian ambassador in Greece who didn't have any objections at all, on the contrary he encouraged the project and wanted to see the Project Director:

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So the Project Coordinator came and met with the Palestinian Ambassador and talked with the Palestinian community and met with them. The main activists in the Palestinian community in Greece approved of the Civitas project.

We held a [preliminary] meeting for the community, which was attended by representatives of the Palestinian parties and factions, and by the popular committees like the students and labour committees. It was also attended by Fateh, Hamas, the Popular Front, and the Democratic Front which had a distinct presence. After this meeting, those representatives of the unions, doctors, students and workers were supposed to tell the rest of the community members about the project. We gave them booklets issued by Civitas. What happened was that they tried to tell the people, but things did not work the way we want. We put great effort into the issue of holding the meetings and telling the community. Within the community, some supported the project and others opposed it. But those who opposed it did not incite people against the project and did not resist it. They were distributing articles that were written against the project by fax. But no one openly opposed the project.

Most of the organizations were happy with the project, and they attended the meetings and did not oppose it. The Popular and Democratic Fronts supported the project and attended the meetings. Therefore we held the first meetings, and an extensive meeting which was held for the first time for the community without having a factional goal or without being based on the call of a certain Palestinian party. Everyone said that it was the first time that all the people from all the trends gathered together without any political goals or differences; just sitting there and discussing things.

Attendants wanted to talk about the secondary

disagreements they have, and the disputes between the political organizations and parties. Others valued the meeting and expressed their wish to participate in the activities to support the project. Some criticized the project, but within logical limits, and there was no chaos.

Then some figures wanted to have a bigger role than just attending the meetings, so they formed a committee. They wanted to lecture people about the project and its goals. There was a discussion about the project and they told people that it is not what they think, and wanted to explain things to them. This was one of the problems we faced. People didn't understand that the project's goal is to listen to the refugees and ordinary people, and all the social categories of the refugees. We didn't want to listen only to those who are active on the political or union level, or only those who form the factions, unions, or parties as if they already know all the problems of the community members.

Our idea was not to limit the meetings on the parties and unions representatives or the political activists and leader, but to listen to everyone and to the public in order to know their needs and priorities.

We then called for the [public] meeting. There were people who wanted to come, but who didn't want to help or make any effort in telling the people or invite them to attend the Civitas meeting. But most of those who attended the second meeting of Civitas were activists, and the number of attendants was fairly good.

The first [syndicate] meeting of Civitas was for the youth and the activists who wanted to attend. In this meeting, they discussed their problems. The second meeting was for women; they were very excited and didn't expect people to feel such enthusiasm. They were very happy to attend and participate in the discussion. They suggested

mechanisms of communication and presented the needs and priorities of the community and of the refugees in *Al-Shatat*.

Women started to think what to do. And they wondered why they don't have Women's Committees. They said that it was the first time for them to meet in such numbers in Greece. They said that this meeting should have been held twenty years ago, and they were very happy.

Regardless of the project's goals, women wanted to form a Women's Committee on their own; some even suggested forming an independent one. They wanted this Committee to convey the issues of the Palestinian community and discuss its problems, in addition to devising methods of communication with the national representative, the PLO, and the Palestinian Authority. They agreed to form a Women's Committee in the community.

The third meeting was then held in Salonica where the community is very active and where the members bond more closely with each other. Perhaps because the city is smaller than the capital, Athens, people feel closer to each other; they always meet together.

A good discussion was held in this meeting. There was only one member from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Before the meetings had begun, he started to distribute an article to those attending about the Civitas project warning people from participating in it because it is suspicious and because it aims to manipulate the Right of Return and create alternatives for the PLO. When people came to the meeting hall, they were confused and afraid because of this article distributed by the Popular Front. During the meeting, people started to discuss all the dreadful points mentioned in the article. They said that the project wants to create alternatives for the PLO and that it opposes the right of the refugees to

Mobilization and Preparation for the Debates According to Moderators

2. Concerns and Priorities a. Relationships within the Community

return. The important thing is that as soon as the discussion about the project and its goals began, the discussion took a constructive turn, and fears began to vanish. By the end of the meeting, they offered a lot of suggestions. *(Moderator, Greece)*

There is one city, Vlaardingen, which contains 1500 Palestinians who know each other. The main seminar was held there under the patronage of the Network of the Palestine Return Committees. Before inviting them, we called the mayor and asked him to participate with us in inviting Palestinians so that they would not be afraid, and he agreed, and we put his name on the brochure, distributing thirty thousand brochures on every house in the name of the mayor and the committee. A large number of Palestinians, as well as between 50 to 80 Dutch guests attended the meeting, and more than two thirds of the city council, in addition to the Project Director and the Project Coordinator. *(Moderator, Netherlands)*

We demanded to incorporate the West Bank and Gaza in addition to the '48 territories in the projects' meetings if we are to look at the refugee problem as one indivisible issue, for we have the same cause and the same goal. Our demand was approved, and they agreed to hold the meetings. The West Bank is divided into three regions: the north, the centre, and the south. Gaza is divided into two regions: the south and the north. Five meetings were held in the West Bank and Gaza, and the Project Director was asked to hold meetings for certain people not for the masses, i.e. not public meetings. The focus was only on the political and union leadership, and the Right of Return committees, in addition to the Popular Committees in the camps. In Nablus, we held a meeting in Balata camp to which 22 members from the associations and institutions were invited. This

meeting was attended by 24 active people during which a very important dialogue took place. And despite the attitude of the Popular Front, the ideas discussed were positively received. Several [other] meetings were held in Balata Camp for the youth, children, women, and institutions, attended by sixty people. And we invited two people to talk about the project, one of them supported the project and the other opposed it. And we discussed with them in front of the attendants. The ideas and goals of the project were also discussed. Mr. Husam Khader [well-known political prisoner] sent a letter addressed to the Project Director. He was hoping from the Hadari prison to be among us, because he has participated in this issue from the beginning. *(Moderator, Nablus, Palestine)*

2. Concerns and Priorities

a. Relationships within the Community

In short, except for the problems concerning providing people with their daily living needs, we don't suffer from the problems which the Palestinian gatherings in other countries suffer from, and which were raised in the meetings, such as economic problems. Rather, the focus was on political issues, such as our legitimate representative, and the channels of communication with the host countries and with other Palestinian gatherings. The focus in general was on political issues and problems. Some of the discussions focused on the simple social problems of the community. These problems exist in all the European countries. In this community, there aren't many problems. *(Moderator, Sweden)*

A lot of effort was made based on personal relations between the community and the work team. The Right of Return is demanded by every Palestinian living abroad. The obstacles lie in the

problems and the slow pace of life. Even the Palestinian Ambassador complains of this issue. Only 20-30 people from Fateh would participate in celebrations. People are desperate. Palestinian villages are socially isolated, and there are no utilities, or schools, or a health centre in the village. The Kuwait Real Estate Company tried to take this area [the Palestinian Village in Sana'a], but it is illegal to re-build anything in the village or invest in it. We organized four meetings. The first was a syndicate meeting; the group consisted of 18 people. The second was a meeting for students. The third was a teachers' meeting and was held in Hamas headquarters. Bad weather was such an obstacle that even Hamas asked the Embassy to hold the meeting in its headquarters with the presence of the Palestinian Ambassador in the public meeting. People have a general impression that the Palestinian Embassy is a bad model of representing the Palestinians, and a place where nepotism and favouritism is exercised, in addition to missing documents. The new ambassador promised to solve all the problems and to build a health centre. The results [from the meeting] are: the opening of a dialogue channel for the first time between the residents and the Embassy. The discussion lasted for one hour, and it was clear and open. The ambassador revealed that there are Palestinians who invest their money in Yemeni institutions, while not investing in creating jobs for the members of the Palestinian community who are unemployed. There is also the problem of the lack of the work contracts between the teachers and the Yemeni government. Consequently when they finish their term, they don't get any compensation or pension like the other communities. In other countries, the embassy is requested to do that. The problems of the community are indeed bigger than its size. We formed a preliminary committee for the Palestinian community, and it wouldn't

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2. Concerns and Priorities b. Relationships with the PLO

be possible for us to do that were it not for the discussion with the community members. Second, there is the teacher's union which faces elections. The Palestinian community asked for an ID card from the United Nations. People are seeking solutions. Yemen granted travel documents that were considered suspicious by some people. (Moderator, Yemen)

I want to say that Civitas project is a chance for people to express themselves and their suffering, problems, needs and demands. They also expressed their problems between the Palestinian Embassy and the Palestinian community in Greece. What was noticeable was that there wasn't a certain factional attitude towards these problems. The problem was between the Embassy and the community members, and also at the level of relations between the community members themselves. There are concerns related to interests; everyone were concerned that his own group would not be brought into the light.

The Islamic trend in Greece didn't have any problems with the project and its goals; on the contrary, its members came to the meeting. But perhaps their conditions didn't allow them to attend the other meetings, and the conditions in Athens are not favourable and it is difficult to set a date in the desired time. We faced a time problem in arranging the meetings. The Islamic trend as well as all the other political trends was represented in the meetings that Civitas held. The active women from the Islamic, national, left and independent trends attended the womens' meetings. (Moderator, Greece)

There was also the issue of the second generation, who was born later. They are very important because they are like a bridge connecting the

Palestinians with the European nations, because they can deal with western society in a more active way, and present the Palestinian cause in a different manner. We, the first generation, are overwhelmed with emotions, while the second generation engages with logic and places human rights and international law as a base for discussions. This has its effect in extending the circle of support and understanding for the benefit of the Palestinian cause. These are the results of this meeting, and we haven't faced any criticism for Civitas project and its meetings. (Moderator, Netherlands)

The struggle to have a place in the executive committee in the PLO is still going on. What happened in the workshop, and the emphasis on communication and Resolution 194 is very important, for we are now being surrounded by the Popular Committees in Gaza and the West Bank. No one wants to work, and we are trying to activate the Department of Refugee Affairs in any possible way. We want to work and are trying to revive the issue. The budgets have not been released yet, and we are depending on our resources; we build centres instead of renting them and we are trying to be independent by recruiting volunteers. (Moderator, Gaza)

b. Relationships with the PLO

There are a lot of lessons that can be extracted from working in the Civitas project. But we think that the Palestinian scene needs reforming and a rebuilding of the PLO, along with its institutions, and those of the Palestinian National Movement in general, on real nationalist democratic terms. In addition, people [have to] participate in political life, while abandoning organizational tribalism; also, granting Palestinians in *Al-Shatat* the right to exercise their political, social, nationalist, and cultural activities without interfering in their lives

by the Palestinian political powers. In general, interacting and connecting the organizations of the Palestinian people wherever they exist in the world. The Civitas project unveiled many pressing needs and wants which were boldly articulated and stressed. The project also allowed Palestinian institutions to progress democratically among the refugees and controversially among the Palestinian political movement, in a way guaranteeing the unity of the Palestinian people in *Al-Shatat*, in order to achieve ratification of the project. (Moderator, Syria)

The communities demanded to play an active role in political decision-making and in designing the political map. (Moderator, Chicago)

There is lack of information about what has remained of the PLO's structures and who represents us in Canada. Among the issues that were discussed in the meeting were the Right of Return, reviving the PLO, clean elections for the National Council and to have a representative in the Council and establishing a national fund with clear and transparent accounts. There were also the issues of the unregistered refugees and the displaced persons in the territories of 1948 in Palestine. They demanded the removal of all the Palestinian factions from the list of terrorist groups, cut relations between Canada and Israel, and to form a higher education committee for the native inhabitants of North America, the Native Americans, and three meetings. (Moderator, Canada)

The office of the PLO, which is in Ottawa, did not have a positive role. The relationship between the Embassy and the community in Ottawa is low. The ambassador was against the project, and it was the first time for him to be involved in the community's affairs. (Moderator, Canada)

Mobilization and Preparation for the Debates According to Moderators

2. Concerns and Priorities b. Relationships with the PLO

We called the Palestinian Embassy in Denmark out of courtesy. One should call his Embassy first and tell it about the project, because it would be shameful to perform any activity without its knowledge, although I didn't need its help especially that I know that the communication between the community members in Denmark and the Palestinian embassy is nearly cut off. But after this project, the relationship between the Embassy and the community was a lot better; thanks to the Project Director; and to this project. The communication between the Palestinian embassy and the community in Denmark is a lot better now. Things worked out at the end. Frankly I was forced to show the community the letter of Abu Mazen, and the ambassador saw it, and the Embassy decided to be neither with nor against anyone, so that it won't call Abu Mazen saying that it opposes and create a problem. But the ambassador in Denmark understood the situation eventually and tried to help. *(Moderator, Denmark)*

Let's start with the situation in Iraq. During this period the situation is critical, as a result of the security threats that community members currently face. Therefore, although we would have liked to hold general extended meetings discussing the issue of Iraq, this was nearly impossible because of the security conditions. Consequently, the meetings were limited to some Palestinian activists in some of the Palestinian neighbourhoods. These meetings were distributed as follows: two meetings in the university, and five meetings in different neighbourhoods for the refugees living in Iraq. It should be mentioned that it wouldn't have been possible to hold these meetings without coordination with the Palestinian Embassy, which played a positive role in organizing these meetings and in contacting people to hold a meeting in the municipality

neighbourhoods. The issues discussed in the meetings focused on the problems the community suffers concerning the relationship with the PLO and the host country, and the relationship with international organizations. The role of the PLO was not praised in any meeting. Let's be realistic in wondering why this role seemed so bad and ineffectual. It is because after the sanctions were imposed on Iraq, the Palestinians became neglected and forgotten. The only channel of communication between the Palestinians and the PLO was through the Palestinian Ambassador. Therefore, this relationship is important and isn't established as it should be. The PLO was heavily criticized for its absence and for neglecting the conditions of the Palestinians, which are real, even in the days of the old regime....The Palestinians demanded through these meeting that the PLO should play an effective role in this context, and to create coordination between the leadership of the PLO and the leadership of the National Authority in their contacts with Iraq. There should be contact, whether they accept it or not, in order to ease the suffering of our people in Iraq because of the relationship with the host country....Some of the brothers demanded to create coordination between the PLO and the host country to organize this relationship. It is true that our number is small here, but that does not mean that we are to be cancelled from the map. *(Moderator, Iraq)*

The discussion focused on two points: the Right of Return, because it is a national issue, and people have this right. Second, the PLO, because it is absent from the scene, whether on the political and media levels, or in its relationship with the Palestinian community. The Palestinian delegation has not had a relationship with the Palestinian community for the past 10-15 years.

The PLO office has not invited any Palestinians to attend any seminar or to talk with them. 90-95% of Palestinians don't know the location of the PLO office except those who need something from the office. There isn't any type of political activity whether by the office manager or his staff. Fifteen years ago, there was some activity with the presence of [the previous Ambassador], but when he went, this activity stopped. I don't recall anyone from the PLO talking about the Palestinian community; even the media does not remember that there is an office to interview Palestinians. In terms of the community, the important issue for the community is having Palestinian civic bodies with democratic associations. This was the core of the discussion, whether in the preliminary meetings or the general one. *(Moderator, Netherlands)*

In Frankfurt, we held two meetings; the first failed because the administrative body for the Palestinian community didn't care for the invitation because those in it are lazy in this area. [Nonetheless], almost 40 people attended the meeting, and everyone said that the PLO is the legitimate representative and that they won't accept an alternative to it, and that the Right of Return is a sacred right that can't be renounced. But, of course, some demands were suggested one way or another; one of them was the possibility of helping establish a federation for Palestinian women, or helping in building bridges between the Palestinians abroad and the PLO, and working on activating the existing institutions or the Palestinian community and the PLO. Another demand was connecting the Palestinian communities in the host countries of Europe and America, excluding the countries surrounding Israel, to create some sort of coordination so that they can succeed in their mission. *(Moderator, Germany)*

Mobilization and Preparation for the Debates According to Moderators

2. Concerns and Priorities c. Host countries

The institutions of the PLO are dead; the question is how to revive them. Discussing this issue is very important. We realize the importance of the PLO's role, but its structures and its National Council must be activated. The articles and readings I received [against the project] were criticizing the PLO and the Authority rather than attacking the project. The PLO was attacked because it didn't assume its role properly in representing the people it should represent. The attack was from people who thought the project would discharge them from their positions, but the Right of Return belongs to us, and we are to decide if the PLO represents us or not. The project does not offer solutions or provide answers... The results that were concluded related to the role of the Legislative Council. For example, it didn't assume its duty in defending the Right of Return. The role of the Right of Return institutions is insignificant. The Right of Return committees became more like a service institution than a political one... They became concerned with helping the refugees and creating job opportunities for them. There are no pressures on the Authority to defend the Right of Return. The reliance was on the institutions' role. We must organize our efforts to educate the Palestinian citizen for make our institutions connect with Palestinian refugees in order to [help the refugees] communicate with the inside. (Moderator, Bethlehem, Palestine)

c. Host countries

Concerning organizing meetings, there were no obstacles. In the meetings, some mentioned the political struggle, and the absence of Hamas and other movements [in Iraq]. In Iraq, the only obstacle is the security situation that requires us to move in secret or cancel one or two of the meetings, or holding it in one of the brothers' houses. For example, a meeting was supposed to

be held in New Baghdad, but as a result of the security situation it was cancelled. (Moderator, Iraq)

When we first started the project, we tried to conduct a preliminary study in the camps, but we were prevented by the security. So we brought the camps to our office, and about 70-80 people came. Security services called us and asked us not to continue. After that, there came two governments, the governments of Al-Fayez and that of Badran, and three Prime Ministers and Royal Court Ministers and two Ministers for the Refugee Affairs department. We meet again with them [as they get appointed], but it is obvious that they don't want to give a final answer; they don't want to approve, and they don't want to refuse, so that they won't be considered against the project, but I think that failing to give an answer is an answer in itself. There was the idea of the Maximum Model in Jordan, because 40% of the refugees live in Jordan. We implemented the Minimum Model because it was too late to start the project as planned, that is to say 30-35 big and minor meetings, for the issue is very sensitive. (Moderator, Jordan)

We went to Egypt in the first half of September. Palestinians there have some privacy, because they have integrated to some extent into Egyptian society, and they are lost between 70 million Egyptians. In addition to this, there is no permission or governmental authorization to hold these meetings. We also faced constraints on freedom and people are scared of Egyptian Security, and they feel threatened from discussing their civic needs. There were four attempts to work in Egypt... Working in Egypt in this area is like sacrificing one's life, especially as everyone suspected and feared this issue. Even the Palestinian women who came from Egypt were

afraid to work on this issue. That's why I will not talk about things that I discussed in Egypt. Meetings shall be confidential without public invitations. (Moderator, Egypt)

d. Issues with Civitas and the European Union

People from all the cities where no meetings were held called us wanting to know about the project and its goals, because they heard the positive and negative things about it. They invited us to come to these cities to present the project; these cities were not on the list of the meetings' agenda. I am proud to say that we have a small information bank about the Palestinian communities, associations, clubs and federations in Denmark. We have an archive about the areas of Palestinians there. (Moderator, Denmark)

We have a popular coalition which connects anyone who works with refugees, and doesn't do anything for the refugees or those who seek to return. Let me say that the Popular Committees in Gaza and the West Bank forced the PLO and Abu Ammar to form a Department for Refugees' Affairs, in order to exert pressure on the Authority and its leaders. This was the reason to accuse us of working with Syria or Israel. We might have been arrested were it not for our personal relations. Those who questioned the project were pursuing personal interests, for they thought that the project would replace them. And what is taking place against the project consist of people who have nothing to do with the refugees issue; they are people who are 70 years old or older and they obey one person in just about everything. (Moderator, Gaza)

Mobilization and Preparation for the Debates According to Moderators

3. Assessing the Project as a Mechanism and its Results a. Assessment of Constraints

3. Assessing the Project as a Mechanism and its Results

a. Assessment of Constraints

The Palestinian community in Yemen is relatively small. There was the problem of belonging –Jordanian or Palestinian. Palestinians would go to the institutional meetings of the Jordanian community and would not come to the meetings of the Palestinian community, for it would be suspicious if he did. There are no general battles within the community, and if there are Palestinian political organizations, they are not effective, especially Fateh and Hamas. Also, the Palestinian Embassy can't be challenged, for all people have interests with it. Abu Mazen's letter was a great help when Fateh tried to give a negative picture about the project by distributing articles attacking the project, hence indirectly adopting this attitude with [initial] coordination from the Ambassador. And Abu Mazen's letter helped as I said. Hamas did not oppose nor take a negative attitude. The only precaution was the organizations; people dislike the idea of the PLO's alternative, they still think of it as a sacred organization, but there were no demands to activate it. *(Moderator, Yemen)*

The most important difficulties that we faced while trying to hold the project meetings was the fear felt by the members of the Palestinian community in Sudan on the issue of resettlement. I think that this fear pervaded in all reservations. They were wondering whether this project aims to create an alternative for the Right of Return and promote resettlement attempts or is it promoting the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their country and properties.

The second difficulty that we faced is the factional structures which dominate the Palestinian community in Sudan. This was a

problem for us because there was no real balance between the political organizations. In the past, Fateh movement was dominant among the Palestinian community, but in the last seven years this dominance turned in favor of Hamas and the Islamic trend in general.

Therefore, the imbalance between the Palestinian political powers among the Palestinian community was a big problem for us, Civitas team, because all the civic structures of the Palestinian community are affiliated to one political trend, which is Hamas.

The weak influence of the Palestinian Embassy among the Palestinian community was also a problem, because the Embassy can't organize the community. Rather, the Palestinian community for the past five years has felt disgust for the Palestinian Embassy. Some people promised to attend, but they didn't, and some promised to bring their wives, but they didn't. They lack political motivation within themselves and they are frustrated because of the embassy's attitude towards them; it doesn't offer them services, nor fulfil their demands. *(Moderator, Sudan)*

The price that the host or organizer of such an activity pays is criticisms and articles about him. But it is worth it, for he has a chance to meet the good people and feel that he is a Palestinian among others who think about Palestinian concerns, and who are willing to do anything for the Palestinian cause. The reason that prevented people to attend the meeting in large numbers is a clash of activities on that day. We felt that there should have been a committee to coordinate the work of the effective institutions and committees, but our brothers don't participate in them. There are fourteen institutions that meet every month to perform activities. Second, the Islamists performed an activity [that day] and attracted

many Palestinians and Arabs. Third, there was an administrative fault, for we were supposed to, as hosts, dedicate a special area for the kids to enable women to come with their children and participate. Fourth, the Palestinian community members lack the notion of participation. They loved the idea, but they didn't visualize how important their role is in sharing their ideas and communication mechanisms with the Palestinians in *Al-Shatat*. Fifth, there are at least 40 thousand Palestinians distributed in three categories, part of them came in the 1970s, and most of those were students and are now part of the British social structure, and another part are from the camps; and there are five thousand from Lebanon, but they face residency and documentation problems, so it is hard for them to be a part of any activity, although it is not impossible. The cultural background played an important role, as well, for they didn't realize the importance of being there. They may be an audience but not effective participants in the activity. *(Moderator, United Kingdom)*

b. Methods taken to Overcome Challenges

Finally, I can say that one of the most important reasons for the project's success is not only holding meetings and workshops, but also to work according [to project principles]. We were working on another project, which is an instructive and educational conference for the Palestinians in Lebanon. We used the methodology and the mechanisms of the project to prepare the instructive and educational conference; we were moving the expertise and the method towards this direction. Connection between the two projects was a factor in their success. *(Moderator, Lebanon)*

If you want to gather a big number of people to attend Civitas meetings, you can do that through the mosques only, because it is impossible to bring them from any other place. (*Moderator, USA*)

Among the critical and bothersome issues was Oxford University's crest printed on the booklet that we have distributed in Denmark. They [opponents to the project] caused trouble because of this crest. Some increased its size and turned it upside down saying that it is the Star of David. Sadly some un-named official bodies agreed that this crest represents the Jewish candlestick and the Star of David.

This is the logo of Oxford University. Even the very small words in it which is unreadable by the naked eye was said to be Hebrew writings. We were forced to open the website of Oxford University, and we increased the size of the crest and the writing, because when I heard this I was very upset and I found it awful that I would do anything to help the Mossad. But it turned out that the writing is in Latin! Therefore I printed a lot of explanatory leaflets and put them inside the booklets before handing out the invitations. This is a simple example of the problems that we faced in Denmark. We repeat that every human being has the right to have such fears. (*Moderator, Denmark*)

First, we held meetings for Palestinians in the cities of Frankfurt, Hamburg, Munich and Stuttgart. After these meetings, we settled in Berlin, and the first meeting afterwards was with the women, because the Palestinian woman represents half of society, and should have an effective role. This meeting was indeed bigger than the small meetings; it was organized

by the centre of Arab women in Berlin. Then we held a meeting for the youth, and then we moved to the Palestinian community to take their opinions about this issue. The Palestinian community at first welcomed the project, and the Project Coordinator was there, and they were willing to participate. But when he left, they were told to stop their participation. The Palestinian community here is coloured with all the Palestinian factions. Some of them said that they will support it, and others refused to do that for reasons that everyone talked about. But we continued to invite them. Those who supported it came to the meetings, and those who were against it started to negatively talk about it. What I want to say is that this project is a new experience, and we don't blame people for taking this attitude, for they are not used to participating in such projects and in such democracy. They demand democracy but they don't correctly implement it in the Palestinian institutions, especially after Oslo. We all know that in Europe there are no longer any Palestinian institutions. The only existing institution is the Palestinian community, and we all know that these Palestinian communities were built on the debris of Palestinian institutions. Our first meeting was with women, and the second was with the youth, then we moved to the other cities and to Frankfurt, Stuttgart, and Munich. The response was good; I don't want to say encouraging, because people did not know about the project. You need to give people information about the project and its goals. Yet people, especially neutral persons, didn't have enough information. I don't want to exaggerate and say that we can reach all people, but we managed to reach some people in Germany. Germany is a very big country, and it has too

many people, and it is impossible to reach them all and tell them all the important details that concern every Palestinian person, especially the issue of democratizing Palestinian society and the meaning of the structures that the project is talking about, and this is a problem. Of course, those who opposed the project used the issues of the Right of Return and the PLO to convince people to oppose it, but they couldn't do that. (*Moderator, Germany*)

c. Participatory Practices

I really like the idea of civic structures so much. A meeting for the teachers union [General Union of Palestinian Teachers] was held, and this is the only union that held a conference where a preliminary committee was registered for the Palestinian community, and it will now be registered in the country and will establish its internal organization. The community elections are supposed to be conducted near the end of October. The only problem we have in this project is that if Fateh is with it, Hamas would not participate, and vice versa. Also, we couldn't avoid the problem of custodianship in Yemen; having one of the parties means that the country agrees on the project. (*Moderator, Yemen*)

d. Creating Public Space

As for the main conclusions related to needs, each camp has different needs in every region. The camps in the south focused on security concerns, and on communication with the surrounding Lebanese areas, because it is near to Israel. There is also fear of expected blockades. The camps in the north were interested in democratic needs, and reforming the leading entities in these camps. The needs of the Beirut camps focused on the health, environmental, and pressing economic needs. Consequently priorities are different

Mobilization and Preparation for the Debates According to Moderators

3. Assessing the Project as a Mechanism and its Results **c. Participatory Practices**

Mobilization and Preparation for the Debates According to Moderators

3. Assessing the Project as a Mechanism and its Results d. Creating Public Space

Everyone agreed that they all need a way to develop democratic work in every aspect of the life of the Palestinians in the refugee camps, whether on the political, social or other level. This was very exceptional, and people were very grateful, because they said that this is the first time that they ever came to speak and demand instead of following orders! This shift was exceptional in all the meetings and workshops. (Moderator, Lebanon)

between regions, but these needs are the main ones, and there is no need to repeat the details. (Moderator, Lebanon)

Still we will continue to work boldly to complete this project, because so many people supported it, and because it is the first time we have suggested a project to the political powers in Syria. Also because people are starting to talk and discuss, which is something that was frozen for some time. A lot of controversial issues on the national scene started to find a way to be discussed. (Moderator, Syria)

We liked the project because it will help the Palestinian community to come together and present their problems, needs, and priorities. This was necessary for the Palestinian areas in Denmark. Something had to be done to connect them together. We suffer from a big flaw in this area. We have people in universities and in activities, and we have many prominent figures active in Danish society and among the Palestinian community, but unfortunately we don't have communication between each other. That's why I felt that this project has satisfied one of my personal needs. When the project was first presented to me, I said that we have been demanding this for a long time, and that it is necessary for the community. (Moderator, Denmark)

For us who live in Britain, the timing of the project was perfect, for we badly needed this project in this time when the general Palestinian situation is so torn and lost. Therefore the project helped define things, and people were very interested and they enjoyed the project and participating in it. (Moderator, United Kingdom)