
USAID project to Improve the

Health of Palestinian

Mothers and Babies

Ramallah

11/11/99

**PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION**

**FIRST LADY HILLARY CLINTON INAUGURATES USAID PROJECT TO
IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF PALESTINIAN MOTHERS AND BABIES**

**Grand Park Hotel
Ramallah
November 11, 1999**

Full Transcripts of Remarks by Each of the Speakers: U.S. Consul General John Herbst, Mrs. Suha Arafat, First Lady Hillary Clinton, Chairman of the Coordinating Council Dr. Jihad Mishal, Minister of Health Dr. Riad Zanoun.

(BEGIN TRANSCRIPT OF CONSUL GENERAL JOHN HERBST'S STATEMENT)

Good afternoon. I'd like to welcome you all here today. My name is John Herbst. I am the US Consul General in Jerusalem. Mrs. Clinton, Mrs. Arafat, Mr. Za'noun, Governor Abu Firas, distinguished guests. It is an honor for me to be here with you today for two streams of American policy towards the Palestinians to come together. There's an old saying in America. "to care enough to send the very best." The United States considers its relationship with the Palestinians to be a top priority because we repeatedly send you the very best, from the visit last December of President Clinton to the stops here of Dr. Albright to First Lady Mrs. Clinton presence today.

Mrs. Clinton represents the best we have to offer, particularly in the area of maternal and infant health. Her distinguished career has, among other accomplishments, been closely connected with these issues; her life long involvement with the Children's Defense Fund, her exceptional role in promoting health care reform and her co-hosting, with the President, of two White House conferences on children's issues point to her expertise and her strength as an advocate.

This brings us to the second aspect of the American policy towards the Palestinians. We care deeply about the quality of your life enough to provide you with hundreds of millions of dollars in assistance. A building block to a better life is maternal and infant health care. The First Lady is with us today because the United States and the Aid program have put together a pilot project in the West Bank and Gaza in cooperation with two private American organizations and five Palestinian NGO's. To help the Ministry of Health has also been essential in this. Soon, as this Palestinian - American partnership, thirty two clinics in the West Bank and Gaza will be offering quality attention to the health of mothers and their infants. We hope this will provide a model for a much wider program.

We know that there is one more side of a growing Palestinian-American cooperation. Another important side of that cooperation is the presence here today of our two peoples' first ladies. I first met Mrs. Arafat at a lunch that she gracefully hosted for my wife and myself two years back. Since that I have come to admire this large-hearted woman.

Whether establishing a center for disabled children in Gaza or promoting the welfare of Palestinian children throughout the West Bank and Gaza, Mrs. Arafat has a well-deserved reputation for putting her people first. I now have the pleasure of introducing her to you. Please.

(END TRANSCRIPT OF CONSUL GENERAL JOHN HERBST'S STATEMENT)

(BEGIN TRANSCRIPT FOR SUHA ARAFAT'S STATEMENT)
(INFORMAL TRANSLATION FROM ARABIC)

First Lady Hillary Clinton,
Dear Friends,

It's my pleasure and honor to welcome you again here in Palestine, the birthplace of the three divine religions and the land of peace, love, and tolerance. On my behalf and on behalf of the Higher Council for Maternal and Child Health, I would like to thank you for your noble visit to see firsthand the great challenges facing the Palestinian people, especially in the areas of maternity, childcare and environment, in addition to all the other economic, social, cultural and educational fields.

We continue to exert all possible efforts to ease the suffering of our people with the assistance and support of our friends and all those who appreciate peace and freedom. We try, in particular, to coordinate with the Palestinian Ministry of Health and with specialized international agencies to fight epidemics and diseases, which assail our children and women because of lack of adequate healthcare and because of malnutrition caused by the widespread harsh economic and living conditions known to all of you. We consider such conditions to be some of the inherited burdens of the Israeli occupation of the past three decades.

Also, it is important to talk about the great damage caused by the daily and extensive use of toxic gasses by the Israeli forces over the past years, which have increased the number of cancer cases especially among women and children.

We have inherited from the Israeli Occupation a destroyed infrastructure. Research and field studies have pointed out that 80 percent of the water resources are contaminated and that the Palestinian land has been soaked with internationally-prohibited chemicals that have caused the spread of diseases amongst our people, who suffer from poverty and deprivation and from the deterioration of their living and health conditions, which have negatively affected our people, especially the women and children."

Mrs. Clinton,
Dear friends,

We look forward with great hope and confidence towards the future and try, as we welcome the 21st century, to make our country, Palestine, free from the diseases that assail our women and children. This goes side by side with our sincerely exerted efforts to achieve the pursuit of a peace based on justice, equality and mutual respect, one which will provide for us and our neighbors great horizons for cooperation and coexistence in order to face the challenges of this age with the spirit of humanity, responsibility and solidarity between the different nations. The peace that we work and struggle for is the peace that will guarantee that our children and theirs will live in peace of mind, in prosperity and stability; the peace that ends hatred, grudges, oppression and subjugation.

The struggle that we lead today in our battle to build our basic institutions has started from point zero after long years of occupation. This struggle makes it incumbent upon us to pay adequate attention to the maternity and childcare sector, and also to work on building a comprehensive civil, institutional, cultural and modern society based on the rule of law, political diversity and freedom of expression and opinion. This is what corresponds to the ambitions of our people and their determination to keep up with the stream of development, advancement and prosperity in the world.

I would like to express my deep thanks and appreciation to you and to the American people for the moral and material support and for the continuous sponsorship of the efforts exerted to achieve the Peace of the Brave on the ground, while guaranteeing stability and advancement for all the peoples of this region, in addition to achieving freedom, independence and sovereignty to the Palestinian people.

Allow me, my dear friends, to especially acknowledge the efforts put forth by USAID along with CARE International and the Population Council in supporting and developing the Palestinian health organizations and Palestinian NGOs, that which focus on responding to basic needs and improving the public health, of women and children in Palestine. The Palestinian Woman Development Project occupies our major attention. We move forward to elevate women's standard of living and encourage their constructive participation in the building battle of our country.

Dear friends,

Welcome to Palestine. We will again be pleased to welcome you in the city of Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, peace be upon him, to join us in celebrating the end of the second millenium. We wish that this year be a year of righteousness and blessings for the whole of humanity. And we wish for the accomplishment of peace in our region and that the Palestinian people will be able to accomplish their legitimate dream of achieving an independent state on their national soil, with your support and that of our friends and all those who love peace, freedom and democracy.

Welcome to the Holy Land.

(END TRANSCRIPT OF SUHA ARAFAT'S STATEMENT)

(BEGIN TRANSCRIPT OF U.S. FIRST LADY'S STATEMENT)

Thank you very much. I am so pleased to be here and to see once again my friend, Suha, and to be here on an occasion in Ramallah where we are going to be celebrating the progress that can be made together. I am pleased to be here with the Governor, the Director of the Coordinating Council, the Minister of Health, the Consul General and the USAID Mission Director.

This visit is particularly meaningful to me because today, as we meet, the Palestinian and Israeli people stand at a crossroads ready to make the hard decisions to achieve a just and lasting peace. I know, and my husband knows, that this will be a difficult undertaking. It will not be easy; and for neither side will it be without pain. But all of us believe that the rewards far outweigh the costs. For what peace will give to the Palestinian people, and especially to the children, are lives that could only be dreamed of before. And I want to tell you, on behalf of the President and his Administration, that you can count on the United States and the strong US-Palestinian relationship as you move forward on the path to peace.

Today I am delighted to join my friend, Mrs. Arafat, and all of you as we launch a vital, new partnership to strengthen the families of the West Bank and Gaza. Every minute, somewhere in our world, a woman dies from the complications of pregnancy and childbirth. The vast majority of these deaths are preventable with basic prenatal and postpartum care. And yet, too many women are carrying their children and giving birth without this essential, life-saving care. In Gaza and the West Bank, the situation is acute. Fewer than half of all Palestinian women receive proper medical care during their pregnancies. And fewer than three out of ten new mothers and babies receive postpartum care. The women and children of the West Bank and Gaza deserve much better.

Women need not die giving birth to future generations. And every child must be given the chance to blossom and reach his or her full potential. That is why I am very pleased to inaugurate a new USAID initiative to improve the health of mothers and children in the West Bank and Gaza. Through this 3.8 million dollar pilot project, CARE International and the Population Council will work with five Palestinian NGO's that are represented here today: the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, the Union of Health Work Committees, Patients Friends Society, the Center for Development in Primary Health Care, and the Health Development Information and Policy Institute. I also wish to thank the Minister of Health and everyone who has worked to make this possible.

Together, these NGO'S, the American and Palestinian partners, will upgrade and refurbish 32 health clinics in Jenin, Gaza City and Hebron. They will boost the training and supervision of the health care staff and expand counseling for couples on child spacing and other family planning and health issues. I am very pleased that as we learn which strategies and methods of this pilot project worked best we will expand this initiative to include every single community in the West Bank and Gaza.

Reducing maternal mortality requires sustained long-term commitments from all sectors of society. I have seen, firsthand, the important work NGO's can do to extend medical care and counseling to the hardest to reach mothers and families. So I commend the Palestinian Health Ministry for working with the NGO's represented here to provide the best possible health care for the Palestinian people.

For the past five years, the United States has been working with the Palestinian people to improve and expand the water supply, to create new jobs for young people, and to bolster civil society. Activities such as these are important, I would even argue crucial, to building a lasting peace that benefits all Palestinians. And the United States government will continue to support such activities. But, today we must recognize that there is a goal that is just as important to Palestinian peace and prosperity in the future – improving the health of new mothers and babies. We cannot ever forget that mothers are the backbones of our families. And strong families are the foundation of strong, thriving societies. And every new child born into this world represents nothing less than our best hope for a better future. I thank you for the work you are doing toward achieving this vision and for leading the efforts for building a better future for the Palestinian people.

Now, I would like to hear more about the plans for this project and especially about the Palestinian views regarding this new program and any additional ideas about health care that we might be able to take back and consider and act on. So, Consul General, I believe that you are going to help us to learn more about what we will do here.

(END TRANSCRIPT OF U.S. FIRST LADY'S STATEMENT)

(Consul General John Hurbst)

My job is to point us in the right direction and to do that, I would like to introduce Dr. Mashal of the Palestinian Medical Relief Committee..... Dr. Mashal.

(BEGIN TRANSCRIPT OF DR. JIHAD MISHAL'S STATEMENT)

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends, US First Lady Mrs. Hillary Rodham Clinton, First Lady Mrs. Arafat.

On behalf of my colleagues and partners on the coordination council for the pilot health project, I would like to extend a warm welcome to you and wish you a pleasant stay in Palestine. It is a great honor to host you in our homeland.

Mrs. Clinton, we here in Palestine know only too well the contributions you have made to help the marginalized and underprivileged groups, specially women and children throughout the world.

The pilot health project which we are inaugurating today was founded with the collaboration and coordination of five prominent NGO's, local Palestinian NGOs; the Ministry of Health, Care International, the Population Council and USAID, whose

financial and technical assistance are helping us improve the health status of Palestinians who aspire to exercise the legitimate right for self determination and to build an independent and sovereign democratic state. The pilot health project opens a healthy path for individuals and families. It touches in-depth on issues of awareness, quality service delivery, women's empowerment and, most importantly, development in the context of the cultural tradition of Palestine. The process of the pilot health project is also helping us build healthy democratic institutions founded on the principals of good governance and a strong civil society.

Dear First Lady, durable and strong peace in this area can only be based on justice and be built on an atmosphere and respect for democratic human and development rights. The Palestinian people, who suffered a great deal, are looking towards such peace, one that would fulfill the right of Palestinian refugees to return and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, including east Jerusalem within the pure boundaries of 1967. Such a sovereign state can be viable and will ensure sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for being here and welcome you again. I hope that next time you visit us, we will host you in our home land, Palestine, in its capital city of Jerusalem. I am very glad to introduce our First Minister of the Palestinian Ministry of Health, Dr. Riad Al Zanoun. Welcome.

(END TRANSCRIPT OF DR. JIHAD MISHAL'S STATEMENT)

(BEGIN TRANSCRIPT OF RIAD ZANOUN'S STATEMENT)
(TRANSLATED FROM ARABIC)

It is my pleasure and honor to welcome the First Lady of the United States of America, Mrs. Hillary Clinton. Welcome in Palestine, and it is my pleasure to welcome our First Lady in Palestine. Welcome, Mrs. Suha Arafat.

First Lady of the United States. Allow me to honor you in the land of Palestine. I would like to tell you that we have followed your activities during the first successful term of President Clinton. We have benefited from your efforts to improve and reform the health services and action plan, and we have distributed it to the various sections in the Palestinian Health Ministry. We have learned from you and from your serious efforts to concentrate on the health economy and the reformation of health insurance, and we have learned from your efforts the need to develop the quality of health services provided through primary care and secondary care. Parts of this plan are circulated for research and discussion purposes in the health services development unit. We have carefully followed, through our members who have participated in the ICPD plus 5 in New York, your serious and enthusiastic words that aimed at developing and improving the quality of women's healthcare throughout the world.

Today we are very happy to inaugurate and honor this gathering, in which five Palestinian NGOs sign an agreement with CARE International and with the Population Council and funded by USAID. We are indeed before a pilot health project, which is similar to a symphony played by all of them. It is an experience worth appreciating and taking care of because it emphasizes the role of the NGOs in building Palestine and a civil society.

This experience is one step that we hope will be followed by other steps and that USAID will pay more attention to health issues. In the past five years, USAID has been engaged with other issues related to developing infrastructure concerns, but we do believe that it is time for USAID to provide, through your encouragement, more for the health issues to achieve the goal that you have worked for... to accomplish better health services for women and children, because they make 70 percent of the entire population. USAID and our American friends are not only here for this project. We met the experts from CDC in Atlanta, who were brought here by USAID to help us get through the cholera epidemic four years ago. We will not forget that role. Also, now we have experts at CDC in Atlanta who are being trained in the field of epidemiology.

Three days ago, we were with a group of specialists who were brought here by USAID to help us with the problem of Y2K. They work day and night with our specialists to confront possible problems, not only in computers, but also in the operating rooms and in ventilators and other life-saving equipment. They are also helping us in preparing an emergency plan.

At this time, while we celebrate the signing of this project, which will improve maternity and child care, there is an American team of heart surgeons in Ramallah hospital, volunteering their time and experience to save lives and teach our local doctors. This is not the only team. We have several teams. And I would like here to mention as an example, an American NGO, called the Palestinian Child Fund, headed by Steve Sosby(?) and his wife. They took from Palestine 150 children who were injured during the Intifada. They lost an eye or were burnt. They were taken to the U.S. and underwent surgery carried out by volunteer doctors, free of charge. And the children were also hosted by American families.

The relationship between the Palestinian people and the American people has such human dimensions that it has entered the hearts of all Palestinians. Another such American NGO, called Operation Smile, comes to Palestine twice a year. And every year, it performs 150 operations.

"Oh, First Lady. Oh great lady. I would like to remind you with words you have said, which have found their way into the hearts of every Palestinian, when you addressed the Israeli and Palestinian children of Seeds of Peace. You told them the road to a just and real peace is through establishing a homeland for the Palestinians. This was followed by a visit by President Clinton. He visited Gaza Airport to emphasize this very fact, and he addressed us in Gaza and said that it was time to focus on planning for a better life for the Palestinian people because they deserve it. I thank you and welcome you again."

(END TRANSCRIPT OF RIAD ZANOUN'S STATEMENT)

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