Christian Aid Submission

International Development Committee
Inquiry

The UK's Development Work in the Middle East

January 2014
Christian Aid welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to this inquiry and would be happy to provide follow up written and verbal evidence by request through our Senior UK Political Advisor, Barry Johnston (bjohnston@christian-aid.org; 02075232175).
1. Occupied Palestinian Territory

1.1 Introduction

Christian Aid has worked in the Middle East since the 1950s after the Middle East Council of Churches appealed for aid to assist with the unfolding Palestinian refugee crisis. Christian Aid’s programmes in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) aims to challenge discrimination and marginalisation and promote accountability. We tackle the restrictions that prevent marginalised groups from having productive resilient livelihoods and enable their communities to flourish. We aim to bring about change at a community, policy and structural level.

1.1.1 Christian Aid believes Middle East peace requires a long-term, just and peaceful solution that ends occupation and guarantees viability for both Palestinians and Israelis. Viability includes the protection of rights and security for all.

1.2 DFID’s funding to the Palestinian Authority and the twin goals of state building and achieving a negotiated peace

1.2.1 Poverty in both Israel and the OPT is not inevitable; the main causes are discrimination and the unjust system of Israeli occupation over the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Christian Aid believes that it is essential to address the inequality entrenched by discriminatory practices and the system of occupation, and focus on mechanisms of accountability to address these root causes of poverty.

1.2.2 While international aid is critical, it is not the long-term solution to Palestinian poverty; that requires a political solution which includes an end to occupation. Clearly aid plays a key role within the Palestinian economy, such as keeping schools open and health services running. Christian Aid would be very concerned about the crippling effect on Palestinian household economies if this aid was cut. However, international aid efforts to improve the lives of the Palestinian people, despite some short-term successes, have largely failed to deliver on tackling the root causes of poverty.

1.2.3. This is primarily due to Israeli occupation policies but also because aid has not been accompanied by sufficient political will from donor countries to effectively address them. The ever-increasing aid flow keeps the Palestinian Authority (PA) afloat but hasn’t led to sustainable development or peace. Christian Aid recommends that UK aid be accompanied by closer coordination between all relevant government departments to ensure that development assistance is as effective as possible. This needs to include political actions that put policy positions into practice, development assistance that helps build a viable future and humanitarian assistance that contributes to alleviating the immediate humanitarian suffering caused by the occupation and conflict.

1.2.4 Christian Aid believes that DFID’s continued support for institutional capacity building within the PA, private sector development and to United Nations Relief and Works Agency UNRWA is critical, for both building peace and addressing humanitarian needs. However, our experience from working with grassroots Palestinian organisations is that Palestinians across the OPT feel disconnected from any peace process, including current efforts by US Secretary of State, John Kerry. They are primarily preoccupied with dealing with the daily obstacles of the occupation and wider conflict to their lives. Their experiences are still dominated by insecurity, indignity and discrimination despite talk of peace. We believe that support to government structures will only be effective if it is complemented by support to all levels of civil society that builds and strengthens the accountability and effectiveness of state-building mechanisms. The UK Government should give
greater priority to supporting civil society structures – both through its own aid budget and through the EU.

1.2.5 A positive example of a grassroots approach is Christian Aid’s Programme Partnership Arrangement (PPA) with DFID, part of which has been allocated to our work with local Palestinian partners to build community resilience within conflict settings. We and our Palestinian partners have identified that a community based bottom-up approach is critical for Palestinian society to be able to function and develop livelihoods, especially in the face of extensive restrictions to movement, trade and access to resources imposed by the occupation. These restrictions are particularly pronounced in Area C.

1.2.6 Nevertheless, as a result of the PPA intervention, this community has developed the skills and capacity to identify which risks could be mitigated against, planned for, and better responded to by them and interaction with the Palestinian Civil Defence (PCD) who are responsible for responsive protection services. Through this engagement vulnerable villages in Area C formed a ‘Crisis Team’ which has been trained to respond to risks faced by the community such as floods, fires, settler and military attacks and earthquakes and have been given first aid training. While macro policies and structures of the occupation cannot be avoided, engagement with the PCD enables communities to build sustainable grassroots structures and processes that can contribute to a future peace and a viable state with engaged citizens.

1.2.7. It is important to understand why previous peace initiatives have failed to overcome the central obstacles to peace in order to avoid repeating the costly financial and political mistakes of the past. This includes transforming the pattern of ‘fund, build and destroy’ that we have witnessed in the OPT. In 2007 we presented a framework for understanding what the key issues are for achieving a viable solution. Building on that, we believe that narratives which have legitimised and perpetuated discrimination, marginalisation and impunity, which define the lives of so many in this conflict and block progress, must be confronted. Viability must be understood as concerned with more than just tangible elements, such as freedom of movement or borders, but also take into account respect for identity, competing narratives, recognition of equality and a full understanding of security. Such a process requires addressing grievances of injustice and human rights violations in order to build confidence within communities. To achieve a viable solution, policy makers must learn from previous efforts towards peace and ensure that justice, accountability and equity drive any future process. Christian Aid believes that aid in conflict must be accompanied by the creation of a sincere process of transitional justice that can help both Palestinians and Israelis approach the future free from fear and poverty.

1.3 The effectiveness of DFID’s programme in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

1.3.1 The Israeli occupation impacts directly on the Palestinian economy and Palestinian livelihoods, and therefore on the effectiveness of DFID’s programme. The World Bank estimates that Israel’s sustained control of the West Bank has resulted in a loss to the Palestinian economy of $3.4 billion.¹ Israel controls access of all trade into and out of the OPT and imposes significant movement restrictions within the OPT; these discourage private sector investment and undermine internal and external trade. Israel’s policy of movement and access restrictions has further undermined people’s access to work, to trade and for some, access to their land situated on the other side of the barrier.

Gaza Blockade

1.3.2 As one of a range of occupation policies, the continued Israeli blockade of Gaza all but denies any exports. Others severely limit Palestinian fishermen to fish within 6 nautical miles and prohibits farmers’ from accessing their land adjacent to the demarcation line. The precise areas designated by Israel, known as the buffer zone are unknown but at times extend up to 1.5 kilometres inside the Gaza Strip. Israel restricts Palestinians’ access to the land located in the “buffer zone”, sometimes through the use of live fire. From January to May 2011, at least 19 civilians have been killed. As a consequence of these restrictions both domestic and international markets are almost impossible to access thus putting sustainable livelihoods largely out of reach. Christian Aid recommends that all efforts are made to secure an end to the blockade and allow Palestinians full access to their land and fishing waters whilst ensuring that the security of neither Israelis nor Palestinians be compromised.

Settlements

1.3.3 There are more than 100 illegal Israeli settlements containing 530,000 Israelis in the OPT. 42.81 per cent of the West Bank has been allocated by Israel to regional settlement councils for construction, shrinking the space available for Palestinians. Palestinian access to land and water resources is restricted throughout.

1.3.4 Whilst we welcome the support given by the UK government to the EU Funding Guidelines for Israeli settlements and their guidance to companies about trading with Israeli settlements, we don’t believe this goes far enough. According to a 2013 World Bank report Israel’s control of just Area C in the West Bank costs the Palestinian economy £2.1bn a year, or 35% of its GDP. The most recent estimate of the value of EU imports from settlements provided by the Israeli government to the World Bank is $300m a year; this is approximately fifteen times the annual value of EU imports from Palestinians. Ultimately, the value for money of the UK’s aid in the region will continue to be undermined by the economic damage caused to the Palestinian economy by settlements. Christian Aid recommends that UK legislation be introduced to end trade in Israeli settlement products in the UK as an effective way of concretely challenging illegal settlements. Translating routine UK condemnation of settlements into meaningful action would benefit Palestinian economic development and be a logical accompaniment to DFID’s financial assistance.

1.4 Whether DFID is focusing on the right sectors and working with the right organisations

Refugees

1.4.1 On-going displacement of Palestinians is one of the foremost realities that underline Palestinian life wherever they live, from the 1947/48 unresolved refugee crisis to the threatened relocation of Bedouin communities in the Naqab/Negev into townships. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs since 2009, Israel has displaced more than 4,100 Palestinians through house demolitions alone in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

1.4.2 Regarding refugees, the UK states that: ‘Until the refugee problem is solved through political negotiations, the international community will retain its obligation to support the agency created to support and protect Palestine refugees - UNRWA.’ UNRWA’s remit is largely service provision rather than protection, or a pursuit of durable solutions. The inability, or unwillingness, of the international

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2 Diakonia Briefing [https://www.diakonia.se/en/IHL/Occupied-Palestinian-Territory/Administration-of-Occupation/Gaza-Blockade-Land--Sea/Land-Buffer-Zone/]

3 United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA): funding basic services and protection for Palestine refugees 2011-15 - DFID
community to use international law in order to implement the rights of Palestinian refugees has ensured that refugee numbers rise and financial needs grow. This has led to an ever widening gap between funds required for UNRWA and the ability to match minimum humanitarian needs.

1.4.3 Legal rights cannot be negotiated away by any political process without the consent or participation of the right holder. However, the lack of political will, anywhere, to tackle this issue according to any appropriate or applicable law or UN resolution is leading to a potential powder keg. It is not without precedence that Palestinian refugees fear for their lives and conflict in Iraq and Syria are a reminder of the acute uncertainty and instability that this population fears. To date their future has not been adequately addressed. Indeed, many Palestinian refugees believe that their voices are largely ignored by a Palestinian political leadership that appears to consider recognition of their legitimate rights as a price worth paying for achieving a two-state solution.

1.4.4 UK aid to UNRWA is critical but must be accompanied by a more active exploration of the mechanisms which would see both Palestinian refugee rights respected and implemented. This should include facilitating the development of effective representative bodies given the current level of concern amongst refugees that they are being marginalised in peace talks. We believe that DFID should also support the work of Palestinian and Israeli organisations that explore what the recognition and implementation of the right of return could look like and which helps to break down barriers.

1.5 Whether DFID should consider funding projects involving Israeli-Palestinian joint working, and/or working with MASHAV, the Israeli development agency.

1.5.1 Christian Aid understands that MASHAV is an international agency aimed at overseas development by the Israeli government. OPT is an area occupied by the state of Israel and, thus, the source of its problems. It would not be possible for MASHAV to be an equal partner in Palestinian development. We advise against joint work with this agency in OPT; focus on the fulfilment of the obligations of Israel as an occupying power would be a more justifiable and useful approach. We believe that there are many civil society organisations within Israel who work with Palestinian civil society to address issues of accountability and discrimination which should be supported.

2. SYRIA

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Christian Aid launched a Middle East appeal in November 2012 and have been part of the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal. Christian Aid is responding to the crisis in Syria by working through long-term partners in Lebanon and Iraq, and we are supporting our ACT Alliance sister agency, International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) to work with local partners inside Syria itself. The partner organisation on the ground in Syria is working through churches, mosques and other community based organisations to deliver assistance across several governorates in Syria. This requires negotiating access for cross line work with different parties to the conflict. Our partners are providing essentials such as food, hygiene and sanitation kits, water containers, emergency shelter and short-term work opportunities, as well as psychosocial support particularly for women and children. To date, our work has reached approximately 40,000 beneficiaries.

4 We do not wish to publicly name this partner for security reasons
2.2 DFID’s choice of partners in the humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis and their effectiveness

2.2.1 DFID’s choice of partners has predominantly focused on the UN agencies and some of the larger International NGOs. This focus on scale is to be expected in such a large-scale emergency; however the choice to focus on larger international organisations to deliver the response has meant that local organisations have not always been utilised as they could have been. We believe a shift in focus would allow DFID funded work to achieve a greater impact by working through local partners. The DEC Syria Crisis response review commented that partner organisations ‘have a significant advantage... avoiding some of the bureaucratic hurdles that face other agencies and being able to tap into pre-existing local networks to identify and respond to needs as they arise.’ INGOs without these links have in many cases experienced delays in starting their programmes. The review also highlighted that partner organisations were in many cases able to respond to the crisis more quickly, and to demonstrate a high level of accountability, due to existing networks with grassroots organisations. A joint Christian Aid, CAFOD, Oxfam GB, Tearfund and ActionAid report entitled ‘Missed Opportunities’ examines the case for strengthening national and local partnership-based humanitarian responses. It identified that working through local partners can enhance the relevance and appropriateness of humanitarian responses. Local knowledge and previous experience of working in similar responses has provided a strong basis for a robust and rapid response and greater accountability. In our experience, our partner REACH in Iraq have previously worked with refugees from southern Iraq and the Gulf wards, in Lebanon our partners have many decades experience of working with Palestinian refugees and those affected by the Lebanon war. We recommend that DFID consider supporting more locally guided and operated programmes.

2.3 Challenges working in neighbouring countries: co-ordination

2.3.1 Co-ordination is an on-going challenge, and one which our partners tell us has often negatively impacted their effectiveness. One example we were provided with was a partner working with refugees with disability in Lebanon: the UN provided them with access to the number of people living with disability, but as the UN get this figure by recording the number of people with disability who come to be registered, missing out those who cannot travel, it meant information already gathered had to be collected a second time. The lack of appropriate mechanisms to share sensitive data has resulted in delays and in some cases duplication. Given the size and scale of this response, we think that DFID needs to have a comprehensive strategic approach which is shared with other actors. We recognise the value of the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) but believe there is a need to take this further. Greater opportunities for local and national organisations to participate in co-ordination mechanisms would limit duplications of efforts and increase the effectiveness of the response. We recommend that DFID use its partnership with the UN to strengthen information sharing mechanisms, particularly to ensure that local organisations, and their particular needs, are considered when designing systems and programmes. We believe that full participation of local organisations in coordination mechanisms is essential.

2.3.2 All of our partners report tensions between the host and refugee communities, who are in many cases experiencing the same level of poverty, if not the same response. Our partners seek to make inclusion of the host community an integral part of their response, but this is not a widespread approach shared by all actors or funders. DFID has already recognised the pressure being placed on neighbouring countries by the large numbers of people who have had to seek refuge. We recommend that increased focus be placed on integrating programming to ensure host communities are not excluded. There is a need for a multiplicity of approaches to ease tensions in neighbouring countries and to support neighbouring governments to be able to response.
2.4 Challenges of Access in the Syrian response

2.4.1 The UN estimates that humanitarian agencies are unable to provide assistance to some 2.5 million inside Syria, trapped in hard to reach and besieged areas. Some of these people have not been reached for over one year. On October 2nd the UN Security Council issued a Presidential Statement calling on parties to the conflict to allow access to civilian populations for the delivery of aid. Despite this unity of purpose in the Council’s response to the humanitarian situation in Syria, the situation has barely improved since then. Chemical weapons inspectors were able to gain access to some areas that humanitarian aid is unable to reach. This demonstrates that if we are to improve humanitarian access, a similar diplomatic effort and urgency must be put into implementing the Presidential Statement. **We call on the government to use all available opportunities open to them to ensure that all parties to the conflict ensure that humanitarian access is granted to those in need; using the starting point of humanitarian pauses and locally negotiated ceasefires, but working towards unfettered access. We propose that training be provided in International Humanitarian Law obligations to protect civilians.** We recommend that the UK government, as a matter of urgency, redouble its diplomacy efforts to ensure humanitarian access can reach those who need it most.

2.4.2 Due to the nature of the crisis, refugees are more likely to be living in urban areas, and in informal settlements. This has caused many challenges to those involved in the response. Outreach frequently has to be worked in to the programme proposal in order to ensure registration of refugees and delivery of services. **It is important that funding takes into account these different needs. While DFID has a good track record in this regard, we recommend that DFID continues to take steps to improve targeting of support and encourages other donors to follow suit.**

2.5 Likelihood of UK continuing its support

2.5.1 The generosity of the British public in responding to the conflict in Syria has been the cornerstone of our response, however it is our experience that public support is more forthcoming in rapid onset natural disasters and so our prediction is that the level of support that we can expect as an organisation whose response is predominantly funded by public generosity, is likely to fall off, more so the longer the situation continues. This makes the continuation of government support even more critical, and with this in mind we welcome the recent pledge of £100million at the Kuwait donors’ conference. Similarly, the continuation of UK financial support to the impacts of the conflict and refugee crisis across the region is essential. Neighbouring countries have opened their doors to huge numbers of people, and it is probable that many of them will be unable to return to Syria. **We call on the UK government to support Syria’s neighbours in keeping their borders open to refugees and ensure all parties to the conflict abide by their obligations under international law to protect civilian populations. Being able to offer continued support to these countries will be critical in the years ahead.**

2.5.2 At the moment, neighbouring countries are bearing a disproportionate share of the burden of hosting Syrian refugees. The time has come to consider how to go about resettling Syrian refugees in third countries. UNHCR has appealed for western governments to accept 30,000 of the most vulnerable refugees from the region. This would include women at risk, children who are in need of special assistance, vulnerable older adults and torture survivors who will simply struggle to survive in the harsh conditions in the region. **We reiterate our joint call with many other UK agencies for the UK Government to join the other 16 participating in the UNHCR’s global resettlement programme.**
2.6 Continuation of non-financial support

2.6.1. Bringing the conflict to an end, and ensuring a lasting and inclusive peace process, as well as the safe return of all refugees who wish to do so, is a critical task. The United Kingdom has the means and experience to offer support to political stakeholders and help build skills in negotiations and reconciliation. They have already been active in this area, which we commend, and we recommend that the UK prioritise continuing this support to parties to the conflict.

2.6.2. We believe that the only way to bring an end to the humanitarian crisis is to ensure an end to the conflict and the beginning of an inclusive peace process. Until this is in place, millions of people inside Syria, and refugees from Syria, will have no ability to plan their future and development agencies will be unable to provide a response that can effectively help people to rebuild their lives. There are many grassroots initiatives for peace and reconciliation already taking place, including inter-faith dialogue, and locally negotiated short term ceasefires that demonstrate the commitment of so many Syrians to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. We commend the UK government for the steps they have already taken in this direction, but believe a greater emphasis on peace is vital in order to build the processes that can contribute to a peaceful future.

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