Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 14239
23 January 2017

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza

Committee Opinion[1]
Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy
Rapporteur: Lord Donald ANDERSON, United Kingdom, Socialist Group

A. Conclusions of the committee

1. The Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy considers the report on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, presented by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, as being very timely and relevant and warmly congratulates the rapporteur, Ms Eva-Lena Jansson.

2. Welcoming the general findings of the report, the committee proposes to further clarify and define the draft resolution contained in the main report through a number of amendments.

B. Proposed amendments

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 9.1.6, add the following paragraph:

> *"give even greater priority to humanitarian advocacy, including the collection of data on all incidents relating to violations of humanitarian law;"*

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 9.1.6, add the following paragraph:

> *"urge both Israeli and Palestinian authorities to re-examine school textbooks in the spirit of the study report initiated by the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land and published on 4 February 2013, with the aim of maximising objectivity and eliminating material which selectively reinforces each community's national narrative;"*

Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 9.2.3, insert the following paragraph:

> *"refrain from blocking or suspending the transfer to the Palestinian Authority of taxes due and owing to them;"*

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 13707, Reference 4120 of 20 April 2015. Reporting committee: Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons. See Doc. 14224. Opinion approved by the committee on 23 January 2017.

Amendment D (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 9.2.5, add the following words: ", consistent with adequate monitoring to ensure that all relevant materials are used solely for the purpose intended;"

Amendment E (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 9.3.1, insert the following paragraph:

"use their best endeavours to prevent the firing of rockets and construction of tunnels into Israel;"

Amendment F (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 9.3.4, add the following words: "and gender-based violence"

Amendment G (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 9.3.4, insert the following paragraph:

"use all possible means to promote women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, including education on the risks of early marriage and the encouragement of family spacing;"

Amendment H (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 9.3.4, insert the following paragraph:

"promote women's social and economic empowerment;"

C. Explanatory memorandum by Lord Donald Anderson, rapporteur for opinion

1. Introduction

1. The draft resolution presented by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons rightly recalls Assembly Resolution 1940 (2013) on the situation in the Middle East and reiterates the Parliamentary Assembly's constant position that only a negotiated, two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the cessation of the construction of new settlements and of the extension of old ones on Palestinian territory can create the necessary framework for the normalisation of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the promotion of Palestinian State-building.

2. On this occasion I would wish to recall that in the above-mentioned resolution, the Assembly also called on all Palestinian forces, "to conclude, without further delay and in a transparent manner, the reconciliation, already announced several times, between Fatah and Hamas, based on the Quartet principles". Such a reconciliation would be a major step towards a solution to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

3. The dire and deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Gaza are directly related to the political situation. The fact that Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip since its election victory in 2006, is considered by much of the international community, including the European Union, to be a terrorist organisation, greatly hinders the channelling of aid into Gaza.

4. The Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy follows closely the evolution of the situation in the region and reports on it to the Assembly, in particular through its reports on the partner for democracy status of the Palestinian National Council. In this respect, I draw attention to Assembly Resolutions 1830 (2011), 1969 (2014) and 2105 (2016).

5. I am indebted to Dr Bernard Sabella for a most helpful briefing on the employment prospects of women in Palestine. It is clear that women in Gaza are discriminated against in the labour market with an unemployment rate double that of men and where only 20% of women of working age are in employment. It should, however, be pointed out that the Palestine National Authority itself has endorsed the Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) without any reservations. There is encouragement for job opportunities for women in the West Bank, but not in Gaza. Here, surely, is proof that such progress in a similar societal context is also possible in the Gaza Strip.

6. In addition to past Assembly work on this issue, I used the following sources:

– United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): The Gaza Strip: The Humanitarian Impact of the Blockade, November 2016;

– The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA): Gaza situation weekly reports;

– United Nations Country Team in Palestine: Two years after the 2014 hostilities;

– House of Commons, The Occupied Palestinian Territories: recent developments, 25 August 2016;

– International Committee of the Red Cross: Israel and the occupied territories: Facts and figures from 2015;

– European Commission: Humanitarian aid and civil protection, Palestine, ECHO factsheet, October 2016.

2. Justification of the amendments

Amendment A

There must be improved co-ordination of all incidents of such violations in this area in a credible and systematic way in order to bring maximum pressure to bear on the perpetrators.

Amendment B

Using textbook material designed to incite hatred is provocative and has a negative effect on prospects for peace. No peace agreement will be able to guarantee peace in the medium- to long-term if material which selectively reinforces each community's national narrative is not removed from school textbooks.

Amendment C

There is no case for suspending such payments which can only worsen the precarious financial situation and punish the population of Gaza, as indicated in paragraph 17 of the explanatory memorandum.

Amendment D

The list of permitted materials should be regularly reviewed, but past experience of misuse should lead to adequate monitoring.

Amendment E

The territory of the Gaza Strip is small: no more than 365 km^2 [United Nations report of July 2015]. Relying on their professional intelligence services, the authorities in Gaza could surely do more to prevent tunnelling and the firing of rockets.

Amendment F

Unfortunately gender-based violence is still an issue also in Gaza.

Amendment G

Women's sexual and reproductive health is a human rights issue. Women should have control regarding childbearing. Additionally, women should be warned of the dangers of early marriage and the practice discouraged. The number of children per woman is significantly higher in Gaza than in the West Bank and in the Palestinian population of Israel, so the rise in the population in Gaza can be tackled if the will is there.

The booming population of Gaza is unsustainable in such a small territory and has political consequences. (The population was 250 000 in 1948 at the time of partition and is now at least 1.9 million – see United Nations report of 20 August 2016 "Gaza Two Years After".)

Amendment H

Economic security is a priority demand by Palestinian women and women's social and economic empowerment is a major concern of the United Nations authorities.