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INTRODUCTORY REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Addendum

THE ENVIRONMENTAL SITUATION IN THE OCCUPIED
PALESTINIAN AND OTHER ARAB TERRITORIES

Report of the Executive Director

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its decision 14/11, entitled "The environmental situation in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories," the Governing Council requested the Executive Director, within the mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme, to provide, within available resources, assistance to the Palestinian people, and particularly to the municipalities of the occupied Palestinian territories, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and in co-ordination with the Palestine Liberation Organization, in order to help them protect and improve their environment in the occupied Palestinian territories. The Council also requested him to report to the Council at its fifteenth session on the environmental situation in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories and inform the Council at its fifteenth session about the decision's implementation.

2. To assist him in developing his report, the Executive Director drew upon the experience of a consultant who is familiar with the occupied territories and surrounding countries and the environmental situation there. The consultant was admitted to Israel in January 1989 as a private tourist and collected written materials, interviewed officials and private individuals and visited locations. The uncertain political state of the territories, continuing civil unrest and the tense polarized situation often limited the

consultant's access to information and his ability to corroborate it. He was, however, able to produce a reasonably complete assessment of the environmental situation in the territories and areas he visited. The Executive Director has therefore made extensive use of the consultant's report in the preparation of the present report to the Council.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to:

1. Take note of the report of the Executive Director on the environmental situation in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories;
2. Call upon all concerned to take all measures possible to aid and assist in the protection and improvement of the environment in the territories;
3. Request the Executive Director to continue to monitor and report to the Governing Council new developments which may have an important impact on the environment in the territories.

II. ASSISTANCE TO THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

3. UNEP and the World Health Organization (WHO) will take part in a project entitled "Training course on water supply, sanitation and health for environmental health officers working with the Palestinian people". The 25-month project started in February 1989 and will end in February 1991. It will facilitate training in pollution control and environmentally sound management of environmentally related diseases in refugee camps and settlements to control such diseases more effectively. Over the long term, it should improve drinking water supplies, sanitation and food hygiene and control diarrhoea and other water-borne diseases among refugees.
4. The principal activity will be two four-week courses for 25 participants. The first course is scheduled for October 1989, the second for February 1990. A consultant will visit the area, confer with UNDP, UNEP and WHO, provide the curriculum, and outline participant needs.

III. REPORT ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL SITUATION

5. The state of the environmental situation in the occupied Palestinian and the other Arab territories apart from the civil unrest, is generally satisfactory. Like other developing areas, the environment of the territories is affected by expanding urbanization, intensified agriculture and industrialization. Because the pace of development has been at a moderate pace, potential environmental problems have been accommodated to a reasonable degree. Consequently, the general environment has shown improvement over the past several decades. Nonetheless, greater public awareness and additional funding is needed for water treatment, reuse and conservation measures and other specific environmental improvements. These needs are recognized, but their fulfillment is hampered by lack of funds and comprehensive co-ordinated planning. There is a need for additional specific studies and collaborative efforts among UNDP, Israeli and local authorities and other public and private entities to undertake environmentally sound development programmes and projects.

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6. General description: The territories of Gaza and the West Bank differ in physical geography, climate and other respects. Gaza is in the low-lying coastal plain of the Eastern Mediterranean north of El Arish, Egypt and has Gaza City as its administrative centre. By contrast, the topography of the West Bank ranges from arid Dead Sea Valley area through hill country that enjoys abundant rainfall and occasional snow.

7. The climate of the territories is eastern Mediterranean in character. Population estimates in 1987 were 862,000 for the West Bank and 570,000 for Gaza, totalling 1,432,000. Average population growth in recent years is estimated at 2.5 per cent for the West Bank and 3.0 per cent for Gaza, one of the more densely populated regions of the world. Gaza is more urban (82.3 per cent) than the West Bank (62.7 per cent) although the figures are in flux. GNP per capita has risen during the last 20 years to \$1,850 for the West Bank and \$1,305 for Gaza, while unemployment remains low at two to three per cent. Total GDP of the territories for 1985 was \$943 million (West Bank \$694 million and Gaza \$249 million).

8. Air quality: While reliable baseline data have not been collected nor a system established to collect data, observation and extrapolation from more highly developed comparable areas in Israel indicate that air pollution levels for the territories are within accepted standards, due in part to the less developed state of the economy there. This is expected to change in future and steps must be taken to prevent measurable increases in pollution from stationary and mobile sources.

9. Inland waters: Water resources are among the most critical and over-exploited natural resources of the territories. Concerted joint planning and wise stewardship, including water conservation, elimination of waste, and full treatment and reuse of treated effluent, are needed to provide municipal, industrial and agricultural water and to protect the aquifers and related water sources.

10. Water use for agricultural, domestic and industrial uses increased greatly during the past 20 years. Water is being withdrawn and used at an unsustainably high rate. As a result of over-pumping, water tables are falling, salinization of wells is increasing, and water quality is declining. The supply of safe piped drinking water to the population and the provision of waste treatment works have improved over the past 20 years; a large proportion of city-dwellers and many people in the rural areas receive safe chlorinated water, and adequate sewage treatment has become widespread. But in a number of places, improvements in the supply of safe water have overloaded wastewater systems, particularly old septic tanks and cesspools. Public health has improved, however, due to a ban on crop irrigation with untreated sewage and to universal immunization.

11. Marine environment: Because there are few polluting outfalls or runoff along the coastline of Gaza, the sea in this area is relatively free of pollution and the beaches, apart from some litter and occasional tarballs from oil spills, are clean. Continued attention to wastewater treatment will be required to protect offshore fisheries and recreational resources in future.

12. Land use: Growing urbanization is causing increasing competition for scarce land for agriculture and other uses, especially in Gaza. Although struggles over land use persist, the West Bank and Gaza (with Israel) comprise one of the few regions in the world in which desertification has been reversed, and more land is in productive use than was the case 20 or 100 years ago.

13. Forestry: Apart from a few small isolated areas there is very little first growth or other naturally propagated forest cover in the West Bank. This is due to historic patterns of deforestation, or in Gaza, to conditions of geography and climate. The forest environment in the West Bank is improving, despite a long history of intensive resource use and abuse, through the action of the Governments of Israel and Jordan and the Jewish National Fund to afforest the hills and reduce illegal cutting of trees. Most forests are publicly managed and commercial forestry is light. While there have been reports of deliberately set fires in the past, no fires or serious vandalism to naturally-growing or planted trees or crops were reported by interviewees or noted in inspections. Reforestation, particularly of hillsides, must be continued and accelerated under any administration.

14. Wildlife, nature and protected areas: Despite continuing development and a low state of public awareness in the territories, a creditable record of protection of fauna, flora, landscapes, clean water sources and nature reserves has been compiled. Protection of wildflowers and other plants and birds and other animals has been undertaken. Public education is aided by laws to protect wildlife, and over 55 reserves occupy an estimated 10 per cent of the total land area of the West Bank, including the famed Ein Fesh'ha on the Dead Sea. Some nature research, integrated pest control and rabies protection are carried out.

15. Human settlement: The infrastructure of human settlements in the West Bank and Gaza and the general health conditions of the population have developed and improved over the past 20 years. Opportunities for additional improvement do exist and are being acted on by various agencies and institutions. Safe drinking water has eliminated many environmental diseases and other adverse conditions, (such as accidental lead poisonings), and universal immunization, wastewater treatment, and solid waste collection and disposal have improved conditions over recent decades. Life expectancy has increased and infant and maternal mortality rates have declined.

16. Industrial development: Industrial activity, although growing, is a relatively less developed sector, despite efforts by local leaders, the Civil Administration, UNDP and other public and private organizations. Consequently, neither polluting industrial emissions and effluents nor noise is a serious problem. The population needs and desires more development with appropriate environmental controls in any further development plans.

17. Institutional arrangements and legislation: The Civil Administration administers the West Bank and Gaza, with input and assistance from other Israeli agencies. The Environmental Protection Service has been merged recently into a new Ministry of Environment, which will assume a wide range of functions. A number of other planning, advisory, and executive entities apply a range of legislative and administrative environmental enactments,

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superimposed upon the laws of Jordan. A number of treaties and other international agreements related to the environment apply. Israel policy applies the same standards to the territories as those that apply throughout Israel. This means, inter alia, that while some aspects are positive (such as the use of environmental assessments under the planning law), other areas need improvement (for example, air emission and water effluent standards, higher standards for ambient air and water, comprehensive toxic substance regulation and solid waste regulations. The growing world-wide public recognition of the need for environmental improvement has been recognized in the territories. This has led to improvements in public health there. The environment is generally satisfactory, and in some respects, healthier and sounder than that of industrialized portions of Israel. If measures for environmental protection are incorporated into the economic development that is needed, environmental and public health protection could be sustained and even improved in the years ahead.

18. Conclusions and recommendations: To help protect the environment and quality of life of the population, it is recommended that an apolitical joint professional programme of environmentally sound development projects, and other specific scientific, legal, economic and ecological efforts related to the territories should be considered for implementation with UNDP, the nations and local leaders concerned and others. The following are examples of such efforts needed in the territories:

(a) a public transport feasibility study to address anticipated air pollution from motor vehicles;

(b) a comprehensive planning and budgeting study of water supply and quality to save precious water resources;

(c) a comprehensive study of agricultural development and marketing for export, including organic farming products, to provide food and some export needs without causing problems to the environment;

(d) a scientific and legal study of pesticides and other toxic materials and their control;

(e) a comprehensive assessment of flora, fauna, nature reserves and related values;

(f) a feasibility study of high technology, tourism and other areas of development and their environmental impacts;

(g) a legal/institutional study of Gaza fisheries restrictions and the ecological and economic consequences of any proposed relief from such restrictions;

(h) a legal study of optimal models for environmental standards, criteria and practices for application in the territories.
