

### Peace for Ola

Ola is from our country. She is forty something years old. She is beautiful and wears a black scarf the way grandmothers used to tie them at the back of the head. As soon as she ties her scarf, she shakes her head to make sure it is sitting exactly as she wants it to be.

Ola does not understand about politics, she says, but when I watch her talk, get angry, demand something or mock things, I realize that she understands politics completely.

Ola simply says what all mothers say: I do not want to be frightened when I sleep or wake up, or go outside. I want to bury all my fears once and for all, forever. I want peace to kiss us on the cheeks in the evening and tell us to arise to a homeland, a homeland where we are safe... simply safe.

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## The French Initiative:

## An attempt to kick-start the frozen peace process

✶ Muntaser Hamdan

The battle over the French initiative, which was proposed to revive the frozen peace process, is intensifying amidst attempts to divert the initiative's aims. Rather than addressing the initiative itself, discussions and consultations about the French proposals reflect international political and diplomatic disarray in the wake of official Palestinian approval of the French initiative, which includes the convening of a peace conference that provides that French recognition of a Palestinian state would be declared in the event of the failure of the conference to achieve the aspired outcome.

The Palestinian leadership announced its commitment to the French proposals for a peace conference and revival of negotiations to end the Israeli occupation and establish an independent geographically contiguous Palestinian state in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem in the context of the two-state solution. The Israelis and Americans opposed these proposals, and even the convening of a peace conference, and cast doubts on the effectiveness of the two-state solution at present.

The US administration assumes full responsibility for the failure of the peace process to implement the agreements reached at the Madrid Conference and the subsequent political provisions regarding the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. The US administration is now exerting all its efforts and political influence to portray the French initiative as a non-starter because they do not wish to expose their hidden and overt support for the Israeli occupation as embodied in the Israeli state. The US administration also recognizes that the success of such a conference would free the peace process from US control and would introduce international sponsorship of a real and serious peace process capable of ending the occupation and achieving the Palestinian people's legitimate national goals.

Mustafa Barghouti, General Secretary of the Palestine National Initiative, believes that the French have retreated noticeably from their initiative and have come to accept amendments to discuss only specific proposals. This implies a step back from recognition of the Palestinian state following the international conference as proposed by France in the first place. Barghouti said: "The Palestinian objective in convening this international peace conference is to end the occupation and obtain French recognition of the Palestinian state. However, the French have clearly retreated from this because



they are talking about the state as a negotiable issue between the Palestinians and Israelis, and have also withdrawn from recognizing the state in the event of the failure of the conference."

He added: "We cannot count on this type of reluctance because we do not intend to resume negotiations that lead to no concrete results. Meanwhile, Israel is winning time to expand its settlements and complete other projects under the banner that negotiations are futile."

French diplomacy recently resumed in the region, undertaken by the Foreign Minister and a special French envoy, with the aim of conducting broader political consultations with Arab leaders and Israel and to produce a vision acceptable to all parties in the framework of the French initiative. However, it is obvious that the French proposal of convening an international conference has now been limited to bringing the Palestinians and Israelis back to the negotiating table and

formulating solutions related to the results of these negotiations. French recognition of the Palestinian state would be linked to the negotiations, a proposal to which the Palestinians are opposed.

Palestinian Foreign Minister, Riyad al-Maliki, has said on more than one occasion that Palestinian demands are clear and that the Palestinians seek to implement legal international resolutions, including ending the Israeli occupation. This is consistent with the vision of the Palestinian leadership that all means of reaching a solution through negotiations have been exhausted and resolutions and conventions now need to be implemented to put an end to the occupation of all Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 and to establish a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

Saleh Rafat, PLO Executive Committee member, stressed that the French initiative aims to convene an international conference, from which an international

body would emerge to sponsor any subsequent negotiations. The position of the Palestinian leadership in this regard is strictly that the goals of such a conference must be the implementation of international resolutions. Any international body that is formed must supervise the negotiations collectively in a time frame not exceeding three years. The mission of this body would be the implementation of resolutions and not further negotiations.

Rafat called upon the Palestinian leadership to bring an end to its hesitation and to start implementing the decisions of the PLO Central Council because all Israeli responses to Palestinian demands are negative; all Israeli practices confirm that Israel is not willing at all to implement resolutions. He referred to the need for the next PLO meeting to discuss Israeli measures that are destroying the two-state solution and expanding settlements in the West Bank.

## Student Mahmoud Barham: From a machine for selling books to a device for the disabled

☑ **Sudus Qura'an \***

Asked about how he started out, he laughed and said: "Maybe the Grendizer was the beginning". At the age of five, he had a passion for mechatronics long before he learned about this subject. Under parental orders, he was responsible for the repair of house appliances and this led him to create a machine for selling books. He then worked on a technological project to help a disabled person to stand, the first such device of its kind in Palestine and the Arab world.

Mahmoud Barham, a student in his fifth year at the Mechatronics Engineering Department at Birzeit University, is from the town of Serees in Jenin governorate. His story is of someone who lives among us, but is different, someone who we long to meet because we believe in their capabilities, creativity and innovation, someone to whom we lift our hats!

He was associated with the machine to sell books since he was at school and saw one on 'Khawater 6' (Notions 6), a Saudi TV series. The machine caused an uproar in Saudi Arabia at that time when a group of girls bought the machine from Spain for \$10,000 to put in a commercial center. Mahmoud thought that the machine could easily be manufactured. "Procrastination" prevented him from making it until he reached the workshops in Birzeit and he then manufactured the machine with other students Ala' Rimawi and engineer Ahmad Barham.

The machine sells and lends books automatically from the control of an iPad or mobile phone. It remains connected with the owner via the Internet. The three students received an award for creativity and distinction from the Higher Council of Innovation and Excellence during the first major innovation forum that took place in Palestine.

After the machine selling books, his graduation project was called Azer [meaning to fortify]. This is a technological device to help and support physically challenged people and the elderly to stand on their feet by orders given by their muscles. The idea occurred to Mahmoud while he was looking for a graduation project and after he met his colleague, Mohammad Mkheimar, a student at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering. They were aware of the challenges they would encounter, and which started with the objections of their professors due to the difficulty of the project and their lack of competency. In addition, Mahmoud is a mechatronics student and his colleagues are in electrical engineering, which posed more difficulties about how they could meet up on the same course and work on one project.

Finally, the University approved their project three weeks after its submission. Mahmoud and his colleagues worked on this challenge until the project was completed. The humanitarian project of Azer was complete and the device assists the disabled person to stand, sit, walk, and go up and down the stairs. Further developments are pending before the product can be put on the market.

Mahmoud co-founded the Mechanics Association in five Palestinian universities: the Islamic University of Gaza; the Palestine Polytechnic University; the Palestine Technical University- Khadoori; An-Najah National University; and Birzeit University, whose branch he heads. The Association was founded for mechanical engineering students to link them with the private sector. They can also meet with other colleagues in their specialty, even after their graduation from University, and this boosts relationships and the achievement of other practical and altruistic goals.

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## Gaza Port and Airport: Humanitarian purposes or an Israeli goal?

☑ **Mai Abu Hasanein**

Every time the debate resumes about Israel approval for building a port and airport in the Gaza Strip, politicians and analysts offer different opinions about the objective; is it for humanitarian purposes to break the Israeli blockade or an Israeli demand to keep the Gaza Strip isolated and a separate state?

Political analyst Akram Atallah believes that the unity of the West Bank and Gaza Strip has faded over time and talk about a port and airport in the absence of unity simply enhances divisions.

In an interview with al-Hal, Atallah stated: "The Gaza Strip is caught between the devil and the deep blue sea: demands for a port and airport for humanitarian reasons, although this will exacerbate the national divide, or having no port and airport for the sake of maintaining unity with the West Bank, which harms the population."

Ibrahim Abrash, Professor of Political Science at al-Azhar University in the Gaza Strip, agrees and adds: "This is what has been happening since 2007: the unity government is incapable of assuming its responsibilities and the de facto government is operating on the ground in the Gaza Strip."

During an interview with al-Hal, the editor-in-chief of the Hamas Falisteen newspaper, Mustafa Sawaf, denied that "the movement calls for a separate state in the Gaza Strip".

A prominent leader in Hamas, Ahmad Yusef described talk about a state in the Gaza Strip as "an allegation promoted by some people" and stressed that the idea has never been put forward by the leaders or intellectuals of the movement.

He believes that Gaza "represents the center of gravity of the national project. This talk certainly enhances the distance between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank inherent in Zionist strategic thinking, which means the loss of the Palestinian cause."

Kayed al-Ghoul, a prominent leader in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, emphasized to al-Hal that: "The separation of the Gaza Strip from the West Bank is an Israeli goal that required persistent efforts by Israel, including interference to end attempts at reconciliation, and consigning Tony Blair and other European envoys to find solutions that ease the blockade on the Gaza Strip in return for the political price of a conditional truce." Deficiency or strategy?

Al-Ghoul described a "dangerous situation": "The risk lies in that Hamas is not aware of the political implications behind Israeli measures of gradual closures of access to the territories occupied in 1948, in parallel with settlement policies in the West Bank and the Judaization of Jerusalem, thereby imposing a fait accompli that renders the establishment of a Palestinian state impossible. This will leave only the Gaza Strip for the establishment of

a Palestinian entity, no matter what it will be called."

### Airport justifications

Ahmad Yusef confirmed that "the establishment of a port and airport is to find ways for survival and resilience".

He added: "Islamists in the Gaza Strip have not changed their belief in the national project of establishing a Palestinian state from the river to the sea, but with the regional and international complications, they temporarily accept a state on the territories occupied in 1967."

Sawaf justifies the establishment of a port and airport as protecting the Gaza Strip "from the Israeli and the Egyptian sieges".

Atallah argues that "Israeli schemes since the 1980s have a demographic dimension and have been reflected in two ways: the migration of Jews from the Soviet Union to Israel, and the removal of the Gaza Strip from their responsibility, which proves that the separation was planned."

Abrash thinks that any negotiations with Israel related to a port and airport must be conducted by the PLO and the Palestinian Authority, not by Hamas indirectly through Turkish or Qatari mediation.

Yusef disagrees with Abrash regarding the PLO. He told al-Hal: "The PLO does not exist on the ground and has turned into merely a title. President Mahmoud Abbas is exclusively the political decision maker."

### The alternative

Abrash, who authored a series of articles entitled Making the



impossible happen and the possible become impossible, says that the national alternative to prevent the "State of Gaza" scheme would be to "review all the agreements of the past years, starting with the Oslo Agreement, because it has been proven that there is a strategic imbalance in the PLO, the Palestinian Authority, and Hamas as well."

Atallah believes that the alternative is either to dissolve all existing authorities and return to the status prior to the inception of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, or to undertake elections and create a new unified political system.

Sawaf confirmed that the alternative

is to regain unity by implementation of the reconciliation agreement and the revival of the PLO.

Yusef stressed: "The elite must come up with new ideas as the Palestinian territories lack a strong personality capable of thwarting Israeli schemes." He also stated that "the priority is for reconciliation and elections that lead to unity."

Al-Ghoul confirmed: "A rapid resolution to the division and agreement on a political program that puts the conflict with the Israeli occupation back on track by adopting all means of resistance under a unified national leadership, represented in the PLO framework after its democratic reconstruction."

## These problems dried up the “oil” of the Gaza Strip\*

Wala' Farawneh

Spring lost its delights and splendor in the north-west areas of Rafah after the disappearance of hundreds of dunums of land planted with colorful, fragrant flowers.

The fragrance of the roses and carnations is no longer there, the red and yellow flowers are not visible, and the greenhouses are now a barren wasteland, with the exception of few planted with tomatoes and cucumbers.

Flower farmers who gained extensive experience in this field during more than 15 years of cultivation no longer need this expertise.

These were farms of beauty that supplied the specially requested Gazan carnations for years. Suddenly, the siege was imposed; the roses were stuck on border crossings, unable to exit, until they withered, their fragrance faded, and they ended up as fodder for livestock.

### An end to cultivation

Farmer Mohammad Hijazi, one of the largest flower growers, stated that what was previously called the oil of the Gaza Strip, and which generated tens of millions of dollars, has declined over the years and has almost vanished now.

In his interview with al-Hal, Hijazi recalled the land planted with roses in Rafah covering an area of over 1100 dunums in 1992-2000-. The size of this area

has declined year after year, aggravated by the Palestinian political divide and Israeli restrictions on border crossings, up to this year when only 30 dunums have been cultivated.

Hijazi laments the fate of the roses of the Gaza Strip, which were renowned all over Europe, particularly in the Netherlands where millions of flowers were exported. Cultivation was halted due to the increase in production costs. The cost of planting one dunum of land with flowers varies between \$6,000 to \$15,000 over a six-month period during which special care is needed, and other requirements such as clean water and pesticides became a burden for farmers.

Hijazi attributes the collapse of flower cultivation to the high production costs and obstacles to exports. Merchants from Europe would conclude business agreements with farmers, who would prepare their flowers for export, but each year a problem would occur: the closure of border crossings due to security issues, Jewish holidays coinciding with the peak export season and during which the Karm Abu Salem crossing closes, and sometimes due to unexplained Israeli obstacles and pretexts.

As a result, there was a loss of confidence in Palestinian farmers and importers turned to more reliable sources in other countries that could meet time commitments, all at the expense



of the Palestinian farmer.

According to Hijazi, millions of flowers have been used as livestock fodder over recent years and others have been given away free of charge, especially as the local market is unable to absorb such a large production that was destined for export originally.

### Multiple reasons

Economic expert Mohammad Skeik has studied the movement of exports on the Karm Abu Salem crossing and explained that the deterioration in flower cultivation in the Gaza Strip can be attributed to a decline in donor support for

this sector. The Netherlands supported the flower sector for years and facilitated exports by opening its markets to roses produced in the Gaza Strip, but this is no longer in their interests.

Skeik explains that even if farmers pay the costs of planting the flowers, they will still have losses because the local market cannot absorb a commodity that does not have a high priority among a population preoccupied with securing their basic needs for food and clothing. In addition, border crossings do not operate regularly, making exports from the Gaza Strip a risk.

### Limited production

A flower shop owner in Rafah Ammar, Abu Shamaleh, says that rose production is no longer sufficient for the local market. In spite of the high quality of local flowers and their beautiful colors, shapes and fragrance, we are obliged to import from the Israeli market during certain seasons like Valentine's Day and Mothers Day to cover the shortfall. These flowers are delivered at a high price and risk being withered and damaged by the time they reach the consumer.

*\*This article was written during a course on economic reports implemented in the Gaza Strip by the Media Development Center.*

## Abu Mohammad al-Sabah: 51 years at the gate of a settlement

Muhanad al-Shaer \*

Three old houses sit on the top of a mountain in Taqou' village, to the east of Bethlehem. They are impeding the expansion of the Israeli settlement of Taqua over the land of the village in an area a few meters from the settlement fence. The houses belong to Mahmoud Abu Mohammad al-Sabah, a 75-year-old man who built his first house there in 1964 and has now become the first line of defense against the expansion of the settlement.

The Israeli occupation forces have sent several demolition warnings to threaten this man's presence on his land. His house was actually demolished twice in the 1980s and he lived in a tent close to the debris of his home until he reconstructed it in defiance of the racist Israeli occupation forces obstructing him from rebuilding his house.

Al-Sabah talked about his long journey of determination: "We have no freedom. We are not allowed to build houses on our land. The future of my sons is uncertain. We may end up being dispersed if this situation continues. Three of my sons are getting married and have no place to live."

Each morning, Abu Mohammad sits in front of his house, about

five meters from the settlement, which is surrounded by a fence mounted with surveillance cameras. He looks sadly at the land that was confiscated by the settlement cancer.

He described the place where he lives as dangerous. He and his family live in permanent fear and anxiety because they are far from the village community and very close to the settlers, whose violent attacks did not even spare the livestock. Nevertheless, he shoulders these burdens and is determined to stay on his land and in his house regardless of the pressure and displacement schemes imposed on him to force him off his land.

Al-Sabah said that the torture starts during the night when settlers throw stones at the house. The family never have one peaceful night of sleep due to the loud music played by settlers to force the family to leave.

Al-Sabah advises his sons to keep hold of their land because it is their homeland and source of life without which they cannot live. He also said: "In spite of the persistent terrorism and intimidation by Israeli occupation forces to force us off our land, I am determined not to leave. They can only dream of that.



The settlement built near al-Sabah house.

This is my ancestors' land and we have been living here before this damned occupation came." The total area of land owned by Abu Mohammad is over 50 dunums and he and his family defend it from the sprawling settlements. This area is the only outlet for the village, which is surrounded by settlements on three sides.

Al-Sabah explained that services and assistance provided to the family are minimal in comparison

with the settler attacks targeting the family and their land.

The Israeli occupation has tried to tempt them to sell the land and leave. "They offered an unimaginable sum of money to leave the land", but he is adamant that he will stay despite all offers and in all circumstances.

Al-Sabah holds on to his land as an example of determination and resilience, with a solid shield in the face of Israeli arrogance and settlement schemes that

target him daily. His resilience is greater than any article we can write about him; he is the author of a chapter of determination longer than a novel, deeper than any encyclopedia, and richer than any dictionary because all the vocabulary that testifies to his steadfastness could make up a dictionary in itself.

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# Where can you find magic amulets and pilgrimage certificates in Birzeit University?

**Nadin Aranki\***

The Graduate Studies building at Birzeit University holds archeological treasures that few people know of: On the ground floor, more specifically in the Canaan room, the University museum holds three archeological and art collections. The first collection comprises approximately 300 Palestinian dresses, their accessories, and headwear, purchased by the University from an antiques dealer in Jerusalem in the late nineties.

The second collection is an assortment of artifacts collected by Tawfiq Canaan, a Palestinian physician. Curator Amin Shobaki said: "The Tawfiq Canaan collection is the most important in the museum and has a wide variety of amulets and Palestinian lucky charms." He explained that these artifacts arrived at Birzeit University in 1995 as a donation by Tawfiq Canaan's daughters and family after their father requested that the collection never be removed from Palestine.

Canaan categorized the collection as specializing in protection because the amulets were used by people as charms to protect them from envy and illness.

Items include talismans, drinking bowls, beads, metal shapes containing incantations, and coded dishes with symbols and drawings. These were filled with water or oil for the treatment of diseases and for protection from magic spells.

Canaan collected these pieces from Palestine and Syria. Most of them came from different locations in Palestine due to his work as a doctor, travelling from one village to another, which enabled him to collect these items. The Canaan collection also includes Islamic and Christian certificates of pilgrimage, a ritual of respect granted to those who visited holy places in Palestine after returning from Mecca. Those who passed through Syria used to visit the Dome of the Rock, al-Aqsa Mosque and the Ibrahim Mosque as a ritual following their pilgrimage.

Tawfiq Canaan collected 1,400 artifacts from the beginning of the twentieth century up to the 1940s. Perhaps the most significant items are the scientific documentation about each piece. At that time, he was also in contact with collectors of relics in Europe who visited Palestine.

Canaan documented the artifacts in both English and German. His wife was German and she helped him with the documentation, which added value to the pieces by providing background information. These items are treasures of archeological heritage and of great importance to social scientists and anthropologists.

Canaan obtained many pieces from churches. Some are over 300 years old. In general, his collections date from the 19th and 20th centuries.

Of the art work, Shobaki said: "This comprises 300 paintings and works of modern art that were collected during different periods in the 1990s. They include paintings by artist Renee Ferrer that are located in the main library and that featured in an exhibition entitled "Not like any other spring".

This art collection was donated by different artists during the 1990s and up to the present day. Shobaki added that since the University started its collection of archeological items and art works, the most significant moment in the museum's history was the arrival of the Canaan collection in 1995. The majority of pieces are located in the Canaan room in the Graduate Studies building, with the exception of ten pieces that are exhibited in a glass box at the entrance to the main library.

Tawfiq Canaan was a Palestinian physician, researcher and anthropologist, born in 1882 in Beit Jala. He wrote many articles in Arabic, English, German and French. The Canaan room with its valuable archeological collection attracts many Arab and foreign researchers and scholars.

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From the museum collection

## From the Palestinian Museum



Poet Samih al-Qasim reading a poem at a rally attended by thousands to commemorate Earth Day in Sakhnin between 1980 and 1985.

From the album of poet Samih al-Qasim.  
© Palestinian Museum

Each issue of Al-Hal will feature a photograph in cooperation with the Palestinian Museum, which will open its doors for the first time in the town of Birzeit in May 2016. The Museum is supported by the Welfare Association.