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Inauguration of Renovated Notary Public Department in Ramallah

Chief Justice, Issa Abu Sharrar, and Dr. Howard Sumka, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission Director inaugurated the Notary Public (NP) Department at the Ramallah Courthouse during a ceremony held on September 11. The Notary Public Department was renovated and upgraded through assistance from USAID's NETHAM, Justice and Enforcement Rule of Law Program.

The public ceremony was attended by Ali Khashan, the Minister of Justice, Ahmad Al-Mghani, the Attorney General, Ali Mhanna, the Head of the Palestinian Bar Association, and a number of judges, lawyers, and judicial specialists.

During the ceremony, the Chief Justice thanked USAID for their assistance in upgrading and developing the Notary Public Departments in West Bank, particularly the Ramallah Department. He noted that this assistance will aid in providing better services to the public and reducing the workload and pressure on the Notary Public Officers through automating and archiving the workload of the department, in addition to providing advanced technology to help in improving the service delivery and performance of the department.

In his speech, the USAID Mission Director emphasized the commitment of the American Government to building a strong and vibrant judicial system, given its importance in establishing a democratic Palestinian State. The USAID Mission Director also added that Nethams SJC activities aim at increasing confidence in the formal justice sector, represented in the Ministry of Justice, Attorney General's Office and the Public Prosecution offices, and the Supreme Judicial Council and that the project's activities focus on institutionalizing these entities to strengthen the formal justice sector capacities in terms of enforcing laws and court decisions.



Chief Justice Issa Abu Sharrar and USAID Mission Director Howard Sumka taking part in the ribbon cutting ceremony at the Ramallah Notary Public Offices.

Chief Justice Abu Sharrar notes that this assistance will aid in providing better services to the public and reducing the workload and pressure on the Notary Public Officers.

Nabil Isifan, Netham's Chief of Party presented the various steps and stages taken in the development of the Notary Public Department, which included re-engineering and organizing of the department's work flow, improving the data entry and archiving systems, issuing legal and informative pamphlets for the use by the public and department officers, and establishing a baseline to measure the performance of the department's personnel.

Recently development and renovation work began at the Notary Department in Nablus. An inauguration ceremony will be held in Nablus on November 14.

- Netham Activities Under Progress:**
- Development and Renovation of the Notary Public – Nablus Court.
 - Strategic Planning (National Plan for Reform and Development 2008-2010)
 - Upgrading the Administrative and Financial Systems - SJC.
 - Judicial Registry - MOJ.
 - Development of Notification Systems- Courts.
 - Needs Assessment of Attorney General and Public Prosecution Offices.
 - Development of Case Management.

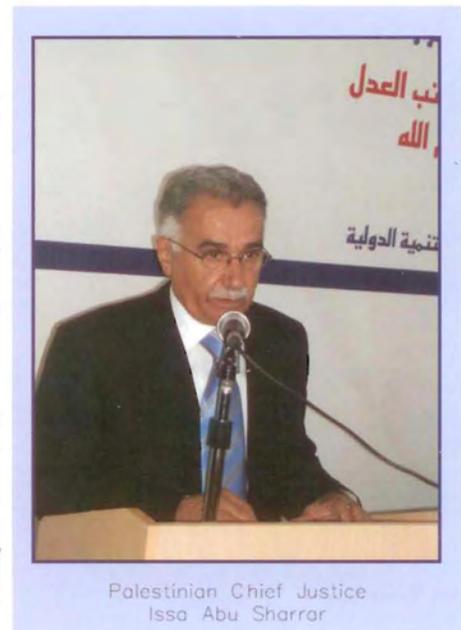
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A Message from the Chief Justice

Subsequent to its creation and after the signing of the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority (PA) took control of the justice sector from the Israeli occupation in 1995.

After the handover of this portfolio to the PA, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was one of the pioneer donor agencies that provided support and assistance to the development and enhancement of the Palestinian judicial system in order to strengthen justice and rule of law.

In 1999, the USAID-funded DPK Project presented ambitious ideas aimed at developing the judiciary and improving its performance. This project worked on automating the court workload through the Al-Mizan automation system (Version 1), which was provided to a number of First Instance and Conciliation Courts in the West Bank and Gaza, knowing that this automation software was an intermediary step to be used as a base towards developing another automation system (Al-Mizan Version 2) that will be implemented at a later stage.



Palestinian Chief Justice
Issa Abu Sharrar

In November 2005, USAID resumed its assistance to the Palestinian Judiciary through launching a series of new activities. Prior to the initiation of activities, political changes prevented implementation of these programs and ultimately led to suspension of assistance and freezing of development projects. Further political changes took place in mid-2007 and USAID has re-expressed its readiness to assist the Palestinian judiciary. The swift implementation has exceeded our expectations. The first significant achievement towards improving the Palestinian judiciary was represented in the development and upgrade of the Ramallah Notary Public Department which was suffering from insufficient space and chaotic and poor workflow systems. The USAID-funded Netham Project has renovated and created a proper space for this department in an unprecedented timely manner leaving the department fully equipped with the various systems, equipment, and archiving needed to re-engineer and organize the workload of the department.

After the completion of the Ramallah Notary Public, within its plan towards supporting the Palestinian judiciary, and through its efforts towards replicating the Ramallah success and making it similar to the Ramallah Notary Public Department, the Netham Project directed efforts towards developing and improving the Nablus Notary Public Department, which is expected to be inaugurated before mid-November 2007. In addition and with the assistance of USAID, Netham will develop and upgrade the Financial and Administrative Departments at the Supreme Judicial Council.

Based on this rapid progress, we are looking forward to maintaining stronger cooperation focused on developing and improving the infrastructure of our courts to assist in creating a qualitative development in terms of courts improvement, which will ultimately lead to an upgrade in the performance of the courts and judicial departments as a whole. We will also accelerate efforts to develop the Palestinian courts and departments of the Supreme Judicial Council towards the ultimate goal of enhancing judicial independence and rule of law.

The authors views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for international Development of the United States Government.



Data entry of old files

SJC IT staff & the new queuing system

Notary Public manual

New waiting area



Supreme Judicial Council

Want to learn more about the Supreme Judicial Council? Check out the Supreme Judicial Council website

www.courts.gov.ps

Netham's Assistance to the Notary Public Makes a Difference

The impact of this initiative is gauged here by public users, lawyers, and Notary Public staff.

Palestinian Businesswoman Maha Abushusheh

"In Ramallah almost every citizen has to go the Notary office at least once and prior to this change that visit was often dreadful and humiliating. The queuing system is wonderful and the atmosphere is very comfortable and sophisticated. Unlike before, citizens feel respected with clear lines and procedures. I strongly recommend making similar changes in all courts and other government offices utilized by the public."



Maha Abushusheh

Ramallah Notary Public Officer, Saleh Mousa Khalil

"Prior to these changes, the situation in the Notary Public Department was difficult and unbearable with tight space and lack of organization that affected everyone from staff to the public waiting to process deeds. NP Officer Khalil attests to the public's approval of the new changes, "now the public is happy but we have to work to get more lawyers to respect the new queuing system."



Notary Public Officer Saleh Mousa Khalil behind the desk

Notary Public Assistant Lama Al-Jubeh

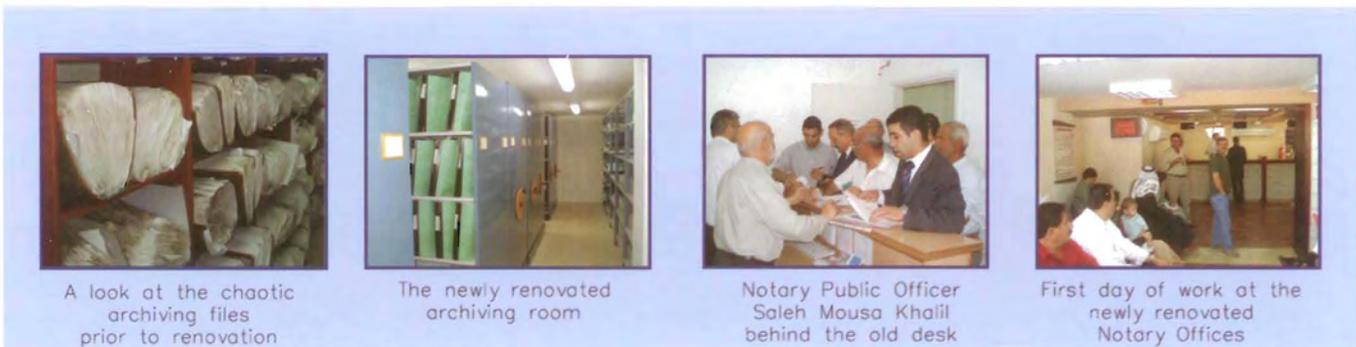
"The improvements that took place are great. The pressure is still the same due to the increasing workload but at least the atmosphere is comfortable," says Notary Assistant Al-Jubeh. She also notes a significant difference in the department from four years ago when she first began work in the department, "at that time it was only me and one Notary Officer working and we were constrained in one small room that was not able to accommodate the public leading to overcrowding in the office, and a chaotic queuing system. Now the space includes a large public seating area, an information booth, space for two Notary Public Officers and an assistant, in addition to an area that accommodates four data entry volunteers and a substantial archiving room."

Attorney Yazid Dawabsha

Dawabsha sees the difference from a lawyers perspective. "Now there is better organization and clearer instructions in addition to the benefits of the queuing system which has led to swiftness in processing cases," he says. Another positive development he positively acknowledges is turning the department into a non-smoking area.



Notary Public Assistant Lama Al-Jubeh



A look at the chaotic archiving files prior to renovation

The newly renovated archiving room

Notary Public Officer Saleh Mousa Khalil behind the old desk

First day of work at the newly renovated Notary Offices

Q & A with the Minister of Justice

Q. What is your vision for the Ministry of Justice?

A. Until recently the Ministry was the victim of various conflicts the reasons for and motives behind which are personal views and partial and incomprehensive vision. Since I assumed my responsibilities as the Minister of Justice, I decided it is very important to work to achieve the goals related to the development of the justice sector through the activation of the Ministry's role and to work together with all stakeholders.



Minister of Justice, Dr. Ali Khashan

Q. How could you describe to our readers the achievements that have been made since you started performing your duties as a Minister of Justice?

A. Efforts were focused on the Ministry's activities and its relations with the public and with other judicial institutions and bodies this led to the adoption of a policy build upon continuance and fruitful communications with the Supreme Judicial Council and the Public Prosecution. In order to develop and start an effective reform process which targets the justice sector based on the government's agenda, these efforts resulted recently in the joint drafting of the Justice Sector National Plan which was recently implemented and monitored by the Ministry of Planning. We were also able to gather all the individual and sometimes contradictory efforts related to judicial training and education through the understandings we reached with the Supreme Judicial Council. Our efforts in this regard were finally materialized through the renovation and establishment of the temporary quarters of the Palestinian Judicial Institute in Ramallah through assistance of the USAID /Netham Project. The MOJ also signed an agreement with the Jordanian Judicial Institute.

On another track we were able to successfully introduce the strategic planning concept to the Ministry as a precondition for serving the justice sector and this was done through the assistance of various donor projects.

Q. What do you anticipate for the Judicial Institute and how will it serve the Judiciary?

A. Training and upgrading the skills of judges, prosecutors, and judicial personnel is very important and necessary in achieving a just and independent judiciary in developed countries. We in Palestine give great consideration and importance to judicial training and realize its importance and reflections on the justice sector. Because of its importance, effective judicial training has to be developed based on our national, academic, and professional standards through specialized institutions; therefore, we are optimistic that the establishment of a Judicial Institute would contribute to the unification of training efforts and would unify the authority behind such training which would ultimately serve in the development of a comprehensive and balanced training which is capable of strengthening our judges competencies and skills in Palestine.

Strengthening the Skills of Judges through the Establishment of Judicial Training

The Judicial Training Institute (JTI) aims at providing legal and judicial related training services in an effort to enhance the capacity and skills of judges, Public Prosecution members, and court administrators to carry out their duties more effectively and efficiently.

Netham's Consultant Qais Jabareen who is working with the Ministry of Justice on establishing the Institute says that this work is important for several reasons, •the Institute will aim to build the capacity and enhance skills of the judiciary through keeping judges and Public Prosecution members updated on all new developments in the legal field. In addition, the Institute will provide a preparatory training program for new judges which will help in establishing competent judicial candidates to serve on the bench. Lastly, by centralizing training at and through the institute this measure will assist in creating a centralized database of judicial training conducted and facilitate tailoring future training programs based on the needs of the judiciary thereby ending the various ad-hoc training programs.

Netham is working with the Institute in several key areas. The first area is the legal framework and establishment of the Judicial Training Institute law and various by-laws and regulations defining the work and responsibilities of the JTI. The second area is the administrative framework to develop the Institutes needed organizational structure and inter-departmental coordination. The third area focuses on renovation of a space to serve as the Institutes offices. A new space consisting of 320 square meters for the JTI was renovated; including installation of tiles, windows, doors, paint, air conditioning, restroom upgrades, and renovation of the buildings entrance. In addition to the renovation work, a cohesive package of needed equipment and furniture including computers, printers and furniture for a computer lab, a wireless network, server, projectors and training screens were delivered. Finally, a library was created to provide educational and training tools. The Judicial Training Institute will be inaugurated during a ceremony on November 14.

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