

INDIA – PALESTINE RELATIONS

India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and its attitude to the Palestinian question was given voice through our freedom struggle by Mahatma Gandhi. India's empathy with the Palestinian cause and its friendship with the people of Palestine have become an integral part of its time-tested foreign policy. In 1947, India voted against the partition of Palestine at the United Nations General Assembly. India was the first Non-Arab State to recognize PLO as sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1974. India was one of the first countries to recognize the State of Palestine in 1988. In 1996, India opened its Representative Office to the Palestine Authority in Gaza, which later was shifted to Ramallah in 2003.

India always played a proactive role in garnering support for the Palestinian cause in multilateral fora. India co-sponsored the draft resolution on "the right of Palestinians to self-determination" during the 53rd session of the UN General Assembly and voted in favour of it. India also voted in favour of UN General Assembly Resolution in October 2003 against construction of the security wall by Israel and supported subsequent resolutions of the UNGA in this regard. India voted in favour of accepting Palestine as a full member of UNESCO. At the United Nations General Assembly on November 29, 2012 the status of Palestine was upgraded to a non-member state. India co-sponsored this resolution and voted in favour of it.

There have been regular bilateral visits between India and Palestine. Late President Yasser Arafat visited India several times. President Mahmoud Abbas has visited India in 2005, 2008, 2010 and 2012. The visits of President Mahmoud Abbas in 2008 and 2010 were State visits. From the Indian side too, there have been several visits to Palestine, prominent among them being of Shri L.K. Advani, Union Home Minister in 2000, Shri Jaswant Singh, External Affairs Minister in 2000, and Shri E. Ahamed, Minister of State for External Affairs in 2004, 2007 and 2011, Shri S.M. Krishna, External Affairs Minister in Jan. 2012.

Apart from the strong political support to the Palestinian cause at international and bilateral levels, India has been contributing, since long time, material and technical assistance to the Palestinian people. With the Government of India's aid, two projects were completed in the field of higher education i.e. Jawaharlal Nehru Library at the Al Azhar University in Gaza city and the Mahatma Gandhi Library-cum-Student Activity Centre at the Palestine Technical College at Deir Al Balah in the Gaza Strip. Under India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Forum's assistance, an Indoor Multi-purpose Sports Complex has been constructed in Ramallah. Al Quds hospital in Gaza is in the process of reconstruction and the process of building a rehabilitation centre in Nablus has started.

In 1997, an MoU between India and Palestine was signed, which provides for promoting scientific, technical and industrial cooperation including provision of training facilities in specialized areas and undertaking of mutually agreed projects. During President Abbas's State Visit to India in Oct 2008, a Memorandum of Understanding regarding construction and equipping of the Jawaharlal Nehru High School at Abu Dees, Palestine was signed. In February 2010 during the visit of Dr. Hasan Abu Libdeh, Minister of National Economy, PNA a Memorandum of Understanding for cooperation was signed between the Federation of

Palestinian Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Agriculture (FPCCIA) and Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). During the visit of President Abbas to India in 2012 three MoUs were signed in the field of setting up a Centre of Excellence in IT, Building of two schools in Palestine and providing equipments and training to Vocational Training Centres in Palestine.

During the visit of President Mahmoud Abbas to India in 2005, a commitment for assistance of US \$15 million was made by the Government of India. In pursuance to the commitment, several projects were undertaken; prominent among them is the construction of Palestinian Embassy in Delhi which has been completed. Further, in the Paris Donors' Conference in December 2007, India announced a fresh commitment of US \$ 5 million. During President Abbas's State visit to India in Oct 2008, Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh announced a grant of \$10 million as budgetary support to the Palestine National Authority as well as an additional \$10 million in project assistance for Palestinian development programmes. The budgetary support of US \$10 million was paid by Government of India to PNA in March 2009. During President Mahmoud Abbas' visit to India in February 2010, Prime Minister announced a grant of US \$10 million as budget support to Palestinian National Authority, the amount was transferred to PNA in March 2010. During the visit of President Mahmoud Abbas in 2012, Prime Minister announced a grant of US \$ 10 million as budget support to Palestine.

India offers eight scholarships under the General Cultural Scholarship Scheme (GCSC) of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) to Palestinian students for higher studies in India. Over the years, several hundreds of Palestinian students have studied in Indian universities and institutions on their own. Foreign Service Institute (FSI), MEA organised a 'Special Course for Palestine Diplomats' (SCPD) at the FSI from 22nd November to 17th December 2004. India has been offering 40 slots for training courses under the ITEC programme. During the New Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership Ministerial Conference on Capacity Building for Palestine at Jakarta in July 2008 India committed to provide 60 slots for training courses under ITEC programme. Later, the slots were increased to 100 slots per annum since 2009-10.

Trade between India and Palestine has shown steady improvement. Products imported from India include fabrics, yarns, readymade garments, household appliances, stationery products, leather products, industrial tools and accessories, basmati rice, spices, vaccines and pharmaceutical products, sanitary wares, marble and granites.

Several cultural activities were held in the Palestine by the Representative Office of India. On the occasion of celebrations of India's independence, dance programmes, film shows, photo exhibitions in various Palestinian cities as well as a joint painting exhibition of Indian and Palestinian artists have been held. A commemorative cover with a special stamp honoring Mother Teresa was released by the Palestinian Authority. Indian Film Festivals also have been organized in various cities.

January 2013