

## **India – Palestine Relations**

India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and its attitude to the Palestinian question was given voice during 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 our 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 has 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 separation 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. India voted in favour of Palestine at the UN Human Rights Council in July 2014. India supported the Bandung Declaration on Palestine at Asian African Commemorative Conference in April 2015. India supported installation of Palestinian flag at UN premises along with other observer states, like the flags of member states, in September 2015.

### **Bilateral Visits:**

There have been regular bilateral visits between India and Palestine. Late President Yasser Arafat visited India several times. President Mahmoud Abbas visited India in the years 2005, 2008, 2010 and 2012. The visit of President Mahmoud Abbas in 2008 and 2012 were State visits. Special Envoy of President Mahmoud Abbas, Dr. Nabil Sa'ath visited India in November 2014. From the Indian side too, there have been several visits to Palestine, prominent among them being of Shri Pranab Mukherjee, President of India on 12-13 October 2015, Shri S.M. Krishna, External Affairs Minister in January 2012, Shri L.K. Advani, Union Home Minister and Shri Jaswant Singh, External Affairs Minister in 2000, and Shri E. Ahamed, Minister of State for External Affairs in 2004, 2007, 2011 and 2013. Prime Minister Narendra Modi met President Mahmoud Abbas in September 2015 on the sidelines of UN General Assembly session in New York. In April 2015, Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah and Foreign Minister Riad Malki met EAM Sushma Swaraj in Indonesia on the sidelines of Asia Africa Commemoration Conference. Mahmoud Habas, Religious Affairs Minister, visited India in May 2015 and during the visit, on behalf of President Abbas, conferred 'Star of Jerusalem' award on Mr Syed Vicarudin, Head of Indo-Arab League, for his work on promoting India

Palestine relations. Shri Anil Wadhwa, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs visited Palestine on July 8-9, 2015 and met President Abbas, PM Rami Hamdallah, and senior officials from the Palestinian Foreign Ministry.

#### Foreign Office Consultations:

The first ever Foreign Office Consultations were held in Ramallah on May 2-4, 2015. The Indian side was led by JS WANA whereas Assistant Minister for Asia, Africa and Australia led the Palestinian side.

#### Projects implemented:

Apart from the strong political support to the Palestinian cause at international and bilateral levels, India has been contributing 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. The project of providing plot and construction of Embassy of Palestine in New Delhi, has been completed. Work on the project of constructing two schools in West Bank, through aid provided by India, was completed in the year 2015. Government of India has set up an India-Palestine Centre of Excellence in ICT and Innovation in Al Quds University in 2015. Work on one another Government of India project for Equipping Vocational Training Centers in Palestine, has advanced and would be completed in early 2016. During the visit of President of India to Palestine in October 2015, India announced five more projects (worth \$17.79 million) for Palestine. The projects include a Techno Park in Ramallah (\$12 million), Palestine Institute of Diplomacy (\$4.5 million), and India-Palestine Centre of Excellence in ICT in Gaza (\$1 million).

Under India, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA) Forum's assistance, five projects have been approved, out of which two are completed (Indoor Multipurpose Sports Complex, Ramallah and Phase I of Al Quds hospital, Gaza), two are nearing completion (Phase II of Al Quds hospital, Gaza and Rehabilitation Centre, Nablus) and for the fifth one (Atta Habib Medical Center, Gaza) work would start shortly.

#### Memorandums of Understanding:

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 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 equipment and training to Vocational Training Centers in Palestine. During the visit of President of India to Palestine in October 2015, six MOUs were signed; one between

the Palestinian Ministry of Culture and the Indian Council of Cultural Relations and the remaining five MOUs were signed between Indian and Palestinian Universities.

#### Assistance to Palestine:

##### Monetary Assistance:

India has announced budgetary assistance to a tune of US\$ 30 million to Palestine and we have already transferred US\$ 25 million so far. During the visit of President Abbas to India in the year 2008, Prime Minister announced a grant of US\$ 10 million as budgetary support and this was transferred to the Government authorities here in March 2009. During the visit of President Abbas to India in February 2010, Prime Minister announced a budgetary support of US\$ 10 million and this was transferred in the month of March 2010. Prime Minister also announced a grant of US\$ 10 million as budgetary support to Palestine during the visit of President Abbas in 2012. During the year, India provided a total of \$10 million as financial assistance to Palestine; \$4 million was provided as project assistance towards the reconstruction of Gaza (on 12 January 2015), \$5million was provided as budgetary assistance (on 12 October 2015) and \$1 million to the UNRWA for the welfare of Palestinian refugees (on 25 November 2015).

##### Project Assistance:

India has announced project assistance to a tune of US\$ 30 million. In 2005, during the visit of President Abbas to India, India announced project assistance for US\$ 15 million. In the Paris Donors Conference in December 2007, India announced a fresh commitment of US\$ 5 million and during the visit of President Abbas to India in the year 2008, India also announced project assistance to Palestine for US\$ 10 million.

#### Scholarships and ITEC training for Palestinian Nationals:

India offered 10 scholarships for Palestinian Nationals under the General Cultural Scholarship Scheme (GCSC) of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) for higher studies in India. The scholarships were enhanced to 25 for the academic year 2016-17 during the visit of President Pranab Mukherjee. Over the years, hundreds of Palestinian students have studied in Indian universities and institutions on their own. Under the ITEC programme, 80 slots were offered to the Palestinian nationals for training courses in 2015. During the visit of President Pranab Mukherjee, the slots were enhanced to 100 per year from the year 2016-17. Till date a total of 770 Palestinian nationals have availed training under the ITEC programme.

#### Indian Visas for Palestinian Nationals:

On September 25, 2013 the Representative Office of India, Ramallah started issuance of Visa from its Office. Palestinian nationals can also obtain Indian visa through Tourist Visa on Arrival Facility launched in 2014.

## Trade:

Since, trade between India and Palestine is channelized through Israel, complete trade statistics are not available. Limited data suggests that India-Palestine bilateral trade stands at around US\$ 30 million. In terms of sectors, automotive spare parts, medical tourism, agro-products, textiles, fabrics, yarns, readymade garments, household appliances, stationery products, leather and leather products, agro-chemicals, plastic products, sanitary wares, marble and granites, pharmaceuticals and engineering goods have vast scope in Palestine. Apart from trade in goods, there is vast scope for trade in services. India's prowess in IT and IT enabled services; consultancy etc. is widely acknowledged in Palestine. In 2014, Indian engineering consulting firm, HOLTEC Consulting has won a tender to prepare a feasibility study for the first cement plant to be established in Palestine by the Palestinian Commercial Services Company. TCIL and Satyam Computers had undertaken two major telecom software projects in Nablus for Palestinian Telecommunications Company (PALTEL). M/s Goldstone Infotech Limited of Hyderabad had tied up with World Trade Centre of Gaza to establish the first Indo-Palestinian Joint Venture in the Karni Industrial Zone in the Gaza Strip in the field of Software Training and Consultancy.

## Culture:

Existence of cultural similarities and having a small Indian community in Palestine has made Indian arts and culture very popular in Palestine. Several cultural activities, including film shows and photo exhibitions have been organized by the Representative Office of India in various Palestinian cities in addition to screening of documentaries prepared by Public Diplomacy division in local TV channels, local schools and youth clubs. A performance by the Indian martial arts dance troupe Kalaripayattu was organized in October 2004 in Ramallah. In 2014, a bust of Mahatma Gandhi was unveiled at the Garden of Nations and a Kathak performance was organized at Ramallah. On March 8, 2015 a concert of Santoor by Dr Varsha Agarwal was organised in Ramallah as part of Jasmine World Music Festival. On June 21, International Day of Yoga was celebrated in Ramallah. From July 1-9, 2015 an Indian Bazaar was organised in Ramallah. ROI has organized a Kathak performance by Prachee Shah, an exhibition of paintings of Islamic Monuments in India, and a food festival in the year 2015.

## Useful Resources:

Website of the mission: <http://roiramallah.org/>

Facebook page of the Mission: <https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInPalestine>

Youtube link of the Mission: <http://www.youtube.com/user/roiramallah>

Flickr page of the Mission: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/roiramallah/>

January 2016