

**The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy  
MIFTAH**



# **Public Discourse and Perceptions: Palestinian Media Coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict**

**The Second Report**

**MIFTAH's Media Monitoring Unit**

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## Introduction

This is the second report that MIFTAH-The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Democracy-issues in coordination with Keshev- Center for the Protection of Democracy in Israel-on the media coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The goal of the project is to facilitate the development of a bold and professional media, and a culture of tolerance, moderation and understanding between the two peoples, through monitoring, research, advocacy and lobbying activities without jeopardizing the freedom of expression.

In our first report, issued in March 2005, we studied the Palestinian media landscape extensively, paying special attention to its components and its shortcomings, as well as to the overriding circumstances under which it operates. We also reviewed our work methodology and presented our definitions of such issues as *incitement, dehumanization, de-legitimization of the other*, and other forms of bias, acknowledging that these definitions were developed by **MIFTAH**, and that there may be others with which we may agree or disagree.

In the first report, we focused mainly on the way the media covered the unilateral Gaza Disengagement Plan and the Road Map. We also focused on the coverage of the victims of the conflict on both sides, highlighting in particular, what is ignored by the Palestinian media. We reached several conclusions, the most important of which was the fact that nothing qualified the labeling of the Palestinian media as "incitement to violence." We did find, however, that there were instances of bias, the most important of which was a lack of objectivity in covering the Road Map. We also found no criticism of some Palestinian militant groups' activities, some of which contradict international laws. We also found that the human dimension is absent from the conflict, and the victims are treated as mere abstract figures, in a way that denies the conflict its human dimension, without which it becomes difficult to embark on a bridge-building process which can help in reaching a just and durable solution based on international law.

At the end of the report, we recalled the recommendations made by the Media Monitoring Unit in its analysis of the media coverage of the Presidential Elections in **January 2005**. The essence of these recommendations was the adoption of a modern media law that liberates the

media from the power and domination of the state or any other authority which may deter it from carrying out its task freely and objectively.

What characterizes our first report is a concentration on the print media, because we did not, at the time, have sufficient material to issue an elaborate enough report on the Palestinian Satellite Channel, since we only started monitoring it in the middle of December 2004. In this report, however, we focus on the Palestinian Satellite Channel, as well as on the print media.

## **The Palestinian Satellite Channel**

During the period between **January 10 and March 31, 2005**, MIFTAH's Media Monitoring Unit monitored and documented, on a daily basis, all Palestinian Satellite Channel programming. From **January 10 to February 7, 2005**, the monitoring process followed a rotational system whereby during the first week, the transmission period between 7:00 and 11:00 am was monitored. During the second and third weeks, the transmission periods monitored were between 11:00 am and 3:00 pm, and between 3:00 and 7:00 pm respectively. This monitoring process was then extended to cover the period between 7:00 and 11:00 pm. The purpose of monitoring the programming on a rotational basis was in fact to learn more about the nature of the programs presented to the public and to determine whether or not certain programs necessitate further scrutiny. It was observed that most debate and talk shows, and main news bulletins were aired between 7:00 and 11:00 pm.

The team monitored the following:

- The 7:00 pm local news bulletin and the 9:00 pm main news bulletin.
- The debate and talk shows: *Ana Wa Al-Akhar* (Me and the Other); *Jawhar Al-Hiwar* (the Essence of Dialogue); *Al-Solta al-Rabi'ah* (The Fourth Estate); and *Akher Al-Kalam* (The Final Word).

### **General Conclusions**

Since it started monitoring the Palestinian Satellite Channel in December 2004 with the aim of analyzing the nature of the media coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, MIFTAH addressed several problems in the performance of this Satellite Channel. The Monitoring Unit observed that the Palestinian Satellite Channel had some difficulties in changing its modes of operation and its old-school policies, even though it seemed willing to advance. For example, it was generally unsure whether the new political

system was serious about a reform project and about its implementation, and this was an issue which caused the Satellite Channel to be confused and hesitant. A gradual change began, however, after the results of the Presidential Elections were announced, and continued through until the writing of this report. This change is noticed when comparing the media coverage of the Presidential Elections and the programming of that period, on the one hand, with the coverage after the announcement of the election results and the introduction of new programs with better content and technique on the other.

In its evaluation, the Monitoring Unit took into consideration the difficulty of transformation and the need for gradual change. Also taken into consideration is the fact that no institution can be expected to restructure and redefine its policies in three months (the duration of the monitoring period), much less implement any of these new policies. However, the analysis of those monitored programs will show that, on the one hand, the Palestinian Satellite Channel has made some progress in its performance, and it will highlight, on the other hand, the weaknesses and flaws that require intervention.

**MIFTAH** has welcomed the move towards placing the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) under the authority of the Ministry of Information when in the past the PBC had been under the authority and control of the office of the Palestinian President. MIFTAH believes that this move would allow for an overhaul of the media establishment, though it may not be enough for developing the official media. It also believes that there is a need to establish an independent media council, which will oversee the state press and which will fall under the direct jurisdiction of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

The Palestinian government is called upon to establish a government press office which covers all government activities, and with whom all Palestinian and international media will deal directly as an alternative to its current policy of controlling the media.

In the following, we present the Palestinian Satellite Channel's gradual progress in performance, with some examples recorded by the Media Monitoring Unit:

### **Statements made by Abu Mazen – the “Elected President”**

After President Mahmoud Abbas was elected, the Palestinian Satellite Channel often dealt with the statements of the new president in an eclectic manner which reflected a certain state of confusion as to what direction the Channel was now going to take. This state of confusion reached new heights when an editor (or someone else, unknown to us) interfered and deleted words from a statement given by the President which was published in its entirety in the daily newspapers and was aired, also in its entirety, on other Arab satellite channels.

In the 7:00 am news bulletin on **January 15, 2005**, the Satellite Channel transmitted a news story on the continuing Israeli attacks against the Palestinian people, quoting President Abu Mazen as having said that “*the killing of nine Palestinians last week does not help the peace process.*” The news story made no reference to the actual question that the President had been asked the day before, on **January 14 2005**, as he came out of Friday prayers. The question was “*What do you think of the Karni attack?*” and the full response was that “*these attacks and the killing of nine Palestinians last week do not help the peace process.*” The Palestinian Satellite Channel thus preferred to rework the President’s statements and put them into different framework and take them out of context, and this reflects a lack of confidence in the new institution’s approaches. The Channel ignored the question and the President’s reference to the Karni attack, and deliberately edited the President’s statement so that it would appear as if it only supports the news item relating to the Israeli attacks.

The various Palestinian factions’ commitment to a period of calm, the deployment of Palestinian security forces in the Gaza Strip and their efforts to thwart any attempts at launching Al-Qassam rockets into Israel, and the destruction of the tunnels running between The Strip and Egypt, all contributed to giving an impression that the new political leadership is serious about the implementation of the agenda it presented, particularly the security component of that agenda. As a result, the Palestinian Satellite Channel began airing programs which highlighted that agenda, and which covered such issues as the lawless use of arms and trespassing government lands, all supported by interviews with ordinary citizens on the street who expressed their support of the National Authority and extended their wishes for the success of its new agenda.

As the factions announced their commitment to the period of calm, and as the Palestinian National Authority gave signals that it was serious in its commitment, it was observed that the Satellite Channel began to clearly develop several debate programs and talk shows, which reflected an attempt, on the one hand, to introduce new programming to attract a larger audience, and on the other hand to escape accusations of un-professionalism or of neglect of its duty to shape public opinion. We monitored programs that were well prepared, given the resources available, and which we can say were actually good, which we had not seen before. These programs were daring in presenting the issues of the conflict and in presenting controversial policies within the Palestinian society, through direct discussion with policy-makers and political analysts who shape a wide spectrum of public opinion. Among these programs were, for example: *Al-Solta al-Rabi'ah* (The Fourth Estate); *Akher Al-Kalam* (The Final Word); *Ana Wa Al-Akhar* (I and the Other); *Jawhar Al-Hiwar* (the Essence of Dialogue).

A major advancement for which the Channel should be highly commended is its new practice of actually seeking out the public's opinion on certain issues it once regarded as largely controversial. The public expressed its opinion in its hope that the period of calm would continue, and that the National Authority would be able to maintain order and security, something which our people are missing. Presenting different views on such crucial issues as the Sharm Al-Sheikh Summit, a specific suicide attack in Tel Aviv, and allowing Leor Ben Dor, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, to present the Israeli government's point of view directly to the Palestinian public, all demonstrated a noticeable progress, despite some noted criticism which will be discussed below when we tackle the issue of the media coverage of a specific suicide attack in Tel Aviv.

This development can not, however, be taken to indicate a wholly new strategy for the Satellite Channel, because the Channel continues to produce and air certain sub-standard programs, from which ordinary citizens are almost totally absent. Such programs are similar to each other in form, based on the three main broadcast elements (the studio, the host or moderator, and the guest), and with no field reports, a format very common in television programming. There are also programs that are seen by observers as fostering social and political regression, as does for example *Fi Rihab Al-Islam* (In the Vicinity of Islam), which constantly fosters a unilateral point of view dominated mainly by lecturing, preaching, and instruction.

### **The Suicide Attack in Tel Aviv**

In its coverage of the suicide attack in Tel Aviv on the night of **February 25, 2005**, the Palestinian Satellite Channel focused mainly on the Palestinian leadership's condemnation of the attack and on the armed Palestinian groups' denial of responsibility. The coverage mainly highlighted statements made by President Abbas, who strongly condemned the operation. At 7:30 pm on **February 28, 2005**, the Channel aired its *Akher Al-Kalam* (The Final Word) program, during which guests Hassan Asfour, Talal 'Ukal, Samih Shbaib, and the spokesperson of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Leor Ben Dor, discussed and debated the ramifications of the Tel Aviv attack on the peace process. While the discussion was at times very heated (reminiscent of Al-Jazira's *Al Ittijah Al-Mu'akes* – The Opposite Direction debate program), the participation of the spokesperson of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the debate, giving him the opportunity to address the Palestinian television audience, is seen as a major advancement in the Satellite Channel's performance and in its readiness to present the other "side" to the Palestinian people.

The highlight of the debate was the unanimous condemnation of the attack with no attempt to justify it. The report prepared by the program, which reflected widespread condemnation and rejection of the attack among the Palestinian public, represented a major development in the performance of the Satellite Channel, in its unprecedented attempt to present the Palestinian public opinion of such attacks so openly.

It was observed that the worst part of the program was the host's inefficiency in moderating the debate. As one of the guests tried to force his questions on the host, the latter often gave in, and the debate thus took on a personal tone which eventually steered the program away from its intended goal of presenting the other opinion.

### **Jerusalem...Present, but Absent**

While monitoring programs about Jerusalem – the capital of the Palestinian state recognized by all Palestinian political and social factions – it was observed that the Palestinian Satellite Channel was constantly re-airing programs, a practice that has lowered their artistic value. An example is the *Al-Aqsa; Tuhfah Mi'maria* (Al-Aqsa; an Architectural Masterpiece), wherein we monitored several scenes of confrontation between Palestinians and occupation soldiers which were squeezed into the program without any

artistic, aesthetic or contextual purpose or value. For an earlier report, we had monitored two other programs, *Al-Quds Tunadeekum* (Jerusalem is Calling You) and *Hathi Hia Al-Quds* (This is Jerusalem), but we did not monitor their transmission in the period between 7:00 and 11:00 pm. It should be noted that the programs on Jerusalem lack recent documentary reports and material focusing on Palestinian life in the city. And so, just as the city is absent from our satellite channel, so too is its suffering and the suffering of its people, and it is present only through the re-runs of old programs that no longer reflect the realities of the city and the hardships of its inhabitants.

The Satellite Channel must set up a team capable of covering the events in the Holy City and the activities of the Palestinian Jerusalemites, not just their steadfastness, but also their participation in and contribution to the overall national economic, cultural, developmental, and social framework, including conferences, civil society activities, and faith-based activities-both Islamic and Christian- thus portraying Jerusalem as a city of peace, tolerance and coexistence.

### **The Wall and the Absence of the Human Dimension**

The Media Monitoring Unit observed that the Palestinian Satellite Channel treats the apartheid separation wall as a seasonal topic, raising the issue only very sporadically, thus giving the impression that the Satellite Channel is minimizing the impact of the damage which the wall is inflicting on the Palestinian national project, and of the destruction to which it is subjecting the social and national infrastructure.

The Satellite Channel's coverage of the wall is part of its coverage of the occupation practices and violations in the Channel's news bulletins, under the title "*Confrontations between Occupation Forces and Demonstrators Against the Wall.*" The Palestinian Satellite Channel is expected to produce programs focusing entirely on the wall and on its impact on the economic, social and political developments in Palestine, and on the final agreement. Such programs should also focus on the human dimension, which is currently absent from the coverage, including live interviews with families harmed by the wall and those who have been imprisoned within it. Also, the coverage so far has not yet responded to Israeli allegations that the reason for the wall is the security issue, and not for political gain. The Satellite Channel can do this by providing documented facts, information and maps which clearly outline the wall's route, and which define the land that it is

swallowing up, and the prisons within which it is confining many Palestinian families and villages, separating them from one another.

### **News Bulletins...Whose News ?**

We already discussed the progress in some of the Satellite Channel's programming, and some of its flaws in dealing with the issues of Jerusalem and the wall. The monitoring of the news bulletins has shown that these latter are the Satellite Channel's biggest flaw with no attempt made for review or development.

The Monitoring Unit analyzed one local news broadcast, aired on the evening of **March 12, 2005**, as a sample of the 7:00 pm bulletin. This news bulletin was chosen particularly because the day had witnessed several significant incidents. But the way the news was handled completely minimized the value and importance of the media items available to the Channel, rendering them worthless. It also greatly belittled the audience's intelligence and made the Palestinian Satellite Channel seem indifferent to gaining an edge over several other satellite channels, all of which are competing to transmit quicker and more detailed information to their audience.

### **Local News Bulletin / 7:00 pm – March 12, 2005**

**1. Random order of the news items:** While we understand that evaluating the importance of news items is a relative and partisan issue, the order in which they were presented did not follow their level of importance. The most important event of that day was a press conference held by Hamas in which it declared its intention to take part in the Legislative Council elections. But this item was the third in that news bulletin. The first was President Abu Mazen's reaction, welcoming Hamas's decision to participate in the Legislative Council elections, and the second was Nabil Shaath's (the Deputy Prime Minister) reaction, welcoming Hamas's same decision. When Hamas's decision was finally treated as a news item itself, as the third item of the bulletin, it had lost all its importance and news-worthiness. Some media specialists agree that this news item should have been the first, with selected clips from the press conference itself and a brief background report on the reasons behind Hamas's decision to participate. Only then can reactions be presented, within a segment about the overall reaction to Hamas's decision. Reactions to any event or news item cannot be presented before the actual event or item is itself presented.

The second main event of that day, which we believe is not any less important than Hamas's decision, was the demonstrations of the unemployed in Gaza. Placed at the end of the news bulletin, the event was covered in a fragmented manner, failing on the one hand to mention that the demonstrators had broken into the Legislative Council building, and on the other hand failing to interview or speak to any one from the assembled crowds in order to understand what their reasons for the demonstration and what their demands are. The Satellite Channel dealt with this news item in a way that minimized its importance, and which seemed to indicate that the Satellite Channel was in reality the Palestinian Authority's news outlet, where news or images of public protests and demonstrations were prohibited.

## **2. The Israeli Violations – Emptied of Substance**

Israeli attacks are still being covered in an unprofessional manner. The actual circumstances of an attack are not always covered, and there is no on-site reporting and no actual photos from the location of the attack. The fourth news item in the news bulletin in question was "*Settlers intend to attack Al-Aqsa,*" but there were no details or information given in support of this item, except that it was based on a statement made by the Mufti of the Holy Land. Similarly, the 7<sup>th</sup> ("*A Palestinian farmer arrested*"), 8<sup>th</sup> ("*Allar and Saida – North of Tulkarem – raided*"), 9<sup>th</sup> ("*The occupation forces still impose a curfew on Hebron*"), and 10<sup>th</sup> ("*Qadumim colonizers still prevent Palestinians from accessing their agricultural land*") news items were all presented with no corroborative reports or pictures, not even a correspondent on the telephone. And if we were to assume that restrictions on the journalists' freedom of movement made it difficult to get actual images of the events, why then was it that the item about Hebron (the 9<sup>th</sup>) was presented with a graphic in the background showing a historic map of Palestine, with no indication of where the city of Hebron lies.

## **3. News Taken Directly from Israeli Sources**

News item no. 11 in the news bulletin was about the refusal of Hadassa Hospital in Israel to treat an Israeli accident victim because she was transported by a Palestinian ambulance. Despite the importance of this news story and its implications, the story was copied exactly as it was originally published in the Israeli daily *Yediot Ahronot*. The Satellite Channel did not even bother to edit the story or call the driver of the Palestinian ambulance to verify the story, or to provide the viewer with some details not mentioned in the Israeli newspaper.

This news bulletin is a prime example of why we need an in-depth analysis of the news which the Satellite Channel is disseminating. It also gives clear indications as to what deep-rooted changes need to be instituted, particularly regarding the news bulletins.

### **The Main News Bulletin**

The main news bulletins, like the daily one at 9:00 pm, are a modified version of the local news bulletin, with some Arab and international news added. To examine these news bulletins, we will discuss one of them.

### **The Main News Bulletin / 9:00 pm – March 12, 2005**

The bulletin's news items were presented in the following order: *Abbas welcomes Hamas' announcement of its participation in the coming legislative elections*; a news item about the Minister of Information; a news item about the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his comments on the London Conference; *the Minister of Interior meets with the military commanders*; *Dar Al-Fatwa condemns the settlers' attempts to break into the Al-Aqsa Mosque*; *'Allar and Saida – North of Tulkarem – raided*; *Hadassa Hospital in Israel refuses to admit an Israeli woman because she was brought in by a Palestinian ambulance*; *the Syrian forces withdraw to the Beqa' Valley*; *demonstrations in Lebanon demanding the truth about Al-Hariri's assassination*; *four people killed in Iraq*; *Tehran insists on continuing its nuclear project*; *Spain commemorates the victims of the explosions*.

## **The Palestinian Press**

The Palestinian press demonstrated a noticeable advancement in its coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in general. This is certainly tied to the Palestinian leadership's ability to successfully bring about a period of calm agreed to with the armed Palestinian factions. It is also tied to the Sharm Al-Sheikh Agreement and to the people's willingness to support the new Palestinian leadership in its project to implement the Road Map. And with this, the press has, contrary to its past performance, taken up two aspects it had overlooked in the past:

**The first:** Highlighting and no longer ignoring Palestinian violations of the Sharm Al-Sheikh Agreement, whenever they occur, and without trying to defend them: an **Al-Ayyam newspaper headline, March 1, 2005:** *"Two*

*Settlers Shot and Injured West of Ramallah,*” and in the body of the article: “A shooting at a military outpost near the Avni Hevets settlement.” Similarly, in **Al-Quds newspaper, March 1, 2005**: “Two Israeli guards near Moda’in were shot and injured, and the Israeli army seizes a booby trapped car near the village of Arrabeh...and accuses Damascus.” **Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah newspaper** also covered the same story. While such news stories were presented before, they were covered from an angle that always sought to justify them.

**The second:** Newspapers began to relay international statements in a balanced way. **Al-Ayyam headline, March 1, 2005**: “Washington Demands that Abbas Confront the Palestinian Groups – After the Tel Aviv Attack,” and in the body of the article: “to confront Al-Jihad in particular.” **Al-Ayyam headline, March 2, 2005**: “Rice: ‘We Have Proof of Al-Jihad’s Involvement in the Tel Aviv Attack’.” The paper reported other international statements confirming Al-Jihad’s responsibility. In the past, such details could have been read in the body of the article only, and not in its main headline.

The papers also highlighted the Palestinian Authority’s statements that it will fight any one who tries to undermine the truce (*Hudna*). **Al-Ayyam, February 27, 2005**: “The Authority pursues those responsible for the Tel Aviv attack, and Al-Jihad confirms its commitment to the ‘hudna,’ despite the videotaped message from the person who carried out the attack.” **Al-Quds, March 1, 2005**: “Abu Mazen: We Will Not Be Lenient with Bombing Attacks.”

During the five years or so of the Intifada, it was impossible to read such headlines in a Palestinian newspaper, because that would have given the impression that the Authority was ready to work against the armed Palestinian groups. But publishing the news story in such a clear way points to the Palestinian press’s willingness to report on the general national sentiment, and relate its resentment for and rejection of such acts. It also reflects the Palestinians’ general interests in the implementation of the Sharm Al-Sheikh Agreement.

The development of the Palestinian media in that direction, where it presents violence in general as an unacceptable means of dealing with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, is in fact a process that is linked directly to the progress of the political process on the ground and to an atmosphere of

mutual trust that can be built between the two parties. This brings us to incitement.

### **Incitement**

The duty of any media outlet is to inform the public of what is happening around them, and to relate to them the events as they happen, with background information but without unnecessary verbiage or exaggerations, so as to allow the public to make their own decisions. In this respect, the Palestinian press did honor its duty of relaying the incidents on the ground in an unbiased manner, without incitement to or provocation for violence against Israel. But the practices which the occupation carried out during the period covered by this report are in and of themselves incitement and provocation, and not in any way unbiased. Merely reporting on these practices as they were carried out is enough to raise the public's indignation and anger. The following is a sample of newspapers headlines, all from the front pages:

#### **Al-Quds Newspaper / January 18, 2005:**

*"Incursions into some areas and bombing raids over residential neighborhoods: two from Al-Quds Brigades martyred in the north of Khan Yunis; curfew imposed on Aqrabaniyyah; and closure of the Jordan Valley areas in the West Bank."*

#### **Al-Ayyam Newspaper / January 27, 2005:**

*"The occupation forces continue their curfew on the town of Saida; three martyred, including a baby girl, in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip."*

#### **Al-Quds Newspaper / January 28, 2005:**

*"Two people injured in Rafah; two martyred in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, one of them from wounds sustained in an earlier attack; the occupation forces continue their curfew on the town of Saida and incursions into some areas."*

#### **Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah Newspaper / February 1, 2005:**

*"The occupation forces kill a school girl in a Rafah school and the Al-Qassam Brigades retaliates with mortar attacks."*

#### **Al-Quds Newspaper / January 2, 2005:**

*"After Washington requested explanations, will Israel retract its decision to apply the Absentee Property Law in East Jerusalem?"*

**Al-Ayyam Newspaper / February 3, 2005:**

*"Altering the route of the wall in the village of Al-Zawiyah saves five thousand dunums of its land."*

**Al-Ayyam Newspaper / February 5, 2005:**

*"Beit Hanoun: two people martyred near the border fence; settlers seize 400 dunums in the Jordan Valley."*

**Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah Newspaper / February 11, 2005:**

*"Two martyred by Israeli bullets in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; shooting at residential neighborhoods; measures tightened at the checkpoints."*

**Al-Ayyam Newspaper / February 15, 2005:**

*"Israeli forces demolish a residential building in Beit Hanina."*

**Al-Ayyam Newspaper / February 16, 2005:**

*"Two martyred from Al-Aqsa Brigades in Nablus."*

**Al-Quds Newspaper / February 26, 2005:**

*"Curfew imposed on the Jiftlik region; incursions into some regions; one person martyred and two injured in Rafah; homes shelled west of Khan Yunis."*

**Al-Ayyam Newspaper / February 28, 2005:**

*"A network, which included an Israeli officer, is arrested for forging documents in order to steal Palestinian lands."*

**Al-Quds Newspaper / March 3, 2005:**

*"A boy dies from his wounds; a youth is injured by a settler's gun; several people injured in Beit Furik as they protested against the confiscation of their land."*

Having read the above headlines, we pose the following question: should Palestinian newspapers ignore the occupation's practices in order to avoid being accused of incitement, or should they expose them?

We believe that the headlines in the Palestinian press are unbiased and neutral news, and that it is the occupation's practices that are provocative and not neutral. By publishing these news stories, the press has fulfilled its basic duty of informing the public of what is happening around them. The solution, we believe, does not lie in stopping to report these incidents nor in ignoring them but rather in a concerted effort to stop the killing, the confiscation of lands, and the demolition of houses, and to push for a just political settlement between the two peoples.

**MIFTAH** is confident that the headlines will certainly be different once these practices on the ground disappear. The new headlines will seek to establish mutual confidence between the two peoples, especially if the peace process is restarted.

### **Sharm Al-Sheikh Summit**

The media coverage of the Sharm Al-Sheikh Summit, which was most extensive during the meetings between the Palestinians and the Israelis that took place even before the actual summit began, centered around the main topics of discussion during these meetings, mainly the issues of those wanted by Israel, the prisoners' release, and Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian cities. The media was very cautious not to have its coverage in any way give the impression that it was possible to reach a true agreement on these issues, and this wariness is related to two basic factors:

1. The unavailability, to the Palestinian media outlets, of detailed information pertaining to the dialogues between the two sides except for the statements made by Palestinian and Israeli officials which highlight the differences, rather than the emerging trust, between the two sides.
2. Israel's practices on the ground did not reflect the sense that a new era in the relations between the two peoples, ushered in by the election of a new Palestinian president, had begun.

The coverage actually reflected the Palestinian media's willingness to support the President's program, which called for an end to violence and a commitment to the Road Map. But the media were quite suspicious that Israel would actually give something back to the Palestinians, something that is near their hopes such as reaching an understanding regarding those wanted by Israel, the release of all prisoners without exception, and Israel's

withdrawal from Palestinian cities back to its September 28, 2000 positions. The prisoners' issue is particularly important and was one of the media's main focuses, even before the summit, primarily because it affects thousands of Palestinian families. On **February 7, 2005**, the **Al-Ayyam** newspaper articulated the Palestinian position on this issue, with its front-page article entitled "*Blood on Their Hands: Israel's Death Sentence for the Prisoners.*" This article, as reflected in its title, conveyed the Palestinians' true feelings about this issue. The newspaper humanized this issue by talking about the case of Samira Al-Barghouthi whose husband, Fakhri Al-Barghouthi, was arrested in 1978, when she herself was only 18 years old, and who has been hoping ever since that he would be released, but to no avail.

The following front-page newspaper headlines show the depth of the Palestinian media's suspicions:

**Al-Ayyam Newspaper / February 7, 2005:**

- "*Slight Progress on all Issues in the Discussions with Israel,*" and in the body of the article: "*Dahlan confirms that the Authority is not involved in Israel's expected release of 500 prisoners, and that a joint ministerial committee will meet after the summit and will submit recommendations regarding the criteria.*"
- "*Mofaz: Israel Temporarily Freezes its Hunt for Palestinian Fighters.*"
- Ha'aretz: "*An Internal Opposition in the Shabak to Dekhter's Position on the Palestinians.*"

**Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah Newspaper / February 7, 2005:**

The paper totally ignored the Summit, but there were two news stories on topics under discussion:

- "*Al-Aqsa Brigades refuse to transfer those wanted to Jericho and Bethlehem. Dahlan talks about slight progress on all the issues and Mofaz announces a temporary freeze on the hunt for 300 wanted people.*"
- "*Sharon denies Israel's agreement to release Sa'adat.*"

**Al-Quds Newspaper / February 7, 2005:**

The paper reported an atmosphere of optimism that is not supported by any documented information. Worse even was that the body of an article did not at all reflect the content of its headline which read as follows:

- *“Dahlan: After the Sharm Al-Sheikh Summit there will be serious prisoner release which will include prisoners serving long sentences, female prisoners and sick prisoners; those wanted will be safe in the cities from which the Israeli army will withdraw, but they have to remain cautious for the time being.”* In the body of the article, however, it is reported that Dahlan points out that, after the Summit, a joint committee will have to discuss the processes and criteria for the release of the prisoners.
- *Mofaz Agrees to Release Qassam, the Son of Marwan Barghouthi.* (From the Associated Press).

The lack of reliable Palestinian sources of information and the contradictory information related to the Summit’s agreements forced the Palestinian press to rely on other media outlets for their information, as they did when they used the French news agency, AFP’s reports to publish the Summit’s agenda.

For example, regarding a cease-fire which was, it was reported, about to be agreed upon, **Al-Ayyam newspaper, on February 7, 2005**, referred to a statement made by Hassan Abu Libdeh, and reported by the AFP, in which he declares that a cease-fire will be announced during the Summit. According to the same press agency, sources close to Sharon all denied these reports. In addition to that, the information, published by the newspaper, which identified the first two of the five cities from which the Israeli army will withdraw as Ramallah and Bethlehem, turned out to be inaccurate. The paper also quoted the same press agency as saying that the unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip will be coordinated with the Palestinian Authority, and this is an issue that has yet to be clarified. Finally, the paper also reported that Israel will halt its assassination campaign only in those cities where the Palestinian Authority will take over the security responsibility.

Whether before or after the Summit, the press coverage generally did not focus on the Summit itself as an event, but rather on the issues related to it. The reason is due mainly to the fact that the success of negotiations among the Palestinian factions depended to a large extent on the negotiations with the Israelis. Since the negotiations with the Israelis progressed very slowly, ambiguously and without a declared agreement signed by both parties, the media therefore looked at the Summit much in the same way as did political analyst Hani Al-Masri. In his article published in **Al-Ayyam, on February**

5, 2005, he said that the Summit in itself was needed, and that therefore the Palestinian press did not give it much attention since the issues on its agenda are what is important, and there did not seem to be any progress on these issues to warrant that the summit be considered as a real point of departure in the relations between the two peoples:

*“Despite the deep and limited differences that emerged during the Palestinian-Israeli meeting last Thursday, this will most likely not affect the proceedings at the Sharm Al-Sheikh Summit. The strong Egyptian, Jordanian, and American presence at the Summit aimed to, among other things, avoid blowing its destiny into the wind, and protect it from the conditions of both parties, as the Summit must be held regardless of its results, because it is in itself needed as reinforcement to this new international atmosphere. The Summit is needed as a channel for a new Arab push towards Israel, encouraging it to grab onto this new wave and to turn it into a new opportunity for making peace”<sup>1</sup>*

This is in fact what happened. No agreement was signed during the Summit, and it was sufficing that both sides came out with their own statements. The Palestinians announced a cease-fire as well as their willingness to consider this an implementation of the first article of the Road Map. And Israel’s Prime Minister Sharon announced that: *“Today, in my meeting with Chairman Abbas, we agreed that the Palestinians will stop all acts of violence against the Israelis, and in return, Israel will stop its military operations against the Palestinians everywhere.”*

However, the real reasons for violence being settlements, checkpoints and harassments were not mentioned. Sharon also announced the postponement of the discussions on the Road Map, stating further that *“the disengagement from Gaza is a unilateral decision, but if real and tangible changes occur on the Palestinian side, this plan can be a point of departure for a coordinated and successful operation. This separation plan can open the road for the implementation of the Road Map which we are committed to and want to implement.”* What the Palestinians had hoped to achieve, therefore, at least a simultaneous announcement that the implementation of the Road Map began at the Sharm Al-Sheikh Summit, did not happen, and this made the Palestinian media more inclined to look at the summit as a marginal and insignificant step.

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<sup>1</sup> Hani Al-Masri, Al-Ayyam Newspaper February 5, 2005.

For its part, the Palestinian leadership adopts a method of exclusion in dealing with the Palestinian media, and this Summit was no exception. The Palestinian media is unjustifiably ignored, and more than one Palestinian media observer noted that the Palestinian delegation was not concerned about taking a team of journalists along to the Summit, as had the Israeli side. It is worthy to note at this point the Palestinian media is being absented from the Palestinian leadership's foreign visits, whether to the Arab world, or beyond. Furthermore, the leadership avoids holding regular press conferences with reporters and columnists, in order to inform them of the general political situation and to apprise them of the decisions made and the reasoning behind them. As such, the Palestinian public is denied access to information, and at the same time the Palestinian media is weakened. Palestinian journalists will not be able to carry out their duty in a professional way if the Palestinian leadership does not keep them updated on the political changes and developments.

The post-Summit media coverage focused on the same issues as the pre-Summit coverage. In that context, newspaper headlines read as follows:

**Al-Ayyam Newspaper / February 9, 2005:**

- *"Sharm Al-Sheikh Summit: Announcement of a joint halt of military operations, Abbas: The beginning of a new era of peace and hope. Sharon: We hope to start a new era of tranquility and hope. Egypt's and Jordan's ambassadors return to Israel."*
- *"Withdrawal from the five cities will be completed within three weeks. Abu Libdeh: the implementation of the reached understandings will start immediately."*

**Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah Newspaper / February 9, 2005:**

- *"Abu Libdeh; Withdrawal from five governorates in three weeks."*
- *"Sharm Al-Sheikh: Abbas and Sharon announce a joint halt of military operations. The President: Tranquility is the beginning of peace and hope; it is high time that decades of our people's suffering and pain come to an end. Mubarak calls for the resumption of political negotiations as soon as possible to avoid a setback. The Israeli Prime Minister hopes a new era of tranquility and hope will start."*

### **Al-Quds Newspaper / February 9, 2005:**

- *The Quartet Summit prepared for the resumption of the peace process and the implementation of the Road Map. Abbas and Sharon announce a comprehensive cease-fire. Mubarak: a first step towards a comprehensive and just peace and the establishment of two states."*

But the newspapers ignored the following two crucial issues that resulted from the Sharm Al-Sheikh understandings:

1. Israel did not fully commit itself to these understandings and reserved the right to act against what it called "ticking bombs" or an "imminent threat."
2. The press did not highlight the Palestinian Authority's acceptance of a clause that would require those who are "wanted" to sign an affidavit renouncing any future armed action against Israel, and in return Israel would remove them from its list of wanted Palestinians. This is considered unfair to the Palestinian people who have a right to full access to the information.

Only parts of Sharon's speech were published in the local newspapers. It would have been better had the entire speech been published to allow the Palestinian public to better grasp the nature of Israel's commitments and of the way it dealt with the Summit, and this is so as to give full representation to the other opinion.

### **Coverage of the Suicide Attack in Tel Aviv**

The coverage in the Palestinian press of the suicide attack that occurred in **Tel Aviv on the night of February 25, 2005** is different from the method of coverage it had been accustomed to. The language of justification disappeared, and there was a consensus on the condemnation of this operation. The newspapers did not publish the obituary of the person who carried it out, and his mother was quoted as saying that she would have stopped him had she known he intended to blow himself up. All newspapers referred to the operation as a "suicide" or an "explosion," steering away from calling it a "martyrdom operation," and the front pages did not refer to the person who carried it out as a "martyr" either. The collective condemnation of the operation was highlighted, whether it was voiced by the Palestinian Authority itself or by opinion columnists. The papers also highlighted the Palestinian factions' commitment to continuing a period of calm. The Authority's actions following the attack, such as the arrest of people suspected of involvement, for example, were also highlighted. Also,

the photos that were published in the papers showed not only the destruction caused by the explosion, but its civilian victims also.

A number of factors played a role in the changes in the coverage of such operations, most important of which are the following:

1. For first three days following the operation, there was no claim of responsibility from any Palestinian organization, while there had always been a flood of such claims in the past.
2. There was a Palestinian consensus on a period of calm.
3. The emergence of a prevailing sense of optimism among the Palestinian people after the election of a new President. Most Palestinians were hoping that Mahmoud Abbas's approach, which was based on an end to the violent confrontations, would restart the peace process, and the Palestinian media was part of this trend.

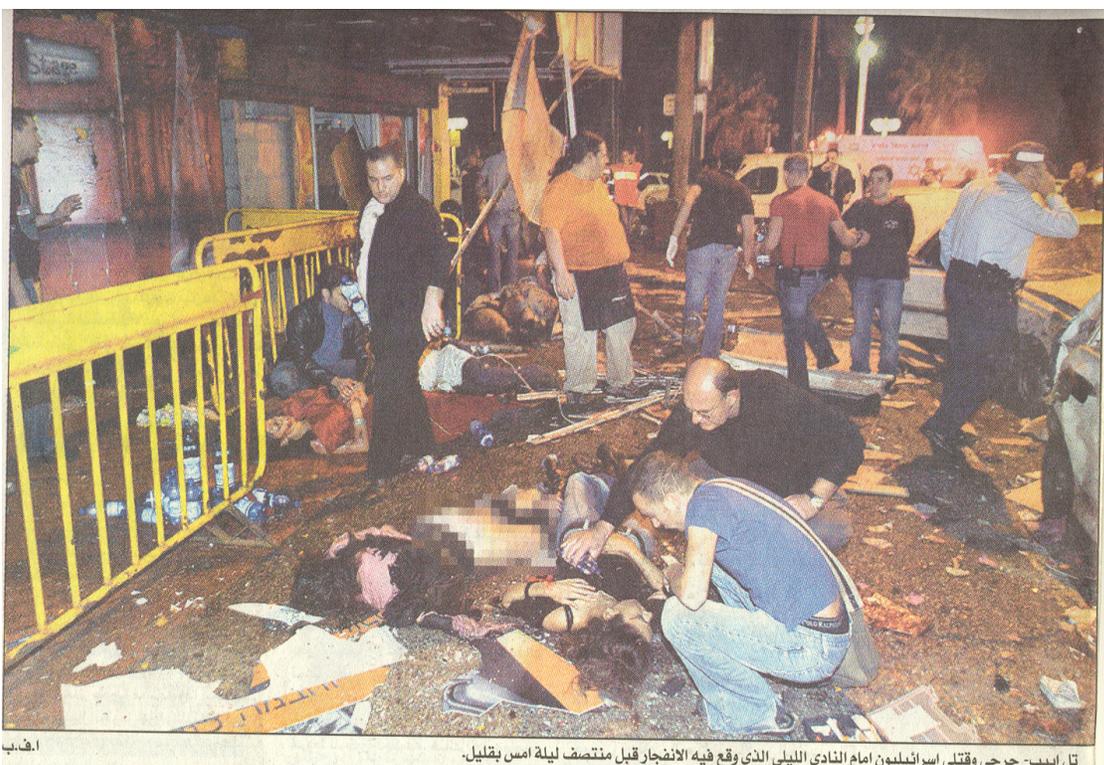
Thus, the newspaper headlines were as follows:

**Al-Ayyam Newspaper / February 26, 2005:**

*"Israel threatens to retaliate, and the Palestinian factions confirm their commitment to the period of calm. Four people killed and more than 60 injured in an operation in front of a nightclub in Tel Aviv."*

**Al-Quds Newspaper / February 26, 2005:**

*"The Palestinian Authority strongly condemned it: an explosion in the heart of Tel Aviv kills three and injures more than 50, some seriously. The paper concealed parts of the photo because they were too horrible."*



ا.ف.ب

تل أبيب- جرحى وقتلى اسرائيليون امام النادي الليلي الذي وقع فيه الانفجار قبل منتصف ليلة امس بقليل.

**Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah Newspaper / February 26, 2005:**

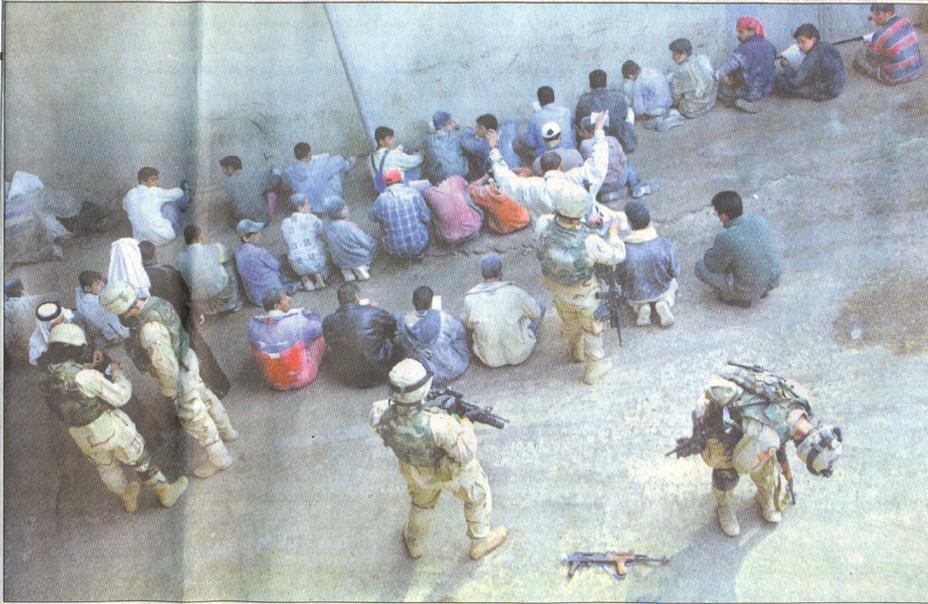
*"The Palestinian Authority condemned it; Hamas, Al-Jihad, and Al-Aqsa confirm their commitment to the period of calm, and Israel threatens; four Israelis killed and scores injured in the Tel Aviv operation."*

In spite of this clearly positive development in the press's style of reporting, mainly avoiding the logic of justification and rather condemning the operation itself, we nonetheless have to make the following observations, which we believe are necessary:

1. Opinion columnists did not mention that Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the operation. Some of them denied that any of the Palestinian organizations had any involvement in the operation, even though Al-Jihad's claim of responsibility was front-page news in both Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah. Some columnists said it was an isolated operation, and others agreed with the Palestinian Authority that a third party is responsible. Still others went so far as to say that there was an infiltration of the Islamic Jihad, which subsequently allowed such an operation. All these writers continued to deal with the operation as if the identity of the person who carried it out was still unknown.

2. There is no clear name given to the Israeli military apparatus in these papers: is it the Ministry of Defense? the Ministry of Security? or the Ministry of the Army? The three main newspapers used different titles for Zeev Boem: he is the Deputy Minister of Defense, according to Al-Quds newspaper; the Deputy Minister of the Army, according to Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah; and the Deputy Minister of Security, according to Al-Ayyam.
3. **On February 28, 2005**, Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah newspaper published the following headline: *“Israel decided to resume its targeted assassination campaign against Islamic Jihad activists and to freeze the release of 400 Palestinian prisoners. Israel threatens to stop communications with the Palestinian Authority and to attack Syria.”* The problem here is that the details in the body of the article do not support what was written in the headline. The statement which was attributed to Israel’s Deputy Minister of Defense, Zeev Boem, read that Abbas *“does not do enough to confront Islamic Jihad, and therefore we have to move and face that organization ourselves.”* No further information was given to support the headline. Also, the photo which accompanied the article was of American soldiers disciplining a number of Iraqi workers, and had nothing to do with the headline or the story.

## قررت استئناف الاغتيالات بحق نشطاء الجهاد الاسلامي وتجميد الافراج عن ٤٠٠ أسير اسرائيل تهدد بوقف الاتصالات مع السلطة ومهاجمة سوريا



رام الله - القدس المحتلة - الحياة الجديدة - وكالات - تواصل اسرائيل توظيفها لعملية تل أبيب في تصعيد لهجتها ضد السلطة الفلسطينية والفصائل وفي الوقت ذاته ضد سوريا، فقد هدد مسؤولون اسرائيليون وفي مقدمتهم رئيس الوزراء اريئيل شارون بوقف الاتصالات مع السلطة الفلسطينية ما لم تدخل في مواجهة مع الفصائل الفلسطينية و«المعارضين» للمفاوضات مع اسرائيل. كما جمدت اسرائيل تنفيذ اطلاق سراح ٤٠٠ أسير من اصل ٩٠٠ افرج عن ٥٠٠ منهم الاسبوع الماضي. وهدد المسؤولون الاسرائيليون بشن هجوم عسكري ضد سوريا وزعم وزير الجيش شاؤول موفاز ان لدى اسرائيل أدلة تدل على دمشق بالتخطيط لعملية تل أبيب ولم يستبعد نائبه زئيف بوم توجيه ضربة عسكرية ضد دمشق مطالبا بشن «حرب دولية» ضدها بزعم انها أصبحت تمثل «مشكلة للعالم كله».

عدد من جنود الاحتلال الاميركي "يشبهون" حشداً من العمال العراقيين في الموصل امس.

"ا.ف.ب"

تفاصيل ص ٢

### الاتصالات الفلسطينية تقر توزيع نصف الأسهم و٢٠٪ من القيمة الاسمية للسهم

رام الله - الحياة الجديدة - أعلن صبيح المصري رئيس مجلس الإدارة لشركة الاتصالات الفلسطينية أن مجلس إدارة الشركة قرر التوصية للهيئة العامة بتوزيع نصف سهم لكل سهم و ٢٠٪ من القيمة الاسمية للسهم كعائد نقدي. وأشار المصري أن الشركة بهذا التوزيع تكون قد وزعت على المساهمين منذ إنشائها أرباحاً بقيمة تتجاوز ٤٠ مليوناً، إضافة إلى نصف القيمة

### مصرع ١٢ عراقياً في الموصل والعثور على جثة امرأة مقطوعة الرأس غرب بغداد مقتل ٣ جنود اميركيين في العراق والسيستاني يدعو الى اشراك السنة في العملية السياسية

بغداد - وكالات - أعلن الجيش الامم كرم مقتل ثلاثة من جنده في جنوب الموصل واربعة من عناصر الشرطة العراقية على يد مسلحين السنة في العملية السياسية.

## Conclusions

It is important to note the progress achieved by the Palestinian Satellite Channel during the monitoring period, especially that related to its attempt to involve the Palestinian public in its programming, and its interest in transmitting their opinions on topics once considered taboo, and whose mere discussion would have crossed over "factions consensus" lines. It is also important to commend the debate programs, *Ana Wa Al-Akhar* (Me and the Other); *Jawhar Al-Hiwar* (the Essence of Dialogue); *Al-Solta al-Rabi'ah* (The Fourth Estate); and *Akher Al-Kalam* (The Final Word), which daringly cover the issues of the conflict, presenting and debating many opinions and points of views. Here we reiterate that presenting the opinions and the points

of view of the other side to the Palestinian public is a crucial step in the development of the Palestinian media. It reflects a significant change in the media's method of coverage, and it highlights its efforts to improve its performance.

The media's courage, as manifested in both its reporting on the condemnations-official and popular- of the Tel Aviv operation and its restraint from justifying it, is also a point to be recorded in favor of the Palestinian media. Its commitment to ensuring that the period of calm is sustained on the ground, its coverage of any Palestinian violations of the Sharm Al-Sheikh understandings, and its presentation of the statements of foreign officials in a balanced way, all should be commended.

As for the issue of incitement, while monitoring the Satellite Channel and the daily newspapers, the Monitoring Unit did not record any instances which can be considered as incitement. We have to reiterate, however, that in the Palestinian media, reporting information and details on incidents on the ground related to the occupation is a responsibility. The occupation's practices are themselves provocation and incitement, and the only way to change the substance of the coverage is to stop the occupation's policies of killing, confiscation of land, demolishing of houses, and arrests. Other positive factors are the degree of progress in the peace process on the ground and the creation of an atmosphere of mutual trust which can be established between the two parties if there were good intentions for ending the conflict.

Despite the progress made by the Palestinian print media and Satellite Channel, the Monitoring Unit can not consider this as a commitment to a new strategy for the following reasons:

- Continuing to produce sub-standard programs, wherein no one from the public participates. These are programs that are almost carbon copies of each other. They are based on the three main broadcast elements- the studio, the host or moderator, and the guest- and include no field reports.
- There are also programs that are seen by observers as fostering social and political regression, as does for example *Fi Rihab Al-Islam* (In the Vicinity of Islam), which constantly hosts a unilateral point of view dominated mainly by lecturing, preaching, and instruction. In this context, **MIFTAH** believes that it is important to highlight the Islamic civilization in its enlightened thought and its openness to other cultures and beliefs. This is particularly important, given the current

- international atmosphere of an impending widespread clash of ideologies.
- The occupation army's attacks are still being reported in an unprofessional manner by the Satellite Channel, with no on-site reporting and no actual images from the location of the attack. Also, the circumstances in which the attacks were carried out were not even reported.
  - The coverage of the city of Jerusalem and of the activities of its residents remains far from being professional. The activities of the Palestinian Jerusalemites are still absent and are not reported on, except when they relate to the Al-Aqsa Mosque.
  - The coverage of the separation wall lacks a focus on the human dimension. The coverage also is deficient in responding to Israel's contention that the wall is for security reasons and not for political gain. This could easily be remedied by providing facts and documented information showing the area of land that is being swallowed up by the wall and annexed to Israel.
  - The newspapers should have published, and the television stations should have aired Sharon's entire speech at the Sharm Al-Sheikh Summit. It is the right of the Palestinian people to hear the other opinion, and it is their right and to know the nature of the commitments that Sharon's government had made upon itself.
  - **MIFTAH** recalls the issues it raised in its first report, issued in March 2005. First, humanizing the conflict in media coverage serves the interest of both peoples, and it enables them both to establish the needed trust for reaching a peace that is acceptable to both. Second, considering all the victims, from both sides, as victims with names, dreams, and families attached to them. As such, we call on the media to change its method of covering incidents to respect and honor victims on both sides and go beyond emphasizing the event itself.

**Finally, MIFTAH would like to explain its position on the following issues:**

- **MIFTAH** welcomes the move towards putting the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) under the authority of the Ministry of Information, when in the past and ever since it was first established, the PBC had fallen under the authority and control of the office of the Palestinian President. We believe that there is a need to establish an Independent Media Council comprised of media experts, NGOs,

members of Parliament and government representatives. The Council's main task will be to oversee the media in general, and the Palestinian Parliament will serve as its reference body. Freeing the media from the control of the Executive Authority is a basic element in its ability to carry out its duty.

- A more professional and credible way of presenting official Palestinian positions and policies is through the set up of a government press office which covers all government activities, and with whom all Palestinian and international media will deal directly.
- The adoption of a modern media law has become a priority to free the media from the control of the government, or any other institution which may keep it from objectively fulfilling its task.
- **MIFTAH** calls on the Executive Authority to change the way it deals with the Palestinian media, and to avoid treating it with disdain. We further call on the Executive Authority to hold regular press conferences with reporters and columnists to inform them of the general political situation, and to apprise them of the decisions made and the reasoning behind them. We also call on the government to provide opportunity for a Palestinian media delegation to accompany the leadership on its foreign visits. This way, the Palestinian media can better serve the Palestinian public by providing it with comprehensive and reliable information.

**End**