

March 2009, Palestine

To:

*Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
foreign Affairs Ministry, Japan*

Subject:

Concerns over current development projects in the Jordan Vally, including

To whom it may concern:

We are writing you to express our deep concern about the JICA development projects in the Jordan Valley, as part of the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity (Peace Corridor).

First and foremost, JICA has failed to take into account the priorities that were expressed during the consultation with Palestinian communities. Of the many needs raised by Palestinians, only low priority proposals for waste management have been implemented. There are much more pressing issues to be addressed such as the development of education, health-care facilities, water systems, roads and infrastructure for the local communities. In response, the Jordan Valley regional councils issued a statement in November 2007 affirming that the projects implemented were irrelevant to the communities' basic needs.

More problematic, however, are the ways in which the JICA project contributes to the development of illegal settlement and infringement of Palestinian sovereignty over the Jordan Valley.

JICA is proposing direct involvement of Israeli businesses currently operating illegally under international law in West Bank (in particular working in the settlements). JICA misleadingly refers to these businesses as "migrant firms", implying that they are Israeli companies operating with permission on Palestinian territory under Palestinian law. However, they are illegal operations which pay taxes to the Israeli government, which are provided with financial support by the Israeli government and which are one of the primary instruments in maintaining control of the Jordan Valley. When JICA proposes joint projects that take advantage of these "migrant firms" technology and infrastructure, it is clear that joint projects will mean extensive Israeli investment in Israeli companies operating illegally on confiscated Palestinian land. The proposed establishment of

a free-trade zone will ensure that the status of both labour and ownership laws, as well as the status of the settlements, remains ambiguous.

The waste program which has already been implemented is a further indicator of JICA's assumption of a permanent Israeli presence in Area C. Waste is dumped in Palestinian-controlled Area A, which are the only areas in which Palestinians are allowed to build. The dumping of waste in these areas reduces both quality of life and limits the available space for natural community expansion. This makes little sense from the point of view of sustainable Palestinian development, and the only intelligible explanation is that JICA has come to an indirect acceptance that Zone C will be permanently controlled by the Israelis, making it unsuitable for the development of Palestinian infrastructure. Further, given JICA's support for settlements in the agro-industrial project, there is a major concern that the waste disposal infrastructure will be integrated with the settlements.

The damage this will do in the long-term to the Palestinian population is serious, as it serves to legitimize the 41 year-old occupation that has been the main factor in the de-development of the Valley as well as the whole of the West Bank and Gaza.

It is our recommendation that the proposals be reviewed and radically changed to support the Palestinian as well as the Japanese government visions of ending the conflict and creating a sustainable development of local industries, based on the real needs expressed by the Palestinians in the Jordan Valley. The proposed project should be scrutinized to ensure that it is legal under international law and does not pre-empt the outcome of final status talks by lending support to Israeli settlement.

Sincerely,

Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO)



PNGO is a Palestinian NGO umbrella organization comprising 100 member organizations working in different developmental fields. PNGO was established in September 1993 with the objective of enhancing coordination, consultation and cooperation among the different sectors of civil society.

Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign



The Palestinian grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign is a coalition of 13 Palestinian non governmental organizations and over 50 popular committees that mobilize and coordinate efforts against the Wall and the settlements on local, national and international levels.

Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights



BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights takes a rights-based approach to the Palestinian refugee issue through research, advocacy and support of community participation in the search for durable solutions.