

Palestinians' other fight in the Middle East – for green development

Palestinians seek to build a secure, sustainable state – and incorporating green building practices and technologies into its development is key to that stability. Improved environmental security contributes to the security of the whole Middle East.

By *Salam Fayyad NOVEMBER 22, 2010

RAMALLAH, WEST BANK — Everyday [in Palestine](#) we address economic and social conditions, physical restrictions, and [political contests that challenge](#) both the present and the future as we attempt to build a viable and independent Palestinian state.

These [difficulties are well-known](#) to the Palestinian people and those around the world. But another challenge that we must face, far less frequently discussed in the context of Palestine, is climate change. This is not only for Palestine but for the whole of the [Middle East](#).

Last year, the [United Nations](#) published the latest Arab World Human Development Report. The Report highlighted that [the Middle East region](#) is particularly at risk to the effects of climate change: desertification, water shortages, reduced agricultural production, and population transfers – such as “environmental refugees” – straining already limited infrastructure. These are just a few of the effects we could see.

The economic implications of climate change are enormous. Despite the region being one of the lowest producers of greenhouse gases and air pollution, we live in one of the regions most likely to be affected.

Palestinians' green construction

It is with this in mind that, in Palestine, we are increasingly recognizing the importance of [integrating green construction practices](#) into our vision for building a viable, secure state. We must consider not only human and economic security, but in order to ensure these, we must [also consider environmental security](#). Without ensuring that we proceed to ameliorate the effects of climate change, we cannot be assured that our efforts in construction of towns, homes – and a state – will not be undermined.

It was encouraging, therefore, to see [President Obama](#)'s recently launched policy directive on global development emphasize the importance of initiatives to counter climate change as being essential to his vision for long-term sustainable economic development and human security. Such an announcement makes it explicit that economic vitality and environmental responsibility go hand in hand.

As we seek to engender climate-aware practices of construction and economic development, important moves are taking place in Palestine. On November 8, regional leaders and experts from the green building industry gathered in [Ramallah](#) for a one-day conference on the need to raise awareness about, and implement, green building and construction practices. The conference was global in focus and breadth, organized by [CHF International](#), an independent development organization, with support from both the [Palestinian National Authority](#) and the US Agency for International Development.

The conference brought about an exchange of information, case studies, ideas and – most importantly – commitment to environmental preservation among key stakeholders from international and Palestinian private industry, development organizations, universities, and thought leaders from around the world. Hundreds of Palestinian students of engineering and architecture participated in a green building design competition as part of the conference.

It was deeply encouraging to see such innovation and creativity emerging from Palestinian youth, and I hope that these young people are given the chance to realize their potential in the future State of Palestine – if they are, I know we are in good hands.

Environmental security for the Middle East

There are simple ways to reduce the effects of climate change: reusing gray water for agricultural production; building to maximize the use of natural sunlight; solar, wind, and low-energy consumption technologies; and many more. These practices are used around the world, and we are seeking to find ways to use the most appropriate technologies for Palestine and the Middle East.

As we seek to integrate these technologies and practices into building the Palestinian state, we can, from inception, improve our environmental security for the future, and effectively contribute to a better outlook for the region as a whole.

In Palestine, we must address economic, social, and environmental conditions of both security and sustainability. All of these must be addressed if we are to [overcome the many challenges we face](#) and build a sustainable state based on investment, growth industries, and partnership with the world around us.

It is my hope that by implementing solid and sustainable practices of development and construction, we will see bigger and more long-term investments in Palestine as well as in the entire Middle East region.

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