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PALESTINIAN WORKERS CALL FOR REFORMS IN EUROPEAN EMERGENCY AID PROGRAM

June 29, 2007, Ramallah: Palestinian trade unionists have criticized the Temporary Interim Mechanism (TIM), a little-known European aid program that has supported Palestinian workers during the economic crisis, and called for beneficiaries to be consulted about how the funds are used in the future.

Speaking recently at a meeting in Ramallah with a consultant from the European Commission, a delegation from the Palestinian public sector unions complained that the TIM program is arbitrary, secretive, and that it has created divisions among Palestinian workers. The unionists also raised questions about the program's humanitarian goals.

The meeting was arranged by the Democracy and Workers' Rights Center (DWRC) in Ramallah. AP Peace Fellow Eliza Bates (Columbia University) is volunteering with DWRC this summer.

TIM was launched in June 2006 by the European Commission to cushion Palestinian workers against the impact of the international economic boycott imposed by Western donors and Israel following Hamas' election victory.

For much of the past year, TIM has paid 1,500 shekels (\$375) every two months to lower-paid Palestinian public sector workers who earned less than 2,000 shekels (\$470) a month before the crisis. Police and security officials, as well as Hamas appointees, have been excluded. About 77,000 Palestinian workers have benefited.

Although international aid has now resumed to Palestinian government institutions following the naming of a new Palestinian government by President Mahmoud Abbas, the European Commission has reportedly decided to extend TIM and provide another round of salaries to workers in Gaza and the West Bank.

While the Palestinian unionists expressed gratitude for TIM support at the recent meeting, they also called for the procedure to be reformed and made more transparent. Several unionists pointed out, for example, that workers who have accounts with Islamic banks have been excluded from the program, without being told why. This raised questions about the program's humanitarian goal, and could make it harder to expand TIM payments in Hamas-controlled Gaza.

They also complained that there is no formal mechanism for announcing payments, and that they are often informed of donations through the television, newspapers, banks or on the streets. Some workers have received no money at all, and some have received less money than their colleagues with no explanation.

Bassam Zakarneh, the President of the Public Employees Union and a General Manager at the Palestinian Authority Housing Authority, said he had received only 25 percent of his salary for the last year. But lower level employees in the Housing Authority have received between 50 to 60 percent of their pay.

Sulaiman Yousif Turkman, President of the Palestinian Nurses' Association, said that some public health workers had been denied TIM support because they had been earning more than 3,000 shekels (\$705) a month.

The larger question is whether the TIM program has allowed Europeans to prevent a humanitarian crisis while avoiding taking the tough political decisions needed to create a just peace and Palestinian state. The unionists also warned that TIM gives the Palestinian authorities an excuse to avoid paying their employees.

- Read [Eliza Bates's blogs](#).
- Learn more about [DWRC](#).