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FIRST QUARTERLY REPORT

STRENGTHEN LEGISLATIVE CAPACITY AND PROCESSES IN
THE WEST BANK/GAZA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report covers the period between the contract award in September 30 to December 31, 2005 for the Palestinian Legislative Strengthening program (PLS). Given the early phase of the project and the uncertainty related pre-election period, most activities during this period were focused on project start-up, including recruiting and orienting a new Chief of Party; solidifying, orienting and in some cases recruiting new program and administrative staff; purchasing equipment and preparing a new office space. In addition, DAI conducted a series of consultative meetings with USAID, members and staff of the Palestinian Legislative Council, the Executive Authority, key Palestinian civil society organizations and other donors.

DAI staff also began preparations for New Member Orientation, in anticipation of January 25, 2006 elections. The current political environment, including the uncertainty of the election date and expected composition of the new PLC, as well as the instability of the current PLC leadership, created a number of challenges. For example, by the end of the quarter, the Speaker of the PLC had not yet signed a Memorandum of Understanding with USAID, which would have given a formal green light to DAI/USAID to assist PLC with NMO activities. In response, DAI prepared a flexible scope of work for an NMO expert, so that he may work informally with the PLC members and staff, with representatives of the executive authority and with other CSOs who may be involved with NMO or recurrent legislative training and with the recipients of other donor funding for this purpose.

A summary of accomplishments during this period include:

- Completion of major start-up activities (hiring and training of most staff; office space selected and renovated; computers, furniture and vehicles ordered)
- Relationship established with leadership offices of PLC, key CSOs, Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of Justice.
- Draft of Grants Manual completed, begun identification and meetings with possible grantees
- New Member Orientation assistance initiated.

ADMINISTRATION

Upon award, DAI initiated start-up activities, including developing scopes of work and advertising for TBD positions (Chief of Party and Senior Legislative Advisor), interviewing prospective candidates and securing office space. DAI Bethesda Representative Jeremy Kanthor arrived October 19 to conduct initial meetings with the USAID mission, further vet and present candidates, and finalize administrative start up activities. Interim CoP and DAI home office representative Carmen Lane arrived in early November, to conduct stakeholder consultations, initiate Phase I program activities, finalize hiring and training of administrative staff, and brief and train the long-term CoP.

Recruitment

Mohammed Almbaid, former CoP of USAID's Tamkeen project, joined DAI in mid November as the new Chief of Party. In addition to briefings in country, Almbaid spent one week in Bethesda in a comprehensive DAI CoP training session. DAI also interviewed, hired and began mobilization for Stephen Terravecchia, a parliamentary strengthening practitioner/expert currently with USAID in the Dominican Republic, as the new Senior Legislative Advisor. Terravecchia will join the project in early January.

DAI solidified the contract with Iyad Qadi as the new Advocacy Specialist, who will begin in January. Office Manager Nisreen Natour joined the project in November; Financial Officer Waseem Aref joined in December.

DAI reopened recruiting for two positions, Gaza Manager and Institutional Development Specialist. DAI identified and got the USAID approval for hiring a new Gaza manager, Nael Younis, who will start working in the middle of January 2006; the position of Institutional Development Specialist will likely be filled after the legislative elections.

Office Space

DAI oversaw substantial renovations on the identified office space, and anticipates moving in early January. In the meantime, DAI PLS staff were able to work out of DAI Palestine's established corporate offices.

Procurement

DAI gathered competitive bids for computer equipment, furniture and vehicles. Pending source/origin waivers from USAID, delivery is expected in the middle of January 2006.

NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION

During this period, DAI conducted several meetings with key PLC members and staff, including the Speaker of the PLC and other key members, Director General, and directors of the media department, the Parliamentary research unit, the training unit, and the acting Chief Clerk. From these meetings, it became clear that there were already two parallel, but disconnected, efforts underway -- one led by the Director General of the Council and the other lead by BirZeit University continuing education department with funding from a consortium of European countries. It is worth emphasizing that these two efforts are not linked at all in terms of both funding and informal cooperation.

The new effort of the Director General and his team was modest and constrained by limited technical and financial resources. This team was hesitant to cooperate formally with DAI/USAID, as to date the Speaker of the PLC has not signed an MOU with USAID. Staff agreed that they needed assistance in further developing the training agenda, gathering comparative documents and conducting training of trainers but felt they did not have the official “cover” to work with DAI/USAID formally. DAI continued to meet with staff informally, sharing ideas and providing feedback for the development of the NMO agenda.

In addition, the PLC staff and members were generally distracted because of the contentious internal candidate selections of the political parties, the uncertainty of the date of elections, and fears over the potential turnover in the PLC that will impact the institution. Furthermore, the fact that the Director General and Chief Clerk of the PLC as well as other key members of the PLC (except the Speaker) are running for election has created a real vacuum in the council which further contributed to the distraction and lack of commitment among the staff of the council.

The efforts of BirZeit University are also limited and have focused on the development of an orientation manual for new members. Based on the initial feedback received, it is uncertain how consultative and/or inclusive with the broader legislative community (or much of the PLC staff) the BirZeit team has been in the development of this manual. The PLS team has initiated several meetings with the BirZeit team to explore ways of cooperation and avoid duplication.

In that light, the PLS team also participated in a USAID sponsored meeting with European Donors interested in funding small legislative strengthening or related efforts, including the Norwegian, Danish, German and UN representatives. During that meeting, DAI and the PLS project agreed to be the focal point for donor coordination related to legislative strengthening activities.

In December, DAI engaged its partner National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) to support the PLC in designing and conducting a comprehensive NMO program. DAI engaged NCSL's NMO expert, former state Senator Fred Whiting, to review the PLC's NMO plans and to identify more targeted capacity building needs. DAI staff worked to solidify a number of meetings for Fred with PLC members and staff, including the heads of the training units, parliamentary research unit, media department, chief clerk's office, Institute of Public Administration of Borzoi University, and other advocacy focused CSOs such as the Palestinian Bar Association, Arab Thought Forum, Muwatin, and representatives of the Prime Minister's Office and Minister of Justice that are involved in the legislative process. The original scope of Whiting's work was changed slightly to focus more on the recurrent training that will be need following new member orientation.

PARTICIPATORY PLANNING

In preparation for the participatory planning process that the PLS plans to organize, the team has initiated meetings with key representatives of the legislative community. In this regard, it is worth noting that the PLS project is adopting a broad and flexible understanding of the legislative processes. For this purpose, it is essential that an inclusive participatory process be organized that include the PLC, the executive authority (Prime Minister's office, Diwan AlFatwa Wat-tashria', President's office) and the advocacy and policy focused CSOs are engaged in this process. The PLS project intends to continue to engage these actors through the life of the project as an integral element of the participatory planning process that would characterize our work-planning approach.

SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM FOR LOCAL NGOs TO STRENGTHEN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

During the quarter, DAI staff completed a draft of a comprehensive grants manual for the PLS project, currently under internal review. The manual will be submitted to USAID for review and approval in January 2006. Once approved, and as an integral part of supporting the legislative processes, the PLS will start awarding grants to worthy CSOs to implement results-oriented and targeted activities.

To this end, the PLS team has started a series of meetings to introduce the project to key and active policy and advocacy focused CSOs as well as universities and think tanks. This effort included organizing bilateral and multilateral forums and workshops to explore such opportunities for future cooperation. These and other targeted meetings will be continued throughout the life of the project to further solidify the participatory and inclusive approach the PLS intends to have.