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Implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding and Agreement on Operational Arrangements dated 28 November 2005 between Magen David Adom in Israel and the Palestine Red Crescent Society

REPORT

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REPORT

Implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding and Agreement on Operational Arrangements dated 28 November 2005 between Magen David Adom in Israel and the Palestine Red Crescent Society

1. Due to the lack of progress on the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and of the Agreement on Operational Arrangements (AOA), in 2022, the Council of Delegates (CoD), through its Resolution 10, requested the ICRC and IFRC “to define a new approach, such as [...] the appointment [...] of a suitably experienced individual who would engage in a strengthened and enhanced dialogue with the National Societies and their respective political authorities with the objective of exploring new avenues towards the goal of achieving full implementation of the MoU”. To that end, I was appointed on 8 May 2024.
2. I begin this document by thanking Dr. Younis Al-Khatib, President of the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) and Mr. Eli Bin, Director General of Magen David Adom in Israel (MDA), for opening the doors of their National Societies to me, and for the privilege of getting to know both of them and their remarkable teams. I learned about the immensity of the work they all do and their powerful commitment to helping people and to saving lives. I would also like to express my most heartfelt gratitude to Tanya Abu Ghosh and Uri Shacham, who supported me unconditionally and helped me understand each National Society’s reality, challenges and perspectives.
3. In this document I explain the steps I took “to explore (together with all parties involved) new avenues towards the goal of achieving full implementation of the MoU”, and the results achieved or in progress. Before going further, however, I must stress that the additional complexity of the current political and security environment, in particular since 7 October 2023, the ensuing war in Gaza and related violence in the West Bank, make everybody’s task even harder.
4. From 11 to 15 June 2024 I held meetings in Geneva to be fully briefed by the ICRC and the IFRC on the background of the MoU and the AOA as well as on the lack of full implementation. From 22 to 28 June 2024 I visited Israel and the West Bank, including Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Ramallah and Hebron. I was accompanied and supported by Mrs. Kvitoslava Krotiuk and Mr. Frank Mohrhauer, to whom I express my sincere gratitude.
5. I made this visit with the following objectives in mind: a) to be an interlocutor to both National Societies and indeed to their respective political authorities; b) to understand the current situation and existing obstacles to the implementation of the MoU and AOA, visualizing them through the eyes, experience and perspective of each National Society,

without making assumptions of my own; and c) to identify concrete, plausible measures to overcome such obstacles and to change the existing dynamics.

6. While in the region, I had the opportunity to meet – separately and on different occasions – the leadership and personnel of both National Societies as well as the relevant Palestinian and Israeli authorities. In all these instances, we could have thorough, honest and indeed substantive conversations. I also visited the main facilities of the PRCS and MDA, respectively, and toured several bases and routes relevant to their operations.
7. From our discussions and my on-site observations, it became clear that the prevailing environment of total absence of trust – a harsh reality that results from the lack of a political solution and the lack of full implementation of the MoU — is an overall obstacle that can only be countered and overcome by a relentless effort to ensure a systematic and effective communication between the two National Societies.
8. As a result of our collective effort, on 27 June, a meeting between representatives of the PRCS (Mrs. Tanya Abu Ghosh, Mr. Ibrahim Abudalo and Mr. Mohammad Hawash), representatives of MDA (Mr. Uri Shacham, Mr. Ori Shacham and Mr. Itzik Asraf) and myself, took place in the ICRC office in Jerusalem. The objectives of this meeting were: a) to re-establish face-to-face contact between the PRCS and MDA; b) to discuss each Society's views and experiences, as well as obstacles they face concerning the implementation of the MoU and AOA; c) to have clarity on all pending and recurring issues concerning the implementation of the MoU and AOA; and d) to agree on a permanent joint method of work, including — critically — a practical system to ensure regular, fluid, predictable and efficient communication between both National Societies in order to address foreseeable and unforeseeable issues in a timely and effective manner.
9. During such meeting, the following was discussed:
 - a. Geographic scope as defined in the MoU, in particular MDA's activities in East Jerusalem.
 - b. Quick route/passage for PRCS ambulances via the checkpoints of Qalandiya, Al-Zaeem, Beit Jala (tunnels) and Shuafat refugee camp.
 - c. Entry permits to Jerusalem for PRCS leadership.
 - d. Ambulances in Hebron bearing MDA-like emblems.
 - e. Passage of PRCS ambulances in Hebron.
 - f. Stationing of PRCS ambulances in East Jerusalem.
 - g. Licensing of PRCS ambulances to operate in East Jerusalem.
 - h. Permits for management and volunteers/EMTs.
 - i. EMS Station in H2 area of Hebron.
 - j. The use of markings and logo of MDA by community-operated ambulances in the West Bank.
 - k. Resumption of LCM (Liaison Committee Meetings).
 - l. Advocacy from MDA towards the emblem of the PRCS and its medical mission.
10. As a result of that meeting, the following was agreed:

- a. Representatives of both Societies will meet on the premises of the ICRC every first Thursday of every month, starting on 1st August 2024. During these meetings, they will discuss pending issues, as related to the implementation of the MoU and the AOA, and MDA will update the PRCS on its advocacy efforts (Liaison Committee).
- b. The leaders of MDA and the PRCS will meet every quarter or every six months (yet to be decided) to assess progress in general.
- c. Channels of communication, points of contact, etc., will be clarified and reinforced so as to make sure that urgent and unforeseen issues can be addressed effectively and, when necessary, in real time.

11. Further to the above-mentioned agreements, on August 1st the first monthly meeting of the Liaison Committee took place in the ICRC premises in East Jerusalem. The following was discussed and agreed:

- a. The PRCS and MDA will agree upon the frequency of the meetings of the two National Society leaders referred to in paragraph 10.b above, and the date of the first meeting.
- b. The PRCS and MDA will develop a “protocol” that clarifies the communication procedures among them, including points of contact and expected responsibilities.
- c. The PRCS and MDA will attempt to resolve the closure of the PRCS’ station and access for the PRCS teams in H2 Hebron during a meeting with the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) scheduled to take place in the week commencing 4 August.
- d. The PRCS and MDA will attempt to secure for the PRCS the option of using Al Jib checkpoint for both two-directional crossings by Jerusalem-based ambulances and “back-to-back” patient transfers.
- e. The PRCS will provide MDA with a list of the names and ID numbers of the students in need of a permit that will avoid them having to cross checkpoints by foot when undertaking practical training on board PRCS Jerusalem-based ambulances. MDA will secure them the most appropriate permit.
- f. The PRCS, MDA and the ICRC will agree on who communicates with the Health Coordinator in Israel’s Civil Administration (CA) and about what.
- g. The PRCS will share with the ICRC and MDA the list of West Bank Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) for whom permits are being sought to allow them to work in East Jerusalem. The ICRC and/or MDA will submit such permit request, according to the aforementioned agreement on who communicates with the Health Coordinator in Israel’s Civil Administration (CA), and will follow up accordingly.
- h. The PRCS will share an updated list of senior management for whom permits are required for them to have the ability to discharge their duties and responsibilities in all parts of the PRCS’ geographical scope. The ICRC and/or

MDA will submit such permit request to the CA according to the aforementioned agreement.

- i. MDA will meet with the head of the police district responsible for Jerusalem's Old City in the week commencing 4 August with the aim to resolve the issue of the PRCS' access to Jerusalem's Old City and the Al Aqsa mosque compound in particular.
 - j. MDA will confirm the date of the initial meeting around preparations for Ramadan 2025 between the Israeli police, MDA and the PRCS.
12. The atmosphere and dynamic of this meeting as well as the discussion, conclusions and agreements, cannot but make us all feel very encouraged that the PRCS and MDA may be entering a new phase of progressive cooperation and understanding.
13. My time in the West Bank and Israel has offered me but a glimpse into the vast complexity of its realities and into the major forces at play that pull both National Societies apart. Without intending to exceed my responsibility, I feel the duty to share some final broad reflections: This is a situation where realism and optimism are two equally needed attributes. On the one hand, it must be recognized that the full implementation of some aspects of the Memorandum of Understanding face structural impediments, that will only be overcome once a permanent peace between Palestine and Israel is finally achieved. On the other hand, however, an important number of reality-changing operational and practical commitments, particularly those contained in the AOA, are in fact fully achievable at present, as the successful results of the above-mentioned meetings show.
14. I could also observe with absolute clarity the unwavering humanitarian bond shared between the PRCS and MDA. It seems to me that, through this bond, their easy-to-appreciate common values and principles, along with commitment, discipline, consistency and, above all, good faith, most obstacles for the full implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding will certainly be overcome.
15. Finally, given that from the time this document was written and the date of the Council of Delegates, almost 3 months would have passed, I intend to remain engaged with and available to the parties if my support is needed until the end of my mandate. I will further update the Council in October 2024, informing on whether this approach has worked and sustained progress has been made.

Juan José Gómez Camacho