



PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN  
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA MEDITERRANEE

الجمعية البرلمانية للبحر الأبيض المتوسط

## **PAM Mission to Syria and Lebanon**

**28-30 April 2015**

***Executive Report***

## **Background and Objectives**

The PAM Mission to Damascus, on 28-29 April 2015, is the second official visit of the assembly to Syria, following the first mission, which took place from 28 June until 1 July 2013.

A mission to Syria had been agreed by PAM Bureau in its meeting held on the margin of PAM 9<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session, in Monaco, February 2015, as part of PAM's institutional mandate and responsibility towards the citizens of its member states.

The main objectives of this mission could be divided into:

- a. To discuss with the Syrian Parliament the possible political solution to end the ongoing war, weeks before the start of the new rounds of talks in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations.
- b. To support and facilitate the international support to ease the grave Humanitarian Situation in Syria and the displaced Syrians to the Neighbouring countries.

Following a request by the UNSG, this PAM mission was also fielded to verify the situation in the Palestinian Refugees Camp (Al Yarmouk), taking into consideration the latest attacks on the Camp (situated in the outskirts of Damascus), which deepened the Humanitarian crisis in Syria and the region.

The PAM Mission to Syria came in collaboration, and as a continuation of the ongoing efforts made by, the International Parliamentary Union, the League of Arab States, the European Union and the various related UN agencies in Syria and Lebanon.

The visit included a number of high-level bilateral consultations in Damascus and Beirut with Speakers of both Parliaments, members of the Syrian Government, UN Agencies and foreign diplomatic representations. The PAM delegation also paid a visit to one of the refugee camps, based in an old school in Damascus, and which is run by the UNHCR and other Syrian NGOs.

On 30 April, in Beirut, the PAM delegation had the opportunity to meet H.E. Nabih Berry, President of the Parliament of Lebanon, with whom the regional situation was reviewed.

## **PAM High-level Mission to Syria and Lebanon**

### **Schedule of meetings**

#### **Monday 27 April**

Arrival in Beirut

#### **Tuesday 28 April**

09:00 Transfer to Damascus

13:00 Meetings with H.E. Mr. Mohammed Jihad Al-Laham - Speaker of the People's Assembly of Syria

15:00 Official Lunch hosted by the heads of the Parliamentary Committees in the Syrian Parliament.

17:00 Meeting with H.E. Mr. Omar Ghalawanji, Deputy Prime Minister for Services Affairs, Minister of Local Administration

20:30 Working Dinner Hosted by H.E. Mohamed Sarwat Selim, the Chargé d'affaires of Egypt in Damascus.

#### **Wednesday 29 April**

09:00 Meeting with H.E. Mr. Waleed El Moaalem, Minister of Foreign Affairs

10:30 Meeting with H.E. Mr. Vladimir JELTOV, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Embassy of Russian Federation in Damascus.

12:00 Meetings with Mr. Yacoub Il-Hillo - UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria and the representatives of the UN Humanitarian Agencies in Syria

13:00 Visit to the Syrian National Museum organised by General Director of Antiquities and Museums, with Diplomates of the European Union, Cyprus and Check Republic.

15:00 Field visit to a Centre for displaced persons in the periphery of Damascus

18:00 Meeting with the Chairpersons and all members of the Foreign Affairs and National Reconciliation Committees of the Syrian People's

20:00 Official Dinner hosted by H.E. Mohammed Jihad Al-Laham - Speaker of the People's Assembly of Syria.

**Thursday 30 April**

09:00 Meeting with Mohammed Jihad Al-Laham - Speaker of the People's Assembly of Syria

10:00 Transfer to Lebanon

14:00 Meeting with H.E. Nabih Berry, President of the Lebanese National Assembly

15:30 Meeting with H.E. Mr. Luca Renda, UNDP Country Director in Lebanon

15:00 Meeting with H.E. Mr. Abdallah AL Dardari, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCWA

**Friday 1 May**

End of mission and departure from Lebanon

## Summary of discussions

The discussions with the Syrian Parliament, Government and the various representatives of the UN Agencies and the diplomatic corps in Damascus focused on the Political situation in Syria and the region, the Humanitarian condition of the Syrian people, the threat of terrorism and Foreign Terrorist Fighters and the role that PAM alongside with the international community can play to reach a permanent solution to this ongoing tragedy.

In the meeting with **H.E. Mr. Mohammed Jihad Al-Laham, Speaker of the People's Assembly of Syria**, he referred to the Extremism line of thought which is dangerously spreading in several countries of the region. He also accused certain states in the region with supporting and funding the fundamental terrorist groups, in a clear violation to the International law and the United Nations Resolution. He added that there is no political moderate opposition in Syria, as all the groups fighting the Syrian Army now neither can be labelled as political opposition nor as moderate.

He called for PAM to deliver their messages, as a founding member of the Assembly and the representative of the Syrian People, to the United Nations and the international community, to take a firm stand against the states accused and proven to be, according UN reports, assisting the terrorist groups and facilitating selling the oil from the Syrian and Iraqi territory under their occupation. He also called for controlling the borders between Syria and Turkey, from where the FTF, weapons and aids to the terrorist groups are coming, according to his sources.

He added that the Syrian parliament would be also counting on PAM in the national reconciliation process and the domestic political dialogue, affirming that the Syrian parliament had shown its seriousness to reach a political solution to this crisis, and its willingness to negotiate with any side not using arms and violence to achieve their goals.

In the meeting with **H.E. Mr. Omar Ghalawanji, Deputy Prime Minister for Services Affairs, Minister of Local Administration**, PAM delegation discussed the Humanitarian situation in Syria. The Syrian Deputy Prime Minister, who is in charge of the National Committee for Relief, thanked PAM for all its effort, since the first official visit to Damascus in 2013, in facilitating the delivery of the Humanitarian assistance, and projecting the gravity of the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

He briefed the delegation on the situation on the ground, the numbers of refugees and the most affected areas in Syria. He showed great appreciation to the international efforts in easing the Humanitarian crisis in Syria, yet he confirmed that, until present, it's the Syrian Government that is providing 80% of this assistance needed and paying the salaries for all civil servants, with no differentiation whether they are in an area under the control of Government or the terrorist groups.

He referred to the high-level of cooperation between the Syrian Government and the UN Humanitarian Agencies, and that they meet regularly to discuss the developments on the ground. He added that they also share efforts not only in delivering the aids but also to accommodate the displaced families fleeing the troubled areas.

In regards to the Yarmouk Camp, he confirmed that the Syrian Governments facilitated the exit of 2350 families (almost 12 thousand civilian) after the attack on the camp. Also, and in full cooperation with the UNRWA, aids and medical supplies were sent inside of the camp, and the wounded people were evacuated.

The Syrian Deputy Prime Minister urged PAM mission to convey clearly what they have, and will see, during their stay in Syria to the entire world and to work on, using its Parliamentary and UN networks, to stop the usage of the Humanitarian crisis politically to pressure the Syrian regime.

The PAM delegation then had a meeting with **H.E. Mr. Waleed El Moaalem, Minister of Foreign Affairs**. During this meeting PAM Secretary General, briefed the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs on the main activities of PAM in the region and the UN/PAM joint efforts in countering terrorism and the implementation of the UN RES. 2178.

On the political situation in Syria, Mr. El Moaalem started with praising the effort of the UN Special Representative to Syria, Amb. Stephan De Mistura. He added that although he failed to get the approval from the different armed forces in Aleppo, yet, the Syrians are still hoping that he can achieve a comprehensive initiative. He confirmed their strong will to work with all different side for reaching a comprehensive and permanent political solution.

He referred to the position of the EU towards Syria and the need to have a drastic change in their approach towards the Syrian crisis. The EU should acknowledge the full picture that the Syrian Army is currently fighting well-equipped and generously funded terrorist groups, like DAESH and AL NUSRA and they have to have free hand on that, or else the crisis will prolong.

In the meeting with **H.E. Mr. Vladimir JELTOV, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Embassy of Russian Federation in Damascus**, the domestic political situation in Syria was thoroughly discussed, as long as the regional and international developments.

PAM delegation discussed with the Russian Charge d'affair the rising threat of the Terrorist groups in Syria and the region, the phenomena of the FTT and the possible ways of implementing the various relevant UN Resolution. Moreover, the political dialogue and the next rounds of talks (Geneva 2) has been discussed, mainly in regards of who will be representing the opposition, and whether these representatives will have the real power to enforce any reached agreement.

**Mr. Yacoub Il-Hillo - UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria and the representatives of the UN Humanitarian Agencies in Syria**, Welcomed PAM delegation and highlighted the significant timing of this mission in view of the very rapid and dynamic developments happening in Syria and also weeks before the resumption of the peace talks in Geneva.

Mr. Il-Hillo briefed PAM mission on all related UN efforts and presence in all the Syrian Cities. Yet, he noted that the Humanitarian situation is not getting any better, due to the ongoing fighting. He confirmed that the number of Syrian civilians in need for aids are rising, and that the Syrian Government is cooperative in providing and facilitating the deliverance of the Humanitarian Assistance. He referred to the importance and fairness to show the positive

side that they undertake, especially that they are considered the main provider of humanitarian assistance to all the Syrian people.

The meeting with the Mr. Il-Hillo also touched on the problem of Illegal Migration threatening the lives of thousands of civilians in the Mediterranean Sea, and causing huge economic and social burden on the receiving countries in Europe. Mr. Il-Hillo indicated the significance of dealing with the Humanitarian Situation in Syria or else there will be other waves of migration to Europe, may be directly from the Syrian shores, this time.

PAM delegation had the opportunity to have an enlarged meeting with all the honourable MPs members of the Foreign Affairs and National Reconciliation committees, where PAM SG briefed the honourable members with the efforts undertaken by PAM to help the Syrian people. From their side, the members of the two Parliamentary Committees gave a clear demonstration to the PAM delegation on the nature of their work, the main obstacles facing them and their views on how to reach a political solution to the Syrian Crisis.

On the margin of the bilateral meetings, PAM delegation was invited, along with the EU representative, the Ambassadors of Cyprus and Czech Republic to pay a visit to the National Museum in Damascus. The director of the Museum explained the difficulties they are facing to rescue the historical heritage from the barbaric attacks of the terrorist groups. He also referred to the cooperation with neighbouring countries, the UN and the Interpol in returning the pieces stolen from Syria. This visit came in reference to the meeting PAM was hosting two weeks later, on the 'Protection of Cultural Heritage Threatened with Destruction', in Rabat, under the patronage of HRH. King of Morocco.

PAM delegation then had a Field visit to a Centre for displaced persons in the periphery of Damascus. The centre was under the supervision of the Syrian Ministry of Social affairs and the Syrian NGO's. It was positively noted by PAM delegation the effort made to accommodate the families in this centre, the learning classes set up for the kids and the handmade materials made by the women in the Centre, which are sold to symbolically contribute to the financing of the centre.

The Mission to Damascus was concluded by another meeting with **H.E. Mr. Mohammed Jihad Al-Laham**, Speaker of the People's Assembly of Syria. During this meeting, H.E. the speaker of the Syrian Parliament extended the invitation to PAM and to the IPU to send a joint fact-finding mission with a full mandate to report to the world the real situation in Syria. He also stressed on the role of PAM in creating the needed Parliamentary momentum to ensure the implementation of the UN Resolutions related to Countering terrorism and the Foreign Terrorist fighters.

In Damascus, Hon. Bilal Qasem had series of dedicated meeting with the Palestinian officials responsible of the Yarmouk Camp, who provided a detailed account of the current situation in the Camp, situated 5km away from the centre of Damascus. At present, the Camp, which previously hosted 200,000 persons, counts only a population of some nine thousand persons, who still refuse to evacuate their homes due to their political/military affiliation to ISIS and Al Qaeda. This group is however receiving humanitarian assistance through a dedicated corridor. A delegation from the Palestinian Authority will soon travel to Damascus for discussion with national authorities to address the situation. Hon. Bilal Qasem was briefed by H.E. Mahmoud El Khaldi, the Palestinian Ambassador to Damascus, about the situation of the Palestinian refugees in Syria and the assistance needed to support them. He was also

informed by Dr. Samir Refaei, Secretary General of the PLO in Damascus, General/ Waleed Abbas, in charge of the Relief committee on the cooperation between the Palestinian authority, UNRWA and the Syrian Red Crescent in dealing with the crisis of the Yarmouk camp. PAM delegates had the opportunity to share information with the Palestinian representatives as well.

### **Meetings in Lebanon:**

PAM delegation briefed **H.E. Nabih Berry, President of the Lebanese National Assembly** on the outcome of the mission to Damascus, the possible political solutions to the Syrian Crisis, and the grave Humanitarian situation, which is directly affecting Lebanon as well.

President Berry mentioned that the political solution in Syria is not something that will be achieved by an internal dialogue between the combating factions. He referred to the similarity between the situation now in Syria and what Lebanon passed through during the civil war. In his opinion, the solution must be a regional agreement between the Syrian regime and all the key players in the region and on the international level, as well; an agreement that would become a constitution to the new Syria.

The discussions with President Berry touched also on the Middle East Peace Process. He highlighted the importance of putting an international pressure on the Israeli government to go back to the direct talks, and to put more pressure to stop the settlement, which is against the International Law.

President Berry stated that he believe in the parliamentary Diplomacy. He added that it opens many doors, which cannot be opened by traditional diplomacy. He urged PAM to continue playing its active role in the Mediterranean, and in particular the Middle East, and to keep on echoing the voice of the Mediterranean people in all regional and international arenas.

PAM delegation concluded their mission to Damascus and Beirut with meeting **Mr. Luca Renda**, UNDP Country Director in Lebanon, and with **Mr. Abdallah AL Dardari**, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCWA. In both meetings, PAM delegation was briefed about the situation in Lebanon and the efforts of the UN, in cooperation with the Lebanese Government, in dealing with the continuous flow of Syrian migrants, and other domestic and regional matters. It has been agreed to work on establishing solid relation between PAM and ESCWA, in the very near future.

### **Conclusions and Follow-ups:**

PAM mission concluded its mission with a positive note based on the commitment shown by the Syrian Parliament and high officials in reaching a permanent political solution to end the three years ongoing crisis.

On his return, the PAM Secretary General briefed the members of PAM Bureau on the outcome of this mission. It has been agreed to continue to use the parliamentary network of PAM in order to support the political negotiations and secure the safe flow of the needed Humanitarian aids.

PAM will enforce, furthermore, its communication with the UN representations in Syria to facilitate, in all possible ways, the delivery of the humanitarian aids and support all initiatives aiming to reach a comprehensive political solution to the Syrian Crisis.

### **List of officials met in Syria and Lebanon**

#### ***PAM Delegation***

Amb. Sergio Piazzzi, Secretary General  
Hon. Bilal Qasem, Vice President of PAM 3<sup>rd</sup> Standing Committee (Palastine)  
Mr. Mourad Youssry, Deputy Secretary General

#### ***The Syrian Arab Republic People's Assembly***

H.E. Mr. Mohammed Jihad Al-Laham - Speaker of the People's Assembly of Syria

Hon. Dr. Fadia Deeb - Chairwoman of Arab and Foreign Affairs Committee

Hon. Omar Ousi - Chairman of National Reconciliation Affairs Committee

Honourable members of the Foreign Affairs and National Reconciliation Committees

#### ***The Syrian Government***

H.E. Mr. Omar Ghalawanji, Deputy Prime Minister for Services Affairs, Minister of Local Administration

H.E. Mr. Waleed El Moaalem, Minister of Foreign Affairs

#### ***UN Agencies in Syria***

Mr. Yacoub Il-Hillo - UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator in Syrian Arab Republic (UNHCR)

#### ***The Diplomatic Representations in Syria***

H.E. Mohamed Sarwat Selim, the Charge d'affair of Egypt

H.E. Vladimir Jeltov, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Embassy of Russian Federation

#### ***The Lebanese National Assembly***

H.E. Nabih Berry, President of the Lebanese National Assembly

#### ***UN Agencies in Syria***

Mr. Luca Renda, UNDP Country Director in Lebanon

Mr. Abdallah AL Dardari, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCWA