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Enthusiasm of Palestinians in Kuwait for Establishing the Entity

In early 1964, I was gaining political prominence in Kuwait. In January of that year, the First [Arab League] summit conference was held in Cairo, headed by president Gamal Abdel Nasser. The Conference commissioned the Palestinian representative to the Arab League, Ahmad al-Shuqairi, to communicate with the Palestinian people and Arab countries with a view to building sound foundations for a Palestinian Entity.

Al-Shuqairi was very enthusiastic to implement this decision and achieve his dream of establishing the Palestinian Entity. He drew up a project to bring it into being. The project consisted of the 'National Charter' and the statutory law. He started touring Arab countries, where he met with leaders and Palestinian people to deliberate. At that time, Kuwait was one of the countries with the greatest number of Palestinians in Shatat. The Entity became the main topic of conversation among these Palestinians in the first three months of 1964.

Meetings and discussions were held, newspaper articles were published, conflicts of ideas intensified and old prejudices resurfaced as al-Shuqairi's project was debated, together with many other ideas about the Entity, which flooded Arab arenas at that time.

The Kuwaiti government, under the guidance of his Highness Sheikh Abdullah al-Salem, was very cooperative. The government opened the floor for Palestinian people in Kuwait to express their opinions on this crucial topic. It allowed all Palestinian groups to hold meetings everywhere. It also dedicated its various apparatuses to helping the Palestinian people give voice to their views.

Palestinian teachers, as well as employees of the various governmental departments, were more qualified than anyone else to express their opinions about the Palestinian Entity.

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Here is a more detailed description of that period, which I included in my book *Khairi Abu Jbein's Memoirs*, published two years ago:

“When al-Shuqairi was commissioned, the youth in Kuwait started thinking about how to build the Palestinian leadership, before the PLO was constituted. They considered prerequisites, funding resources and relations with other Arab countries. Many meetings were held here in Kuwait, in the houses, courtyards and ministries, to study what form the Palestinian leadership should take. Meetings were held everywhere. The newspapers published ideas, and news of al-Shuqairi’s commissioning by the Arab League. Then newspapers started publishing his project to establish the Palestinian Entity, the National Charter etc. The youth in Kuwait began to anticipate that the Palestinian Entity would become a pan-Arab leadership. Committees met every morning and afternoon. All of this happened in the first two months of 1964. After that, my real contribution began. I worked with a big group of Palestinians in the Ministry of Water and Electricity. There were thousands of us. Since I was responsible for the ministry, suggestions that I should play a role in setting up a ministry committee began to circulate. Our committee would collaborate with other committees to build the leadership. One time, I went to the governmental farm with some of the brothers, as a ministry representative. Yahia Ghannam, a senior employee of the Public Works, was responsible for the farm, where a meeting for representatives of the various ministries had been convened. There were representatives from the Ministry of Media, who were all Arab Nationalists, teachers representing the Ministry of Education, representatives from the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Health. All these representatives came together to devise representative process for Palestinian opinion in Kuwait. Zainab Saqallah, a representative of the Ministry of Education, headed the meeting. My administrative experience and my ability to organise stood out. As a result of my previous positions, I had great knowledge of transcribing regulations, chairing sessions, etc.”

During the meeting on the governmental farm, I suggested that we form a “Coordination Committee” composed of one representative from each ministry. This committee would be responsible for overseeing elections to choose representatives for each ministry, who would discuss all proposals and ideas regarding the Palestinian Entity at a conference. The conference outcomes would then be presented to Mr Ahmad al-Shuqairi during his next visit to Kuwait. The attendees agreed with my suggestions for organising the work, and elected me as president of the Coordination Committee. The Committee began by determining the electoral quota for each ministry

participating in the conference. Later on, the 'First Conference for Palestinians in Kuwait' was convened.

Elections for Palestinians in Kuwait to establish the Entity

At that time, in March 1964, there were no official statistics detailing the number of the Palestinian employees working in various Kuwaiti ministries and departments. There were also no statistics regarding the total number of Palestinian workers in Kuwait. The last official census in Kuwait had been conducted in 1961, and the next would not be conducted until 1965.

After conducting a survey and listening to representatives of the various ministries and departments, the Coordination Committee estimated the number of Palestinians in Kuwait to be 31000. It was decided that there would be one conference representative for every 50 people. Each ministry's quota was to be determined according to the number employees working in that ministry. The estimated numbers were as follows:

- a. Ministry of Education: 5,000 teachers and employees represented by 100 representatives.
- b. The municipality, the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Electricity: 3000 employees represented by 60 representatives.
- c. Ministry of Health: 1500 employees represented by 30 representatives.
- d. The remaining eight ministries: 250 employees represented by 5 representatives.
- e. High school students: 500 students represented by 10 representatives.
- f. Oil companies: 1000 employees represented by 20 representatives.
- g. The private sector: 10,000 employees represented by 200 representatives.

The Coordination Committee decided that impartial committees would supervise elections at each ministry. Employees of each ministry would elect their representatives according to the quotas stated above. Those who were elected would represent their ministry at the General Conference of Palestinians in Kuwait.

The Coordination Committee decided that 10% of the each ministry's elected representatives would attend an additional meeting, during which a higher committee would be elected.

The Coordination Committee prepared and stamped 620 invitations signed by the president of the Committee. At the Ministry of Electricity, we started

preparing for elections. As the head of the Coordination Committee and the ministry's representative on the Committee, I was personally responsible for supervising preparations. We had a three-day window for nominations. I didn't nominate myself initially. On the last day, at the latest possible hour, I consulted my colleague Dr Zaki Abu Eid, president of the engineers syndicate. We decided to nominate ourselves jointly. The impartial electoral committee assigned to our ministry set up the polling station in the sketching hall, in the ministry's main building. The elections began, and voting continued for an entire day, in accordance with the time frame set by the committee. Over 50% of all Palestinians working at the ministry turned out to vote. Once the polls had closed, the count began. They used the chalkboard to tally the votes for each candidate. The count took three days. Then the results were revealed.

After the elections at all the ministries were complete, it was noted that full elections had not been held in the private sector, despite the great number of Palestinians employed therein. Elections were held in a limited number of private companies, including the Garage al-Ghanim, the Garage al-Mula and the Garage Ford. The Coordination Committee decided to invite the winners of these elections to the conference according to the quota i.e. one representative for every 50 people. For various reasons, elections were not held in the oil sector, so the committee decided to invite 3 activists from this sector to the conference: Dr Fahim Naser, Youssef al-Nashef and Soubhi al-Dahle. For the reasons stated above, around 400 people attended the conference, not 600 as planned.

Electing the Representative Committee of Palestinians in Kuwait and its President

Once the election results for each ministry were announced, the Coordination Committee asked the elected representatives to choose 10% of all the elected representatives to attend the additional meeting. This meeting would be held prior to the conference to elect a higher committee for the Palestinian gathering. So the ministries sent their representatives. At the Ministry of Electricity, we chose representatives from among those elected, according to the number of votes they had received. If a chosen candidate didn't wish to be involved in this step, the candidate with the next highest number of votes would be selected to replace him. We sent six representatives to the meeting, and I was one of them. The meeting was held in a high school building in Shuwaikh, and 40 people attended to elect the Higher Committee. The Higher Committee consisted of 22 people.

The Higher Committee subsequently decided that the First Conference for Palestinians in Kuwait should be held in the afternoon on Friday 12 March 1964. The conference would present Palestinians' suggestions regarding the establishment of the Palestinian Entity to al-Shuqairi. The conference took place in the high school theatre in Shuwaikh. The Committee sent invitations to all those who had an ID issued by the Coordination Committee, and then decided to discuss suggestions made by the various ministries in advance of the conference. The Committee also decided to discuss arrangements for the conference in a session that would be held on 11 March 1964. Here is a summary of the unanimous decisions made by the elected committee representing the Palestinians in Kuwait:

A Summary of the Decisions Made by the Committee of Representatives of Palestinians in Kuwait for Establishing the Palestinian Entity

After its election by ministry representatives, the Higher Committee held a special session in a building in Shuwaikh to discuss arrangements for the First Conference of the Palestinians on 12 March 1964.

During this session, it was decided that five more members would be added to the Higher Committee. The five new members would represent the ministries that had not participated in the last general meeting, at which the committee was formed. The five new members were all elected to represent their ministries. The five new members were: Wasfi al-Jayyousi, representing the Ministry of Interior; Dr Abdel Qader Statiah and Dr Faeq Abdel Hai al-Husseini, representing the Ministry of Health. It was also decided that Zaki Shahab el-Din would represent the students. It was also decided to raise the Palestinian flag, together with the flags of all Arab states, in the conference hall.

With regard to electing members to the National Council, it was agreed that the President of the Committee should submit the Committee's decision to Mr al-Shuqairi. The Committee's decision was as follows:

"If it were not possible to elect the conference attendees, the conference would be considered temporary, and we would need to hold elections within six months to form the permanent National Council. In this case, preparatory committees would be formed of qualified people with strong reputations and records of national engagement. The committees would be formed in such a way that Palestinians in the various Arab countries would be represented. The members of the preparatory committees would then choose the members of the forthcoming National Council on the same basis on which they were

chosen. Representatives from the Ministry of Education presented suggestions concerning the establishment of the Entity were discussed. After some discussion, it was decided to present these suggestions with some amendments to the forthcoming Conference for Palestinians in Kuwait regarding the establishment of the Palestinian Entity”.

The first Conference for Palestinian in Kuwait for the Establishment of the Entity

The first Conference of Palestinians in Kuwait was held in the great hall of Shuwaikh High School on the afternoon of Friday 12 March 1964, the date set by the Higher Committee. The elected representatives of the Palestinians in the ministries and various departments attended the meeting.

There were around 400 participants at the conference. A designated committee checked the invitations sent by the Coordination Committee to each participant. The Arab flags and Palestinian flag adorned the hall. A number of journalists also attended. The Minister of Interior placed a number of security officers at my disposal to preserve order. We were informed prior to the conference that the Arab Higher Commission for Palestine was attempting to bomb the conference, and that the Commission had sent two people from Beirut for that purpose.

I chaired the conference, in accordance with a decision made by the elected Higher Committee, which I also chaired. The atmosphere at the conference was very raucous, and deep disagreements emerged while discussing the project prepared by the Committee regarding the demands of Palestinians in Kuwait for establishing the Palestinian Entity.

There were attempts to thwart the conference. When arguments in the conference intensified, some members of the elected committee suggested that I adjourn the session, but I refused. Thanks to God, I managed to lead the conference to safety. After some amendments, the proposal presented by the Higher Committee was approved. I remember that the conference agreed to send a thank you letter to Algeria for hosting the Palestine office in Algeria, once the office was established there. One conference participant from Fatah suggested sending the letter.

The two secretaries of the Higher Committee, Abdel Fatah Jibril and Said Abu Eitah, assisted me in answering conference participants' questions regarding the project to establish the Palestinian Entity. Ali al-Hasan and Yahia Ghannam, who were members of the Committee, were remarkably active as well. Yahia Ghannam, the head of Agriculture Department in the Ministry of

Public Works, was my right arm from the beginning and throughout this process. I can't forget his efforts in organising Palestinians in Kuwait to establish the Palestinian Entity.

The Suggestions of the Palestinians in Kuwait for Establishing the Palestinian Entity

Palestinians in Kuwait believed in the Palestinian Arab People's full right to Palestine, the inevitability of the battle for return, and their pioneering role in this decisive battle for the Arab nation. They wanted the proposed Palestinian Entity to be a positive step in the battle for return. The Palestinians in Kuwait saluted the Arab Summit Conference that had given them this long-awaited opportunity. With regards to establishing the Palestinian Entity, they presented the following recommendations to the Palestinian representative to the Arab League, Mr Ahmad al-Shuqairi:

- a) Political Recommendations
- b) Military Recommendations
- c) Financial Recommendations
- d) Publicity and Media Recommendations

a) Political Recommendations

1. We consider the Palestinian cause a decisive and indivisible cause, and refuse all partial solutions calling for internationalisation, partition, re-settling etc.
2. The Palestinian Entity should be a revolutionary organisation that includes all Palestinians and adopts revolutionary-style programme, abandoning all traditional methods followed previously.
3. The Entity should be established by holding free elections to produce a National Council that truly represents all Palestinians, and that will be the highest authority in the organisation.
4. The Entity should be established for the revolution, and not as a replacement.
5. The Palestinian Entity should not interfere in the internal affairs of Arab countries.
6. The Entity should not commit to any international or regional treaties related to the Palestinian cause, especially treaties that fail to recognise Palestinian Arabs' full right to their homeland.
7. The organisation's headquarters should be in Jerusalem. The headquarters could be moved elsewhere in Palestine, but only if necessary.

8. The organisation should establish branches in the Arab countries. These branches would work towards fulfilling the organisation's goal, and attend to Palestinian affairs.
9. Arab countries should guarantee Palestinians freedom of movement, and work for the Palestinian cause.
10. The Palestinian organisation must take necessary measures to prevent the displacement of Palestinians outside the Arab countries.
11. The organisation should take a clear position against the countries that support Israel, and work towards Arab countries adopting this same position.
12. The organisation should pay great attention to achieving national unity, freezing party activities and harnessing all efforts for the battle of return.
13. People who can devote their time to the organisation and to executing its plans should do so.

b) Military Recommendations

1. Establishing a regular Palestinian army under Palestinian leadership, represented at the Unified Arab Leadership, and working towards training *fida'iyeen* immediately.
2. Instituting compulsory military training for all Palestinians capable of bearing arms and opening training camps for this purpose.
3. Enrolling a sufficient number of Palestinians in all manner of Arab military colleges and institutions.
4. Providing the Palestinian army with Arab military and technical expertise.
5. Circulating the principles of popular resistance and civil defence among Palestinians.
6. Accepting volunteers from Arab and friendly countries into the Palestinian Army.
7. Considering Palestinian military personnel in Arab armies as a nucleus for the Palestine Liberation Army.
8. Expediting the Unified Arab Forces' entry into the West Bank.

c) Financially:

1. Forming a financial committee to oversee Organisation resources of and regulate expenditure.
2. Establishing the Palestine Fund, to be funded by the following resources:

- a. Progressive tax on every Palestinian with an income.
- b. Donations from the governments and people of Arab and friendly countries.
- c. Unconditional loans and grants regardless of the source.
- d. Collecting donations during Palestine Week, to be organised in Arab countries.
- e. Taxes imposed for the benefit of the Palestinian cause.
- f. Zakat given to the Fund.
- g. Issuing Palestinian national bonds.
- h. Any other resources approved by the PNC.

d) Publicity and Media

1. Requesting more Arab media offices in foreign countries, and creating a dedicated department for Palestinian publicity under the supervision of the Palestinian organisation.
2. Establishing a strong media apparatus for the Entity.
3. Disseminating the National Charter, approved by the Conference, among Palestinians.
4. Seeking assistance from all media apparatuses of Arab and Friendly countries.
5. Teaching the history and geography of Palestine, and the development of Palestinian cause, at all educational levels in Arab countries.

e) General Recommendations

1. Working towards establishing trade unions for Palestinians.
2. Expanding the General Union of Palestinian Students.
3. The Palestinian Organisation should assume responsibility for supporting and compensating people who suffer as a result of working for the Palestinian cause.
4. The Organisation should supervise the work of UNRWA.
5. Opening the possibilities for Palestinians to work in Arab Countries.

*Signed: The Committee of Representatives of Palestinians in Kuwait
Kuwait, 13/03/1964*

The Second Conference for Palestinians in Al-Shuqairi's Presence

After the success of the first conference, we inquired at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as to the al-Shuqairi's arrival in Kuwait. We were informed of his arrival on Wednesday 17 March. We called for a second conference for Palestinians in Kuwait to be held on the afternoon of Thursday 18 March. Al-Shuqairi arrived on Wednesday; we met him at the airport along with a representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Al-Shuqairi stayed in the guesthouse, where I visited him that evening. I briefed him on the preparations we had made in Kuwait for the establishment of the Palestinian Entity. I also informed him that the second conference for Palestinians would be held the following day, and a mass meeting would follow on Friday 19 March.

Our second conference was held on the afternoon of Thursday 18 March in the theatre of Shuwaikh high school, and attended by the same members who attended the first conference. They were the representatives elected by the various ministries, and they numbered approximately 400. The reception committee checked IDs at the entrance, then welcomed al-Shuqairi as he entered the conference hall. The conference began with verses of the Holy Quran. The Palestinian Sheikh Ibrahim Rommanah recited the verses. After that, I gave the opening speech, explaining the procedures and steps we had taken towards establishing the Palestinian Entity. I presented the statement that our previous conference had approved to al-Shuqairi. The statement included Palestinians' demands concerning the Entity. I briefly explained the contents of the statement, and the decision of our Higher Committee about electing the members of the forthcoming Palestinian conference. Al-Shuqairi then spoke of his tours to Arab countries, and the many obstacles that still stood in the face of the Palestinian Entity's establishment. He announced that he would continue touring Arab countries, especially Jordan, to speak with officials, in an effort to remove the obstacles to convening the first Palestinian conference in May. After he finished his speech, al-Shuqairi answered some questions raised by various conference participants. I then brought the conference to a close. I also announced that a meeting would be held the next afternoon – Friday – in the playground of Shuwaikh high school.

Al-Shuqairi Gives A Speech About the Establishment of the Palestinian Entity

On Friday afternoon, people began streaming into the playground of Shuwaikh high school. They were waiting to meet Ahmad al-Shuqairi. Kuwaitis outnumbered the Palestinians in the playground. Everyone was eager to hear al-Shuqairi speak of how the Palestinian Entity was progressing. The stadium seats were filled, as well as the neighbouring courtyards, and the roofs of the high school dormitory. Microphones and police officers were

everywhere. The elected Higher Committee took all necessary steps to guarantee the festival's success. When al-Shuqairi arrived, he was received with a booming storm of applause and chants for Palestine. As the president of the Conference for Palestinians in Kuwait, I introduced al-Shuqairi, detailing his history of struggle and his efforts at the United Nations towards the independence of the countries of the Arab Maghreb. I welcomed him as a national hero, working towards establishing the Palestinian Entity that every Palestinian, in every Arab country, was waiting for. Al-Shuqairi started his speech by saying, "This Abu Jubein who presented me to you today previously presented me to the masses in Yafa, the bride of Palestine, where we had our struggles, meetings, committees, strikes, aspirations, and demonstrations". Then he chronicled his tour of Arab countries to establish the Palestinian Entity. Then he began to explain what the Entity was, and its vital role in the forthcoming battle for liberation, in which every Arab and every Muslim would participate.

Al-Shuqairi thanked Kuwait for helping Palestinians in establishing their Entity. He thanked his Highness Sheikh Abdullah al-Salem saying, "You, Abdullah al-Salem, are the prince of the *Muhajirun* and the *Ansar*. You are the prince of the many Palestinian *Muhajirun* who came to Kuwait. And you are the prince of the *Ansar*, the generous people of Kuwait who helped their Palestinian brothers". This expression and al-Shuqairi's speech gained the admiration of the masses, who bid al-Shuqairi farewell as he left the stadium amidst clapping and chanting. Al-Shuqairi's Kuwait tour was successful. He carried the thoughts and opinions of Palestinians, as well as his luggage, towards the establishment of the Palestinian Entity.