



**A Spectrum of Light in the  
Middle East**

November, 2003

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### **About The Prism Group**

The Prism Group continues to focus on some key issues and is pleased to see that its efforts are causing "spectrums of awareness" in many places. Our reports have been shared with a number of important government and political leaders around the world and we continue to receive inquiries and comments.

### **Freedom of Religion**

We begin this newsletter as the Moslem world enters the holy month of Ramadan, a month of fasting and prayer. Sadly, this Ramadan seems to be plagued with increased threats of impending terrorist attacks and violence, although we at the Prism Group were gratified to see that despite security concerns, more than 150,000 Moslems were able to attend prayers on the El-Haram-esh-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

Nowhere in the world does the issue of freedom of religion seem to be more central, than in the Middle East. As the birthplace of three great religions, one might assume that in this region, at least, religious freedom would be an understood and accepted concept. The Prism Group has studied this in the past and continues to watch this important issue as a measure of how the peoples in the Middle East live.

In the past, we investigated the plight of Christians in the holy land, those who live under areas governed by Israel, as well as those who live under Palestinian Authority control. We note that a new university has been accredited in the Galilee area, specifically for Arab Christians. At the same time, the proposed constitution of the Palestinian Authority still gives cause for concern. Various parts of the European Union are calling for Christian values to be included as well. As matters currently stand, followers of Christianity and Judaism will be considered as second-class citizens.

As the first Friday of Ramadan passed relatively peacefully, the Prism Group adds its own hope that peace will prevail. We trust that members of all religions will be allowed to practice their faith in security and safety.

### **Continued Mistreatment of Palestinian Children**

We are delighted to announce that our appeal for more appropriate education for Palestinian children has been taken up by others and is beginning to reach those positions to stop the continuing abuse of Palestinian children. Many of the

features in [our report](#), (released in July 2003) have started to gain greater acceptance in various countries, with leaders calling for education and cultural reforms so that Palestinian children can be nurtured in an environment that encourages peace and understanding, not violence and martyrdom.

For example, a group of approximately 170 European Parliamentarians recently visited Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority. They reported receiving material on this very subject, much of which is available to the public at [www.eufunding.org](http://www.eufunding.org).

Additionally, there have been statements from several European, Australian and American politicians on this subject, noting how the abuse of Palestinian children by fundamentalist leadership is now spreading to other countries. This warning was clearly issued in the Prism report itself. Most notably, the British Home Secretary, Mr. David Blunkett, has called for Muslim children to be given an education that opens them up to the values of all peoples.

The UK is rightly concerned about extremist propaganda emanating from its shores. The outlawed Hamas continues to justify and encourage terror in its *Filisteen Amuslima* (Muslim Palestine) magazine and the Muslim Brotherhood spreads its hate messages in *Risalat al-Ikhwan*. Both of these are published and distributed from London throughout Europe and the Middle East.

US Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld has again stressed that the war against terror is more than the capture of known terrorists, but must consider ways to reduce the terrorists being created by indoctrination in radical schools throughout the world.

## **Use of International Funds**

Because it is an important issue, and one that is fundamental to European involvement in the Middle East, and the future of the Middle East itself, we remind you again of our important position paper on funding from the European Union. It can be viewed at: <http://www.theprismgroup.org/euinquiry.htm>.

The Prism Group believes that the money donated to the Palestinians has not reached the man in the street. Until it does, violence, poverty and terrorism will remain prevailing influences. While no one has directly proved that a specific Euro was secretly marked with invisible dye and then tracked as it was banked in a private bank account of a Palestinian official or used to pay a terrorist for a specific incident, clearly money is being diverted.

The IMF report referred to in our last newsletter tells of control weaknesses over the accounts used to channel EU funds. A specific case in point are the appeals by members of the Palestinian Parliament as Mohammed Rachid, Chairman Arafat' private financial advisor, who is currently resident in Cairo and suspected of mismanaging vast sums.

Given all the evidence concerning ongoing theft of Palestinian money by their leadership, the evidence of cheques being written from those accounts for terrorism, and the fact that so much is poured into the system while such limited progress is made for the Palestinian people themselves, the conclusion that international funds are not always being for the intended purposes seems obvious. Whether international aid is being used to backfill 'diverted' monies or is in fact diverted itself seems, at least to the Prism Group, to be a pedantic distinction not worthy of discussion.

The more important question, however, is how these funds are being used to improve the lot of the ordinary Palestinian and improve the hopes for peace in the area.

## **Borders Among Nations**

Often the key to peace between countries lies in the border areas, which divide them. As the issue of the security fence between Israel and the Palestinian heats up in the international arena, it is interesting to view the way that borders are

often misused by other countries in the region, and how borders are often respected and protected by others. Of particular interest was a recent effort by the Jordanian army, which closed the border with Israel, as it searched and found terrorists attempting to infiltrate Israel for an attack. This cooperation signals hope for continued good relations between these countries.

There are still contradictions in the region. For example, Syria allowed anti-coalition forces to be bussed to Iraq during the war to fight against Western forces and is suspected of allowing Iraqi WMD to be hidden within its borders. Similarly, there is evidence that Egypt has been reticent to stop Palestinians from using clandestine tunnels to smuggle drugs, prostitutes and arms via the tunnels, as well as over land routes in the Sinai Desert. Egypt has denied Israel's accusations of a tunnel being sighted coming out in an Egyptian military encampment.

As always, the Prism Group focuses on the people, more than the powers in the Middle East. We would like to emphasize that the people who suffer most from the tunnels are the Palestinian neighbors of home owners who are paid princely sums to allow tunnels to be dug via their homes. While the home owner who allows his land to be used for these criminal and terrorist activities is paid compensation by the criminals, it is the neighbors that suffer when Israeli forces take military action to cut off the source of incoming explosives, mortars, guns and ammunition. And it is the women, who are lured into prostitution gangs or the children of all sides who become slaves to the drug barons, who are the real victims of the Egyptian inability to protect its own border.

### **The Prism Group Website:**

As our resources and reports expand, we have worked hard to keep the web site up to date with our latest efforts. We hope you will direct others to the site. Please visit our site and help direct others to the existing fact sheets. If you have ideas for fact sheets that you believe we should investigate and compile, please write to us at: [info@theprismgroup.org](mailto:info@theprismgroup.org).

Our web site is [www.theprismgroup.org](http://www.theprismgroup.org).

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