***OSF-Arab Regional Office***

***Portfolio Review- Palestinian Citizens of Israel***

*September 8th, 2015*

Outcomes Summary

Overview: The following presents a summary of the presidential portfolio review of the Arab Regional Office (ARO)’s programming around Palestinian Citizens of Israel (PCIs). The first part addresses the reflections on ARO’s construction of the portfolio thus far; the choices made on methodologies and themes, successes had, and areas for development. The second part lays out the thematic issues raised in the discussion as potential areas to explore and questions raised around them. The third part relates to next steps and follow up areas for the portfolio.

1. *Construction of the Portfolio:*

* The PCI portfolio is one of the longest standing portfolios in the Arab region. Initially it had included a wide-ranging number of grants covering diverse issues and methodologies, but was then tightened to a rights-based approach that focused on support to international advocacy and litigation in order to promote equality and non-discrimination.
* Most of the organizations supported by ARO have been successful within the limited scope of their work. The litigation efforts of organizations like Adalah have had a discernable impact on the evolution of the legal system. However, the use of litigation within the Israeli systems has proven ineffective in guaranteeing the rights of PCIs as they continue to experience increasing deterioration in their rights, which requires a re-examination of the choice to support the legislative arm of the strategy. That said, the legislative work undertaken by PCIs has served to support international advocacy efforts by highlighting the illusory nature of the Israeli legal system, and its failure to protect Palestinian rights.
* In terms of international advocacy, ARO’s support has played a significant role in developing the field, and continues to be relevant as grantee focus shifts towards international advocacy in light of closing spaces domestically.
* While most organizations OSF has supported were successful in their niche efforts, the situation for PCIs generally continues to deteriorate. PCIs have experienced increasing inequality and deterioration of rights due to closing spaces within Israel, increasingly right-wing policies and laws, and fragmentation within the Palestinian community itself. The deterioration of the situation despite ARO support was noted, and underlies the discussion and reflection on the choices made within the portfolio.
* The question of the rationale behind the inclusion of women’s rights grantees within the overall portfolio was raised by Chris Stone, and whether this should stand as a sub-portfolio. It was confirmed that as members of the PCI community, women face a double-burden both due to the discriminatory policies of Israel which in some cases impact women more directly, and due to the cultural biases within the community itself which results in increased discrimination. Women within the PCI community are very active both culturally and politically. The strength of women as actors, and the double-burden of discrimination they face is evidence of the need for continued support to women’s rights organization within the portfolio.
* The tightening of the portfolio resulted in a conscious decision to level off support to grassroots movements, youth-based organizations and education-related initiatives. Given the current situation, these options should be revisited as ARO explores new angles to support recognition of PCI rights.
* Palestinian civil society in Israel is less well-funded and there is a lack of skills within Palestinian organizations especially with regards to fundraising. As civil society have become more explicit regarding their needs, this is an area where ARO support could prove useful.

1. *Themes:*

* Palestinian Identity: The question of the identity of PCIs is an intractable issue that has resulted in increasing fragmentation and division within the community itself on issues ranging from self-identification terminology to political participation. During the discussion, this theme was identified as a priority area. Suggested interventions include:
  + Exploring support to grassroots organizations and community organizing in an effort to understand and reflect the desires of the community itself and resolve the leadership vacuum that exists at the grassroots level.
  + Explore promotion of democratic participation and civic engagement as a way to promote constructive debate and build consensus among the Palestinian community of Israel, rather than promote political participation as such. This could include revisiting ARO’s prior interventions on this issue including work with municipalities, grassroots communities and projects that elaborate a unified vision for PCIs.
* Shifting public discourse in Israel: One strategy suggested to combat the increasingly right-wing policies is to support more work targeting the Israeli public in order to shift the public discourse around these issues. It was noted that targeting the Israeli public may be counterproductive, as evidenced by the failure of current advocacy and grassroots efforts to prevent the radical shift to the right. Another observation was that the messaging required to successfully shift the discourse in the Israeli public may differ problematically from messaging that ARO is willing to support.
* Socioeconomic development: There is overreliance by PCIs on Israel for provision of services and economic opportunities. Socioeconomic support to PCIs could have a significantly positive impact on the community. However, it was noted that other donors conduct extensive work on this, but one suggested alternative is to explore support to research on effect of dependence of PCIs on the Israeli system and services.

1. *Follow Up:*
2. The program needs to determine the larger goal that this portfolio serves. The importance of this portfolio is acknowledged, but the objectives that ARO seeks to achieve are less clear. In elaborating these objectives, ARO will be better able to make choices in the portfolio and strike a balance among different approaches to accomplish genuine recognition of the rights of this group.
3. The program should continue to situate this portfolio within the larger ARO strategy in the region, and within the Palestine-specific strategy. Generally, it was noted that the work on the PCI community fits within ARO’s regional strategy on access to justice and non-discrimination, and the use of the term Palestinian Citizens of Israel serves to connect the work in the West Bank to that in Israel.
4. Determining the criteria underlying the choice of grantees will help refine the portfolio and prioritize grantees in order to free up funds, attract new grantees, and explore new themes, actors and approaches. The following criteria came up in the discussion as suggestions:
   1. Strength of the organization and methodology it employs
   2. The ability of an organization to fit in with ARO strategy and execute it
   3. The ability of an organization to collaborate/compete with other organizations.
5. *Conclusion:* (1) ARO should define the end goal and theory of change for this portfolio more closely, and identify how it fits in OSF’s larger strategy, as this will empower ARO to make targeted choices within this portfolio and avoid seeing further deterioration of the situation; (2) ARO should investigate the degree to which different tools and themes have the potential to support the PCI community, beyond the use of litigation and international advocacy, such as political participation and community engagement, or targeting different audiences such as the Israeli public society; (3) ARO should look more closely into the choices made that were less successful in order to free up the portfolio to explore other options.