



## Universities' roles, responsibilities, and cooperation with civil society

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Addressing the role and responsibilities of universities and their cooperation with civil society in Palestine in order to diagnose its reality and present a future vision for its reform; in order to be able to achieve the desired goals, is one of the issues with a complex context, especially in light of international, Arab and local changes that resulted in repercussions that affected the entire life of Palestinian society, and led to a diversion from the path of liberation and independence, as well as the required development.

University education in Palestine, despite the quantitative surge in its enrollment rate, has not been able to keep pace with evolution and respond to the changes of the 21st century. This shortcoming in university education coincided with the emergence of political changes that further complicated the matter. This was represented by the failure to reach a final solution between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Israeli occupation state, as was expected after the declaration of the Oslo principles in 1993, which led to the imposition of more political, economic, social and cultural restrictions on people's lives

and left plenty of space for continuous and repeated Israeli aggression against specific Palestinian areas without international, national or Palestinian deterrence. As for the second variable, it was represented by the Palestinian division, which is no less dangerous and catastrophic than what preceded it, and which almost ended what remained of the Palestinian people's hope. In June 2007, Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip by force of arms, which led to a rift in the segments of the Palestinian political system, especially in the Palestinian Authority. The rift was manifested in the continued presence of two governments, security and police apparatuses, and separate service institutions, one in Gaza and the other in the West Bank.

Ever since and until the period of preparing this paper, the Palestinian case witnessed a sharp political division, the most prominent features of which were manifested in the case of the continuous decline of public rights and freedoms. It also resulted in social, economic and cultural setbacks that affected all segments of society and its sectors. Perhaps one of the most prominent negative indicators of the collapse of economic and social conditions is the increased

unemployment in the Gaza Strip, with a rate of (52%) among the workforce, mostly young people at the age of (18-29) years, reaching 69%<sup>1</sup>. Poverty was also widespread among the population, with a rate of (53%)<sup>2</sup>. In addition to reports indicating that (68.5%) of families in the Gaza Strip suffer from food insecurity, and face difficulties in providing the quantity and type of food due to limited financial resources<sup>3</sup>. Palestinian universities, like others, have been negatively affected by this deteriorating situation, especially in exercising their expected role in embodying their relationship with civil society.

## The problem and objective of the research paper

As part of the firm conviction of the Palestinian NGOs Network in Gaza that there is a need for a kind of complementarity in the relationship between universities and civil society institutions, it sought through this paper to discuss the role of universities, their responsibilities, and their cooperation with civil society at the levels of theoretical contributions and practical applications. The study analyzes the reality of these universities through a number of quantitative and qualitative indicators, as well as reviewing the

challenges facing their work. This paper is also concerned with monitoring aspects of cooperation between universities and civil society institutions. It is worth mentioning here the difficulty of defining a theoretical definition of civil society organizations that gives a clear ceiling to them. However, saying that they are non-governmental and non-profit organizations gives separating boundaries from the governmental and private sectors and approximates the term we are dealing with.

### Based on that, the current paper seeks to reach the following objectives:

1. Definition of university education in Palestine, its objectives, philosophy, and emergence.
2. The role of Palestinian civil society in the emergence of universities.
3. Diagnosing the current reality of university education in Palestine through quantitative and qualitative indicators.
4. Diagnose and pinpoint aspects of cooperation between universities and civil society institutions.
5. Identifying the challenges facing university education in Palestine.
6. Proposing a future vision to activate the role, responsibilities and cooperation of universities with civil society.

In dealing with the subject, the paper relied on a number of approaches; The first of which is the historical approach, through which the process of developing this sector of university education over previous years will be addressed. As for the second approach, it is the descriptive and analytical approach that helps us diagnose the current reality of university education by analyzing quantitative and qualitative indicators, with the aim of reaching results in the light of which reform recommendations are made.

### First: Defining university education in Palestine, its goals and philosophy

Article (2) of Decree-Law No. (6) of 2018 on higher education defines it as: “The right of every individual who fulfills the enrollment conditions determined by the Ministry and the institution in a way that does not stand in the way of the exercise of the individual’s right to higher education<sup>4</sup>.” According to Article (4) of the same law, higher education aims to achieve a number of goals, most notably: preserving the national identity of the Palestinian people, strengthening its unity and interdependence in their places of residence, and preparing qualified human cadres of specialists, researchers, experts and technicians

in various fields of knowledge in line with the requirements of sustainable development, and enhancing cooperation between higher education institutions locally, regionally and internationally, in line with national needs and priorities.

### **The Decree-Law referred to in Article (17) also classified higher education institutions into:**

- **Governmental:** established by a decision of the Council of Ministers, and its affairs are regulated in accordance with the provisions of the relevant legislation.
- **Public:** non-profit institutions.
- **Private:** for-profit and non-profit, registered in accordance with the Companies Law.

As for the philosophy of higher education, it can be said that it reflects the philosophy of society, its social life, and the developments taking place in it. In Palestine, since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994 until these moments, we cannot talk about an educational system that emerged in the light of an independent Palestinian vision. Rather, foreign interventions of a political nature have affected, in one way or another, the educational system and its core content, which is the curriculum,

and this was reflected In the Wye River and Taba Agreements, which were held between the Palestinian Authority and the occupation government during the eras of Netanyahu and Barak... Whereas, the Taba Agreement provided for “an American-Palestinian-Israeli committee to meet regularly to repel cases of possible incitement to violence and terrorism, and to prepare recommendations and reports on how to prevent such incitement<sup>5</sup>.” According to this meaning, any policy that may be taken, or any educational measure that may be exercised, will be subject to these limitations and requirements set forth in the previous agreements. The foregoing indicates beyond any doubt, that the Palestinian educational system as a whole does not operate in an independent manner and does not work according to a Palestinian educational philosophy, but rather is subject to political interventions imposed by the Palestinian situation, and therefore the Palestinian educational philosophy is still absent.

### **Second: Palestinian civil society and the emergence of universities**

Looking at the history of university education in Palestine, it dates back to the forties of the last century (20th

century), when students went to study at universities in neighboring or distant countries<sup>6</sup>. In this sense, the students were bearing the burden of the high costs of study, because «the Palestinian higher education institutions that existed before 1967 do not go beyond community colleges or institutes<sup>7</sup>.» This does not meet the aspirations of most wishing to a university education. Despite the obstacles and difficulties that the Israeli occupation put in front of higher education, these institutes and colleges developed and played an important role in the educational process, as they provided students with educational opportunities to develop and enrich their information through information exchanges with the international academic community<sup>8</sup>.

The Israeli occupation in the Palestinian territories (West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem) in 1967 brought about social and economic changes, and pushed the Palestinian society in the occupied territories to rely on itself in planning and thinking, even in the field of education. In this context, the lack of educational leadership institutions gave a greater role for people with social, economic or scientific influence to take the initiative in this field. The first initiative was at Birzeit College in 1972, which announced the development of the disciplines it teaches into a

bachelor's degree. In 1973, the Freres Schools in Jerusalem announced its conversion into a university called Bethlehem University. In 1980, another college was opened in Hebron besides the College of Sharia, which was established in 1971 to form Hebron University. An-Najah College in Nablus was developed into a university in 1977, after it was an intermediate college. In 1978 the Islamic University of Gaza was established. At the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, four university colleges were launched in Jerusalem, forming what is known as Al-Quds University<sup>9</sup>. It is worth mentioning that with the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century, a number of Palestinian universities were established, such as: Al-Azhar University, Al-Quds Open University, Al-Aqsa University, Al-Istiqlal University, American University in Jenin, University of Palestine, Gaza University, and finally Al-Isra University.

The situation of the universities, which quickly emerged, prompted the elected mayors in the Palestinian territories, the professional syndicate complex, the university chancellors and the heads of their boards of trustees to convene a meeting to deliberate on higher education, define its philosophy and objectives, support and plan for it. This resulted in the formation of

a new council called the Council of Higher Education. The Council brought together Palestinian universities and colleges under its umbrella. In 1990, as a result of amending the Council's work system and forming specialized committees, it became necessary to obtain the approval of the Higher Education Council to open any new major in any university or university college.

For the first time in its history, the Palestinian National Authority assumed the authority of the educational process in Palestine in August of the year 1994. It inherited a semi-destroyed educational structure, as well as all other services, due to the systematic and continuous violation by the Israeli occupation against all Palestinian sectors and institutions, which threatened the collapse of the entire educational system and undermined any real development prospects in this field. The Ministry of Higher Education was formed in 1996 to complement the role of the Palestinian Higher Education Council, which existed before the advent of the Palestinian National Authority.

### **Third: Diagnosing the current reality of university education in Palestine - quantitative and qualitative indicators**

#### **1. Quantitative indicators**

##### **a) Number of higher education institutions**

Higher education institutions in Gaza witnessed a noticeable increase in their number, reaching 26 institutions, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education 2020. These institutions vary according to type and the authority supervising them. In terms of type, there are 6 conventional universities, 2 universities for open education, and 10 university colleges, and 8 intermediate college. In terms of the supervising body, it is divided between governmental, private, public, and UNRWA. There are 7 governmental institutions, including one university, five university colleges, and one intermediate college. As for private institutions, they are 12, including 3 conventional universities, an open education university, 4 university colleges, and 4 intermediate colleges. As for the public institutions, they numbered 5, including two traditional universities, one open education university, one university college, and

one intermediate college. While the institutions supervised by the UNRWA reached two institutions, both of which are intermediate colleges<sup>10</sup>.

### **b) Number of current students and graduates from higher education institutions**

The latest official statistics on the number of enrolled students and graduates from higher education institutions for (2020) indicate that there are 81,470 male and female students, of whom 35,871 are males and 45,599 are females. This number indicates a higher number of female students in university education. The number of graduates reached 16,758, including 8,119 males and 8,639 females. This number also indicates a higher number of female graduates<sup>11</sup>.

### **c) The number of academics and workers in higher education institutions**

The latest official statistics on the number of academics and workers in higher education institutions for 2020 indicate that there are 3,409 academics, including 2,823 males and 586 females. While the number of employees reached 5851, of whom 4767 were males, and 1084 were females. These

statistics indicate that the number of academics as well as male workers is many folds more than that of females<sup>12</sup>

### **d) Percentage of funding and spending on university education in Palestine**

Funding education represents a real problem for the Palestinian National Authority, given that the demands of education growth and development pose a challenge to the financial ability of the authority, which makes it confront a reality prompting it to think about how to push the education finances to a better state in order to meet the demands of education growth and development, especially since the cost of education is increasing continuously due to the population increase resulting from the increase in the number of births, and the accompanying increase in pressure on education, especially since basic education is free education that lasts for (10) years. As well as paying attention to quality factors in education, such as reducing the overcrowd of classes and paying attention to school buildings and aids, and other things that usually increase the cost of education, but they are important and vital. According to the annual expenditure report for 2020, issued by the Ministry of Finance, the actual spending of

the Ministry of Education amounted to (2,766.3) million shekels, while the actual spending of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research amounted to (123.2) million shekels, i.e. a total of (2,889.6) million shekels for the two ministries. Out of (15,944.0) million shekels, the total of actual expenditures from the general budget for 2020, or (18.1%) of the total expenditures. According to the annual actual spending report for 2019, issued by the Ministry of Finance, the actual spending allocated to the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research amounted to (3,161.4) million shekels, out of (16,423.65) million shekels, the total of actual expenditures in the 2019 general budget, or (19.2 %) of the total expenditure<sup>13</sup>.

It is clear, and according to reading the aforementioned, that there is a decrease in actual spending in 2020, compared to 2019, in conjunction with an increase in the needs of higher education and scientific research. In addition, what was allocated to the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (despite its independence in the year 2020) constituted only (0.77%) of the total public expenditures in 2020. The amount of only (123.2) million shekels during a whole year for all expenditure items on the Ministry of Higher Education and scientific

research. This led to a decrease in the aspects of spending operations, as spending on wages and salaries decreased to (92.72%), and transfer expenditures, which include grants to Palestinian universities (45.24%), and development expenditures amounted to (67.91%). The largest percentage of the decrease in spending was for capital expenditures, which amounted to (2.43%) only<sup>14</sup>.

Reflecting the foregoing, Palestinian universities suffer from severe financial crises, which made them resort to compensatory methods to solve this crisis, the most prominent of which was the increase in tuition per hour, which constituted a great burden on students who made many protests that at times developed into clashes and the closure of universities. As well as reducing the salaries of employees of the Islamic University to more than half.

## 2. Qualitative indicators

### a) Scientific research in Palestinian universities

Scientific research and the extent of interest in it is one of the important indicators to judge the status of university education in any society. In Palestine, there is an improvement in this regard, as the percentage of

Palestinian researchers' research production increased from (0%) in 1996 to (0.03%) in 2017. The number of published research has also increased from 21 in 1996 to 843 in 2018. It also recorded continuous improvement in the classification of Palestine in the field of scientific research; In 1996, Palestine was ranked (150) out of 214 countries, and in 2018 it was ranked (100) out of 233 countries. Also, the number of citation/quotation times of research published in 1996 increased from (265) times to (700) times in 2018. **Despite the above, the scientific research is still characterized by weakness for many reasons, including** <sup>15</sup>:

- Focusing on the teaching aspect at the expense of the research aspect in higher education institutions.
- Most research in higher education institutions is for career promotion.
- Lack of subscriptions to global research databases.
- Weakness in linking master's and doctoral theses with community problems.

### b) Academic freedom and independence of universities

Academic freedom means "The freedom of members of the academic community, individually and collectively, to pursue the development and transfer of knowledge through research, study, discussion, documentation, production, creation, teaching, lecturing, and writing." The concept of the academic community is not limited to teachers alone, but includes, in addition to these, students, researchers, workers, and administrators as well, in the various centers of post-secondary education and the centers of research and culture associated with them. In this context, a study showed that the evaluation estimates for the exercise of academic freedom among Palestinian university professors were between low and medium. In light of the foregoing, it can

- Limited researchers' ability to write competitive research proposals in international research programs.
- Poor communication and networking between researchers themselves and local and regional companies.
- Unsustainability of funding sources.
- Lack of applied research production for university professors and students.
- Absence of policies and laws that encourage and oblige to link research results with community problems.

be said that the exercise of academic freedoms in our Palestinian universities is almost non-existent. Rather, it can be said that universities are run through a culture of partisan hegemony and administrative authoritarianism, which means the necessity of working to activate the exercise of these freedoms by university professors as well as students.

Also, we find It necessary to restructure the university administration, including the adoption of democratic policies to select these departments in a way that allows the development of the performance of universities, and contributes to the strengthening of academic freedoms that are still stolen and not available as they should be, in a way that helps in developing the healthy and strong personality of students<sup>16</sup>. It is worth mentioning that the study conducted by (Palestinian Center for Human Rights in 2002)<sup>17</sup> monitored the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities through a number of evidence that confirm the lack of this freedom in universities, such as: security forces persecuting students - manifestations of militarization within universities, taking the law into one's own hand - Partisan orientations of university administrations - student

councils, individuals in the security services - scientific thefts - tampering with grades.

### c) Quality and type of university education

The quality and type of the outputs of higher education institutions did not reach the required level in Palestine in light of the increasing number of high school graduates, on the one hand, and the high unemployment rates among university graduates on the other hand. There are a number of reasons and obstacles to improving the quality and type of the outputs of higher education institutions, whether governmental, civil or private, **as follows**<sup>18</sup> :

- Poor self- and external evaluation processes for programs, especially failure to link them to the needs of the labor market and the lack of flexibility in licensing, accreditation and quality control standards.
- Lack of tools, codified standards, reports and national studies for measuring, evaluating and following up on teaching and learning processes and all quality standards.
- Poverty in the instructions and policies for activating the work of electronic and blended learning.

- Shortage in the number of internationally shared programs and degrees, and joint mobility.
  - Teaching methods are traditional and focus on direct education, and the absence of highlighting the role of the learner and the development of thinking, creativity, innovation and leadership.
  - Limited experience and capabilities of employees in the authority and quality units from a holistic and global perspective.
  - Lack of funding processes for quality issues (licensing, accreditation, self and external evaluation, quality standards and studies).
- organizational and developmental aspects in this sector are the following<sup>19</sup>:
- Absence of national policies for the processes of building and developing capacities and continuous training of administrative, academic and research cadres.
  - Poor systems of incentives, encouragement, and rewards for workers in the higher education and scientific research sector, and the absence of policies to attract national or regional talent or to contract with them.
  - Weak accountability and transparency processes and the need for clear policies in this field.
  - Work pressure and administrative tasks required of some departments.
  - Weak participation of employees in decision-making.
  - Reliance on students' fees and installments to finance spending on educational institutions.
  - Poor Ministry's supervisory role over educational institutions
  - Centralization and exclusivity in the decision-making by specific bodies in the same educational institution.
  - Weak level of networking and cooperation with the parties concerned with higher education.

#### **d) Governance and management system for the higher education and scientific research sector**

The novelty of higher education and scientific research sector and being attached to previous years as a program among seven programs in the education sector strategy, contributed to determining opportunities for the development of institutions, programs and management of the sector, especially in the aspects related to legislation, plans, control and budget programs. In general, the main reasons for the weakness of the institutional,

- There are no laws related to intellectual property and patents, and the laws in public universities are linked to the civil service law.
- Overlapping decisions between the governing councils of universities at the university level: the board of trustees, the executive departments of universities.
- The absence of a national strategy and permanent coordination councils to develop and coordinate relations between the productive and service sectors, according to the areas of higher education programs.

#### Fourth: The mutual relationship between the university and civil society

Despite the paramount importance of the relationship between universities and civil society in Palestine, it is still marred by a kind of lack of clarity, and the university in general is still unable to build a strong interactive relationship with its society and it does not live the life of its society and is isolated from it although it is part of it and its issues. This is evident in the university's weak contribution to strengthening its relationship with the community in various fields, as well as the lack of community support for the university's

development efforts<sup>20</sup>. The relationship between universities and society usually takes the following forms<sup>21</sup>:

- Volunteer work and helping the local community during the seasons, especially olive picking seasons, or by considering volunteer and cooperative work as a graduation requirement for students.
- Students train at local institutions, whether official or private, especially in light of the active and effective civil society in Palestine.
- Blood donation campaigns, especially in light of the demonstrations, marches, incursions and confrontations with the occupation forces and settlers.
- Universities' media are often the voice of the people in shedding light on many societal issues which constitutes an advanced stage of impact beyond the walls of universities to all of society.
- Continuous Education Centers: which is another aspect of social responsibility because of the services it provides to the local community.
- University libraries: and what they contain of volumes, books, studies, periodicals and magazines provided to researchers from inside

and outside universities, which contributes to supporting scientific production and cultural movement in society.

- University hospitals and clinics: which aim to provide medical care to the community in line with international standards, provide solutions to medical problems within the Palestinian medical system, and is under the faculties of medicine and health sciences.
- Hosting officials and decision-makers so that the university student is more aware of the events and developments that are taking place as a result of his contact with decision-makers and listening to them directly and interactively.
- Linking university education to the educational, cultural, professional and development needs of the community in order to ensure bridging the gap between the market and educational outputs and supplying sectors in line with their needs.
- Harnessing university education to meet the immediate and future needs of the individual and society through a strategic planning approach and short, medium and long-term visions.
- Diversifying the programs, activities and specializations offered by the university to keep pace with the spirit of the times. This contributes to increasing productivity in local communities and increasing their involvement in global production structures.
- Helping members of society to understand the developments in their various fields by analyzing and delving into them and researching their roots, causes, consequences and ways of interacting with them. The feasibility of this is increased by linking university education to the reality and various issues of society.
- Encouraging evening studies for adults whose circumstances do not allow them to enroll in regular programs, whether by virtue of family or job obligations.
- Diversification of community service programs (lectures, conferences, seminars, workshops, competitions, marathons) so that it reaches a variety of categories with different intellectual and age backgrounds.
- Responding efficiently and effectively to the requirements of comprehensive development in Palestine, especially with Palestine's adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, most of which

intersect with the educational role of universities, especially SDGs No. (4), (5), (8), (9) and (16).

- Providing integrated student care programs that include social, psychological, counseling and cultural care.

In the context of activating the partnership between universities and civil society institutions, the Palestinian NGOs Network (PNGO) in Gaza organized on April 9, 2014, a dialogue session during which it was agreed to form a committee to formulate a memorandum of understanding between representatives of civil work and university representatives and to define a common vision for partnership according to principles based on strengthening coordination and joint action and addressing problems and challenges. According to the director of the “PNGO”, Mr. Amjad Al-Shawa, this session came to enhance the benefit from the resources available in the universities and NGOs sectors, given their importance in developing the relationship between NGOs and universities in order to reach a common vision for both parties for the development of civil society and the promotion of principles of human rights and democracy.

## **Fifth: Challenges to the mutual relationship between the university and civil society**

Despite what the Palestinian people have achieved in the field of education in general, and university education in particular, they still face many challenges that affect the continuation of the educational process in a way that meets the needs, aspirations and ambitions of the Palestinian society for the future. It is worth noting that some of these challenges are old and inherited, while others are the result of recent developments in an era that seems to be in a state of instability until this moment. The following is an explanation of a number of these challenges, including but not limited to:

### **1.The Covid-19 Pandemic Challenge**

Corona Pandemic has caused a set of economic, social and political effects on the Palestinian society in general, in the forefront of those is the high unemployment and the decline in the income of workers and economic facilities and the low level of services provided to citizens, including higher education and scientific research sector, which was not ready to deal with the effects of the pandemic on the higher education sector, especially its

readiness to provide distance education or to deal with the decline in the ability of students and the government to fulfill their financial obligations to the public and private Palestinian higher education institutions.

## **2.The challenge of financing university education and meeting the increasing number of students:**

Studies attribute the accumulated financial deficit of Palestinian universities to the lack of a clear financing policy for higher education since its inception. The data indicate the accumulation of financial deficits for years in Palestinian universities, and the lack of investments and self-returns for universities, which put restrictions on the internal scholarships offered by universities, and lead to strikes and frequent suspension of working hours at the beginning of each academic year in most Palestinian universities, demanding cost-of-living allowances and compensation for the large fluctuation in currency exchange rates, as well as frictions between students and the administration at the beginning of each semester in most universities due to the university administrations raising tuition fees and demanding students for their previous obligations. This is done in conjunction with the number of university students, which

increases annually by more than (20%), and consequently the number of needy students increases as a result of the economic reality and the conditions of the blockade, in addition to the high unemployment rate, not to mention the noticeable rise in the bill for higher education in Palestine. The annual budget of universities is about USD 200 million, of which tuition fees are the main source of funding, in addition to the limited and irregular aid provided by the National Authority as it has not been spent for several years. The delay in disbursing university allocations leads to a permanent shortage and deficit in covering university expenses, estimated at USD 70 million annually, which confirms the need for Palestinian higher education for stable and sufficient sources of financial support<sup>22</sup>.

## **3.The challenge of improving the quality and type of the outputs of higher education institutions**

Improving the quality and type of the outputs of higher education institutions is one of the important challenges facing the Ministry of Higher Education and universities alike, especially in light of the weakness of self- and external evaluation processes for programs, especially failure to link them to the needs of the labor market, and the lack

of flexibility of licensing, accreditation and quality control standards, as well as lack of tools, codified standards, reports and national studies for measuring, evaluating and following up on teaching and learning processes and all quality standards. As well as the absence of instructions and policies to activate the work of e-learning and blended learning as well as a shortage in the number of internationally shared programs and degrees, joint mobility, and traditional teaching methods that focus on direct education, and the absence of highlighting the role of the learner and developing thinking, creativity, innovation and leadership.

#### 4. The challenge of continued Israeli occupation

The continuation of the Israeli occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory constitutes the greatest challenge facing the development of Palestinian higher education. The occupation has worked continuously and systematically to create an environment unsuitable for the development of the education sector through the blockade and obstruction of the educational process.

#### 5. The challenges of continued political division

The Palestinian division has created a state of fragmentation over Palestinian universities, colleges and institutes. There is no longer a supreme national authority that supervises universities and institutes, and oversight and scrutiny of new universities, institutes and specializations has ceased, and the goal is no longer to open new universities, colleges and departments within correct scientific conditions; rather, the goal became purely commercial profit. Also, the educational curricula have become unsupervised and some colleges have violated the study plan, and some teachers are teaching courses without academic revision and review of their content and whether they are appropriate for our societies or not. The Palestinian division also affected democratic freedoms in Palestinian universities. Universities and colleges became under the authority of factions and political parties. Student council elections were no longer held for years, and factions still had the lion's share of control and dominance over some universities without others. Despite this, universities lack an electoral law, and there is no agreement on an electoral law regulating the work of parties in universities.

## 6. The challenge of the decline government's role towards the higher education sector

The government's role towards the education sector declined as a natural result of liberal economic policies; so many services were abandoned under the pretext of reducing the burden on the budget. The commodification of education has led to the acceptance of a large number of students and the introduction of many specializations, with the aim of increasing the income of universities without paying attention to the extent to which the Palestinian market needs these specializations, whereas universities resort to such a matter to solve the problem of the financial deficit facing their budget, in addition to reducing the salaries of lecturers and university professors, which negatively affects the faculty members and pushes them to teach extra hours, which in turn has negative effects on the quality of education. This explains the increase in the number of private universities. In this context, the study conducted by (Nida Abu Awwad, 2013) indicates that the critical review of some documents of the Palestinian Authority in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education is moving towards strengthening neo-liberal policies in the educational sector under the influence and pressure of international financial

institutions and donor countries, which are already aligned with the orientations and interests of the liberal dominant powers in the Palestinian Authority, without taking into account the peculiarity of the colonial Palestinian situation, therefore viewed education as a commodity to be traded in the market, to be able to adapt not only to the requirements of the local market, but also to the requirements of the regional and global market<sup>23</sup>.

### Sixth: The future vision for activating the role, responsibilities and cooperation of universities with civil society

The university is expected to become more attached to society by providing services to the widest possible segment of it, through its scientific applications targeting various production centers and holding training courses for its employees to keep pace with the huge change in technological knowledge. This comes through activating the partnership with NGOs. The private sector is also considered one of the most important beneficiaries of higher education output, as it employs a large number of university graduates. So, this sector is supposed to contribute to supporting the higher education sector through available legal methods. Also,

the private sector is also supposed to develop new programs in the various services sector that generate new job opportunities. In order to activate this mutual, cooperative and complementary role between universities and civil society institutions (civil society), the paper proposes the following measures:

### **1. Activating partnerships and continuous and framed communication between the university and civil society organizations**

The partnership between universities and civil society organizations achieves the three functions of the university, and it is one of the university's tools for introducing civil society organizations in it, as the university is able to positively impact the functioning and effectiveness of the organizations. It is also possible to find a mechanism for communication and coordination between universities and civil society organizations, in order to strengthen the societal partnership between them, by forming consultative centers within universities to serve the community, developing the process of exchanging information between universities and organizations, and involving university professors in the organizations' boards of directors, as

well as in the general assemblies of those organizations as well as making scientific and professional deals with community bodies and institutions in the areas of public service such as academic cooperation and professional development, such as training, scientific research and environmental service.

### **2. Activating partnership and cooperation in formulating a national vision for the university education sector in Palestine:**

It is necessary to agree on the adoption of a national vision for university education, based on the fact that the state of Palestinian conflict with the Israeli occupation will continue until the end of this occupation. This is done democratically, with the participation of the widest possible sector of the contributors to the educational process (Syndicate unions, student frameworks, social forces, representatives of the civil sector, the Ministry of Education, members of the relevant Legislative Council committees, representatives of the National Council, trade unions, representatives of women's frameworks), and that this vision be transformed into a binding law for the university educational sector.

### 3. Activating participation and cooperation in preparing educational curricula and ensuring that they meet national needs:

That can be done by allowing civil society, through its representatives and institutions, to actively participate in discussing these curricula and submitting their proposals to amend them to national committees specialized in this aspect. Also, a special committee for university curricula is formed in the Ministry of Education that works in interaction with civil society representatives towards a continuous and diligent update of curricula and teaching methods in light of the conflict with the Zionist enemy, through the universities' commitment to adopting curricula for courses related to national identity that adhere to Palestinian principles and rights and the inclusion of elective courses in the regular and summer semesters with specific hours, devoted to serving national issues (confronting settlements, prisoners, the right of return, Jerusalem).

### 4. Activating partnership and cooperation in the development of scientific research

Through the diversity and multiplicity of research centers serving the

community, the increasing number of scientific awards and rewards, and the increasing budget for scientific research. Continuing in the absence of a budget will not allow the provision of the minimum requirements for scientific research in universities, which leads to a continuing decline in the field of knowledge generation. This can be bypassed by providing a government budget for scientific research, or concluding partnership agreements between universities, civil society institutions, and private institutions specialized in research and studies to support scientific research in universities. Research can also be directed towards the requirements of civil society within the areas of graduation research topics, theses or promotion research. In this context, we can point out the importance of establishing specialized research chairs that direct their activities to civil society organizations. The chairs work to create a culture of innovation such as creativity and scientific adaptation in the service of development and the economy. It can also bridge the relationship between the university and civil society organizations by strengthening cooperation between the university's competencies, including researchers, administrators, students and various civil society institutions.

## 5. Activating faculty members towards civil society organizations

This is through resorting to university professors and using them as experts and consultants with civil society organizations, as well as providing technical support through various means, preparing plans, programs, consultations, and manuals, and qualifying and training civil society organizations to enable them to apply leadership methods and develop the work mechanism to implement the plans and goals set to those organizations.

## 6. Activating the role of community service and continuous education departments

That can be done by making it affiliated with the university presidency, and most importantly, is the inclusion of social responsibility within the strategic plans of the university, such as the inclusion in the curricula community issues, the concept of social responsibility, and the roles of individuals towards it, based on the fact that the benefit of social responsibility is not limited to society, but rather has a value return on the global position of the university.

### Footnotes:

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