

# FINANCIAL TIMES

Thursday September 26 2002

## COMMENT & ANALYSIS

### LETTERS

# Working together to improve the life prospects of Palestine's young people

From Dr Rafiq Husseini and  
Mr Rick Little.

Sir, Hope, like rain, is a rare commodity in the Middle East. Too little attention is being paid to underlying factors that if addressed would contribute to the region's long-term stability.

Improving the prospects for Palestinian youth is an especially urgent task and one that we believe holds particular promise. Poverty and lack of opportunity are overwhelming realities in Gaza and the West Bank, helping to fuel ongoing violence and alienation among young Palestinians.

The World Bank reports that 70 per cent of Palestinians live below the poverty line of receiving less than \$2 a day while unemployment rates have reached 90 per cent or higher in some villages. Palestinian youth are also excluded from basic education and training opportunities. Just 10 per cent of adolescents growing up in Gaza and the West Bank will be eligible or accepted into university and vocational training and skills programmes reach only about 6 per cent of high school students.

We cannot wait for another generation to grow up without skills, resources or hope. Yet even in this bleak landscape there are signs of hope. A particularly promising area for employment, for example, is the information technology field. Technology parks being planned for Gaza and the West Bank are expected to generate significant employment. But who will fill those jobs?

One programme is aiming to fill this gap through a computer literacy and job development initiative for young Palestinians. IT4Youth has been developed by a Palestinian non-profit



We cannot wait for another generation to grow up without skills

Mohammad Muhsen

organisation and is strongly supported by foundations, the Palestinian Ministry of Education and municipal governments. The project is largely funded by the US Agency for International Development. This past year, IT4Youth has made it possible for more than 2,000 students in 14 rural schools around Jenin and Nablus to gain access to computer labs and be introduced to a computer-based curriculum. Fifty teachers have been trained. And a regional information technology centre is being built. The project will reach 7,000 young Palestinians in rural areas every year.

This progress is compelling evidence of strong community support and the deep yearning among Palestinian youth for alternatives to conflict. IT4Youth is only one small model of what must become a comprehensive training, job creation and economic development plan for the region.

Palestinian youth can and must be part of the solution. We have seen their frustration but, even more so, their energy, talent, and determination to lead full and productive lives. But they cannot begin to build new lives without real hope for opportunities in the future. Global leaders from the business, non-profit and public sectors must work together now to promote the life prospects of Palestinian youth. Otherwise, real peace and stability in the Middle East will remain for ever beyond our reach.

Rafiq Husseini,  
Executive Director,  
Welfare Association,  
Jerusalem

Rick Little,  
Founder and Chief Executive Officer,  
International Youth Foundation,  
Baltimore, MD 21202, US