

## Ma'an Network Newsletter

October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009

Dear friends and supporters,

[Ma'an Network](#) has expanded its production and activities in 2009, while remaining committed to its mission of strengthening independent media in Palestine and empowering Palestinians. Our projects cover a wide range of subjects and have connected us with organizations throughout Palestine and all over the world. We have decided to produce a regular newsletter to update the public about our different activities – welcome to the first edition! We hope you enjoy reading about our different projects, and as always, we welcome your suggestions and comments. You can contact us at [info@maannet.org](mailto:info@maannet.org).

Ma'an Network has grown significantly since its establishment in 2002, and we now have over 90 permanent employees between our headquarters in Bethlehem, offices in Gaza and Ramallah, and correspondents and photographers based in different Palestinian cities. In addition, approximately 160 staff members based at our partner radio and TV stations are also involved in the production of Ma'an Network programs on a part-time basis. Our activities are still guided by the Ma'an Board of Directors, whose members are elected by the Ma'an General Assembly. Our current nine-member Board of Directors was elected on 31 January 2009 and meets periodically to oversee the Network's operations and provide strategic input. As part of our commitment to transparency, we recently published [Ma'an Network's 2008 audited financial statements](#) on our website to make them available to the public.

### Ma'an TV Department – Bringing Palestinian TV Production to the Next Level

In 2009, Ma'an Network is producing and broadcasting a wider range of television programming than ever before, including talk shows on a variety of topics, feature stories, documentaries, a major drama series, a TV quiz show, and live coverage of special events. We have built on our existing programs and embarked on several new partnerships to bring Palestinians innovative, informative and entertaining television, and to use this important medium to promote wider social goals like good governance and transparency. The end result is that 2009 has not only been a defining year for Ma'an Network's TV programming, but for the development of Palestinian television in general, as our success has pushed other outlets such as the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) to diversify their own offerings.

Since June 2009, we have been producing eight TV talk shows on different themes, broadcast regularly on all Ma'an Network TV stations, in partnership with the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and Search for Common Ground (SFCG). Our project with DFID, which aims to use media as a catalyst for improving governmental accountability and responsiveness in Palestine, includes three weekly talk shows: *People to People (Nas wa Nas)*, *Here is Palestine (Huna Falastin)*, and *The Fourth Power (As-Sulta Al-Rabi'a)*. These programs all investigate different governance issues affecting Palestinians' daily lives and allow citizens to present their concerns to decision-makers; *The Fourth Power* is sometimes filmed before a live audience. We are also broadcasting regular 'town-hall' style meetings that bring citizens face-to-face with government officials in a series called *Intibaha! (Pay Attention!)*, and producing documentaries to investigate municipal and governance issues in depth.

The interactive programs we are producing in cooperation with SFCG include *Hard Questions*, *Eyes on Gaza*, *Our Economy (Iqtisaduna)*, *For Your Health (SahTak Ilak)* and *Bon Appétit! (SahTayn!)*. These shows are designed to provide a range of programming that will appeal to different sectors of the population; some are produced from our central studios in Bethlehem, while others are produced by our partner stations. *Hard Questions*, a talk show which has been running since mid-2008, covers critical political issues affecting Palestinians using investigative features and guest experts. *Eyes on Gaza* is produced by the Ma'an Gaza office and focuses on the situation in the Gaza Strip, reporting on all aspects of life there and serving as a vehicle to connect Palestinians in the West Bank with their compatriots in Gaza. *Our Economy* and *For Your Health* allow citizens to address questions to economic and medical specialists respectively, while *Bon Appétit!* deals with cooking and nutrition. Finally, we continue to produce the popular program *Journey through the Hebrew Press*, which translates and analyzes Israeli print and broadcast coverage on a range of topics for Palestinian audiences. Through this program, we hope to contribute to mutual understanding by informing Palestinians about Israeli political debates and giving them a more complete picture of Israeli society.

While a few of the TV shows described above were off air during Ramadan, the full range of programming is now back on Ma'an Network following 'Eid Al-Fitr, so check your local Ma'an station! Our stations include Al-Amal TV (Hebron), Amwaj TV (Ramallah), Bethlehem TV, Farah TV (Jenin), Nablus TV, Qalqilia TV, Al-Quds Educational TV (Ramallah), Al-Salam TV (Tulkarem), and Wattan TV (Ramallah). We are currently finalizing a common broadcast schedule from noon to 10pm daily, so that all our partner stations will broadcast each program simultaneously. Many of our programs are also broadcast by PBC on their satellite channel, Palestine TV, which increases our audience reach. We are also launching a new Ma'an TV website by the end of October 2009 and hope to make more of our TV programming accessible online over the coming months.

*The Team*, our biggest TV project in 2009, is also the largest all-Palestinian television production undertaken by any organization to date. A 30-episode TV drama series with 110 Palestinian actors filmed in more than 70 different locations all over Palestine, *The Team* is a multi-layered drama that raises social and political issues by portraying the challenges that a Palestinian football team and its players and supporters face on a daily basis. Beyond providing Palestinians with a world-class TV drama that reflects their aspirations and realities, this project has also boosted the Palestinian artistic and cultural scene and allowed amateurs and professionals from the West Bank to work together with Palestinian colleagues in the region. Produced by Ma'an in cooperation with Common Ground Productions, *The Team* is currently in the final editing stages and will be broadcast soon on Ma'an Network and regional satellite channels.

Ma'an continues to produce live broadcasts of special events using our mobile control units and specialized crew. This year's highlights from our live broadcasts include the Pope's visit to Bethlehem and the Al-Quds Capital of Arab Culture events. We also regularly broadcast major games of the Palestinian football league live.

We are also pleased to report that two recent Ma'an Network productions won prizes at major pan-Arab media festivals. Our drama film *Kaffa! (Enough!)* was awarded a gold prize at the Arab Radio and TV Awards held in Tunis in July 2009, and silver at the 14th annual Cairo Festival for Arab Media in November 2008. Produced by Ma'an in 2008 and funded by Prince Claus Fund, *Kaffa!* tells the story of the internal Palestinian conflict through the lens of a Palestinian family whose sons are affiliated with different factions. The film presents a clear call for national unity and reconciliation between the Fatah

and Hamas movements which we believe is still relevant. A Ma'an documentary, *Thaman Al-Intithar (The Price of Waiting)*, which focuses on the difficulties faced by East Jerusalem residents due to Israeli policies in Jerusalem, also won a bronze prize at the 2009 Arab Radio and TV Awards in Tunis.

Our production capacity has been greatly enhanced by the newly expanded and refurbished central TV studios at Ma'an Network's Bethlehem headquarters. These studios were formally inaugurated on 31 July 2009 by Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, who noted that "Ma'an is an establishment that we are proud of as Palestinians and Arabs, regionally and internationally." We at Ma'an are proud that we now have international-quality television studios, which will help us continue to move our productions – and Palestinian television in general – to the next level. Looking to the future, we are actively working to establish a Ma'an satellite TV channel, which would be the first independent Palestinian satellite channel dedicated to serving the entire Palestinian people.

## Ma'an Radio Network Launches Diverse Programming Schedule

Ma'an Network's radio department has also been revitalized in 2009, with the launch of daily news bulletins and a varied set of programs across Ma'an Network's eight radio stations in March. Many of these programs are being produced under our DFID project and are specifically designed to inform citizens on critical issues, provide opportunities for them to address their concerns to decision-makers, and promote public debate. Highlights include a 90-minute interactive program *'Ala At-Tawla (On the Table)* where citizens can question public officials, and *Ma'an fi-Sa'ah (Ma'an in an Hour)*, which delves behind the headlines with special reports, guests, and analysis. Both programs air daily and feature numerous calls from the public. We are also offering weekly programs focusing on specific groups and issues, including programs for women, youth and university students, and interactive shows dealing with medical, agricultural, economic and labor issues.

Together, these shows represent a significant addition to public interest and public-oriented radio programming in Palestine. Our new program line-up has already attained large audiences throughout the West Bank and Gaza and lots of positive feedback since its launch in March. While some of our weekly programs were off air during Ramadan, the full schedule, including 5-6 hours of original live programming every day, is now back on Ma'an Radio Network following 'Eid. Ma'an stations include Amwaj Radio (Ramallah), Al-Balad Radio (Jenin), Kul Al-Nas Radio (Tulkarem), Marah Radio (Hebron), Radio Mawwal (Bethlehem), Nablus FM, Naghham Radio (Qalqilia), and Al-Qamar Radio (Jericho). Marah Radio is also accessible to listeners in Gaza, and our programs will also be available online by the end of October 2009 through the new Ma'an web radio portal.

Two other radio programs were produced in cooperation with the European Commission (EC) with the aim of informing Palestinians about the EU and comparing and contrasting experiences in Palestine and Europe in different fields. *East and West*, a weekly radio talk show, ran from June through August, and featured guests discussing topics ranging from culture to alternative energy to migration. *From Here and There*, a daily quiz show, aired throughout the month of Ramadan, with people competing to win prizes such as laptops and appliances by answering questions on European history, geography, politics, economics and culture. *The Ma'an Ramadan Riddle*, another daily radio quiz, also offered prizes to listeners for solving puzzles and brain-teasers. These special quiz shows proved enormously popular, drawing widespread public participation, and we are currently organizing award ceremonies in the West Bank and Gaza for the prize-winners of *From Here and There*.

## Ma'an News Agency – Continued Growth, Renewed Focus on Promoting Accountability

[Ma'an News Agency](#) (MNA) has experienced continued growth and success in 2009. In January we launched our new Arabic website at [www.maanneews.net](http://www.maanneews.net), and in July we launched a similarly redesigned and expanded English page at [www.maanneews.net/eng](http://www.maanneews.net/eng). The new sites are much more interactive and user-friendly, and include several new features and dedicated sections for economic and cultural coverage, opinion pieces, and news on prisoners. Feedback on both of the new sites has been extremely positive. In fact, in April our new Arabic site won gold prize for the best media website in the Pan-Arab Web Awards, an annual competition sponsored by Microsoft and regional IT companies and associations! This marks the first time a Palestinian website has won in this competition, which began in 2004. Ma'an IT director and website designer Haitham Mousa, who attended the awards ceremonies in Dubai, noted that the site was chosen for its creativity, navigability, harmony of design and technical merits.

Our readership continues to expand, with the Arabic and English sites together receiving from 3.6 to 4.1 million visits per month during 2009. This makes [Ma'an News Agency](#) by far the most popular online news source in the Palestinian territories – we have become *the* point of reference for Palestinian government officials, citizens and other journalists. While the majority of readers are based in Palestine, our audience spans the globe, with visits regularly logged from 170 different countries. Our growing readership and our reputation for independence and objectivity have enabled us to cover most of MNA's operational costs from revenue generated by our Arabic and English SMS services, web advertisements, and photo sales through [Ma'anImages](#). This is an achievement in itself considering that MNA was only launched four years ago and competition for limited advertising budgets remains fierce. During 2009, we have developed major commercial partnerships with Jawwal and Hyundai, and we also have ongoing partnerships with numerous other local companies and NGOs which take advantage of our advertising opportunities and MNA's broad audience reach.

We remain extremely grateful to the Dutch and Danish Representative Offices for their support of MNA from January 2005 to January 2009. Without this support, the establishment and continuing success of [Ma'an News Agency](#) would not have been possible.

In terms of reporting, we began the year with unique and powerful coverage of the war on Gaza. MNA was one of the very few agencies reporting from the ground, minute by minute, throughout the war, with our correspondents and photographers taking considerable risks to do so. Our Arabic website was a major source of information for people throughout the Arab world, as well as those in Gaza itself, during the war and its aftermath. With foreign correspondents barred from Gaza, MNA's English page became an indispensable resource for English speakers trying to follow the events; its readership more than doubled during the war and is still significantly higher than pre-war levels. Ma'an News Agency's timely, comprehensive, and objective reporting during this time of crisis cemented our reputation as the key news source on Palestine for international journalists, and we continue to be quoted regularly by media organizations such as Reuters, the BBC, *The New York Times*, *Haaretz*, and others.

MNA has also placed renewed emphasis on investigative reporting and governance issues, in line with our multi-media DFID project. Although this is a relatively new project for us, we are already seeing increased responses to our investigations on specific issues from governmental representatives, civil society organizations, and members of the public. Our focus on exploring how governance issues affect

people's daily lives from the prices of basic commodities to the workings of the Palestinian judiciary seems to have caught the imagination of the public, and our investigations and questions are catching the attention of politicians! We are excited to use our DFID project, which runs through 2011, to deepen MNA's connections with governmental and nongovernmental organizations as well as ordinary citizens. The training and workshops conducted under this project will allow us to provide even better reporting and fulfill our role of monitoring government institutions and pressing for greater accountability and responsiveness as the leading media organization in Palestine.

## **Our Continuing Commitment to Training and Capacity Building**

Ma'an is dedicated to excellence in all of our media and to furthering the development of our journalists and staff as well as other Palestinian media professionals. This commitment has led us to sponsor numerous courses and workshops together with other local and international organizations. Over the past five years, around 500 Palestinian media personnel have received training through these courses, significantly improving the capacity of the entire Palestinian media sector.

In addition to training under the DFID project mentioned above, this summer we organized a safety training course for Palestinian media professionals working in one of the world's most dangerous environments – the Gaza Strip. 35 Gazan journalists from different media outlets received training in first aid, stress management and operating safely in conflict zones. The training was funded by UNESCO and conducted in two phases, the first in Gaza, and the second by an international trainer in Cairo, in cooperation with the News Sector at Egyptian TV. As a result of this training course, we have embarked on a strategic partnership with Egyptian TV, and we hope to organize further training courses together with them in the future.

Ma'an Network also has an ongoing partnership with UNDP that involves training staff from the information department of the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture in media production and conducting effective public awareness campaigns. The latest phase of this project took place in spring 2009 and focused on raising awareness about Brucellosis and ways to control this livestock disease that can also threaten people. Ten employees from the Ministry of Agriculture participated in an intensive week-long media training, after which Ma'an produced and broadcast three special talk shows, together with TV and radio spots educating Palestinian citizens about these important public health issues.

## **Introducing the Ma'an Research Unit**

Another major development at Ma'an is the establishment of a research unit as an integral part of Ma'an Network and Ma'an News Agency. This unit, launched in January 2009 through our DFID-funded project on governance, will enable us to monitor our coverage and impact, as well as Palestinian media in general and the interactions between the public, media, and government institutions. Ma'an is the first Palestinian media organization to establish a permanent research unit as part of our ongoing efforts to improve program quality and better meet people's information needs. We believe that the Ma'an research unit represents a major step forward in enabling us to serve the entire Palestinian public.

Since beginning work in January, the research unit has played a key role in both the preparation and production phases of our DFID project, which aims to create a culture of demand for good governance in Palestine. Together with the Ma'an administration and our TV and radio department heads, the

research unit has organized training on governance for Palestinian journalists, designed and supervised our first annual opinion survey on media and governance, and begun systematically monitoring Palestinian media coverage of governance issues. Unit staff have also met with a variety of other local NGOs working to improve governmental accountability in Palestine. The information collected is helping our production managers decide on focus topics for our radio and TV programming and online reporting, as well as assisting our production staff and correspondents in preparing their investigative reports.

To provide us with benchmarks to measure the change in public attitudes towards governance and media, the Ma'an research unit conducted a comprehensive public opinion survey in March 2009, in cooperation with the Palestinian Center for Research and Cultural Dialogue (PCRD). A representative sample of 1,360 adults in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was interviewed by field researchers on the role of media and government institutions in Palestine, and how well these various organizations are meeting public needs. A [summary of the survey findings](#) has been published in Arabic and English, and follow-up surveys will be conducted in 2010 and 2011. From this survey, and the other work of the research unit, Ma'an now has more detailed information on Palestinian citizens' needs and priorities than ever before, and we are working harder than ever to meet these needs.

### **Commercial Contracts Provide Quality Programming for Palestinians**

As a result of our growing reputation and audience, we are better able to compete for commercial contracts, which is important as we strive for greater sustainability and diverse funding streams. These contracts also enable us to provide further programming for Palestinians and highlight important issues. Currently, we are engaged in a major project with the European Commission to produce TV and radio programs highlighting different aspects of Europe and European-Palestinian relations in order to promote regional cooperation and mutual understanding. The project targets youth, and we are currently preparing for the Palestinian 'University Challenge,' a televised competition between different universities from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which will start in October 2009.

Another ongoing project for USAID involves producing a documentary and video news releases on different projects funded by USAID in the occupied Palestinian territories in areas such as health, education, and infrastructure. Finally, we recently produced a short video on a shelter project implemented by Oxfam Great Britain for Bedouin communities in the Bethlehem and Hebron districts. This project was designed to help some of the most vulnerable groups in the West Bank.

### **Looking to the Future**

As you can see, [Ma'an Network](#) has been extremely busy over the last several months! With the continued development of our current partnerships, we expect further evolution and growth in the coming period, and we look forward to sharing news about our projects with you on a regular basis. For further background about our projects and ongoing work, please visit our website at [www.maannet.org](http://www.maannet.org).

With very best wishes from all of us at Ma'an,

**Raed Othman,  
Ma'an Network General Director**