

## Pro-Democracy: Diaspora and refugees, Out of Country Voting (OCV)

What about including the diaspora and refugees in elections? What about hearing their voice? Is there an example that allowed refugees to vote from outside the country and the votes were also accepted internationally? Yes, there is. Over 850,000 Afghan refugees in camps were allowed to vote in elections. The process used was Out of Country Voting (OCV), and was organised over 80 days – voter registration and voting.

Some website sources:

- Out of Country Voting (OCV): <http://aceproject.org/today/feature-articles/out-of-country-voting-in-post-conflict-elections>
- Central Election Commission (CEC) – Palestine: <http://www.elections.ps/english.aspx>

This suggestion is looking at the expulsions of people in 1948 and 1967 as also expulsions of ‘voters’. By organising a ‘voter registration’, there will be a listing of all the ‘missing voters’. With approximately 5 million refugees around the world, there are approximately 2 million+ ‘missing voters’.

So how would Out of Country Voting help?

- For any solution, it’s likely that the refugees would like a referendum – this would need ‘voter registration’
- For any solutions, it’s likely the refugees would like to elect representatives who can negotiate and speak for them – this means voter registration and elections
- For people around the world to see more of the picture, as well as being transparent of how many voters would like to return, it would help if the voter registration was done so that people registering would register their names to their ancestral town/electoral district – so showing all the ‘missing voters’, for example in Jerusalem, Nazareth, Acre and others. So the world could see, for example, that there were 200,000 ‘missing voters’ from Nazareth.

The Afghan OCV was organised in 80 days with a budget of \$92 million, with a lot of OCV expertise hired from around the world. There are lower cost alternatives. There are two stages involved. The first stage is voter registration – this can be organised at \$1 (using Polaroid) to \$2 (using digital) per person – which allows people around the world to ‘see’ the ‘missing voters’ – they become visible. Also there is expertise at the CEC in Ramallah, who could help with training, perhaps doing the registration in stages. Doing the registration country by country will allow expertise from one country to help with other countries, and so keep budgets lower. Where could the OCV be organised from? Maybe from London. London has a track record of having exile governments return. Perhaps setting up an International Central Election Commission.

Who could help in organising the elections? There are many groups already in the various countries and camps. They have developed teams that already do work with the communities. There could also be new groups started that have people from different opinions represented. Each camp and city will be able to make a start. The more people that register to vote, the easier it will be to show the world. A link: [http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/vo/voy/voy\\_pa](http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/vo/voy/voy_pa)

So how many seats would the OCV voters be able to choose? There are a number of ways of doing this. Firstly, directly according to population. This would mean with about 1 million voters voting in the West Bank and Gaza, that the 2 million OCV voters would have about twice as many seats. A second option would be to use the 2006 system with 132 seats, and starting the OCV process with also having adding another 132 seats. Making a new total of 264 seats.

Which electoral system would be used? The 2006 mixed system lends itself to this process, because people can vote for someone to represent their electoral district, and it becomes apparent that they have been stopped from voting for many years. The number of seats/politicians chosen directly by voters is 66, with 66 allocated according to how people voted on the separate Party List, giving a total of 132. A link, scroll for powerpoint presentation: <http://www.elections.ps/template.aspx?id=143>

When would be a good time to vote? Straight away., and also 1 week before a Knesset election. Again, this would help the world see what has been going on all these years.

What about identification for registering to vote? There are many options. Some people already have them, for example refugees in Jordan have the ability to vote. Some agencies have historical records. Some people may need others to vouch for them. The same issues were resolved for refugees in Gaza and the West Bank, so they could vote. This expertise would be used abroad. There is also typically the process of people who have registered, the right to view the electoral register and make challenges. This process has been used by the CEC in the West Bank and Gaza.

What about refugees in camps in the West Bank and Gaza, could they also use OCV for their ancestral villages and towns in the state called Israel? Yes they could re-register if they chose. They could also participate in the OCV process. It could also be a way of expressing their right to return.

What parties could people vote for? Maybe the first election, or even all elections, the parties people can vote for need to be registered in the West Bank, Gaza and the state called Israel – having a whole country choice. This could help unity, and help the parties in these areas work better together.

How else could this vote be used? The mixed system allows also for voting for a party list. The existing Knesset voting method uses the party list system. So that could be used to work out a ‘virtual’ election result, and how many OCV representatives could be sitting in the Knesset. So countries around the world who recognised the Afghan election result could be asked to recognise the Palestinian OCV result!

What if the Knesset politicians do not recognise the votes? Carry on. Keep doing the elections. Being free is also a habit. With the OCV election results, media around the world – in magazines, newspapers and TV – can do graphic colour explanations of how e.g. one state would look with the OCV result, and also the Knesset.

What could the OCV representatives do? A number of things. They could send negotiators to negotiations. They could help organise referendums of the diaspora/refugees, getting feedback on progress towards a solution. They could visit other Parliaments around the world and put their case for recognition. They could visit organisations around the world and ask for ‘motions’ to be voted on recognising their OCV votes. They could also assist the diaspora and refugees with day-to-day issues they face.

Where could the OCV representatives meet? They could have a building in London, where they can have a video link to meetings in Ramallah or elsewhere. What would the assembly be called? It may be an idea to call it what you would like it to be. If you would like to have your own Parliament, making all your own laws – then maybe call it a Parliament.

Okay, so you now have OCV representatives. What about all the other institutions? What about the PLO? How would all the structures look like? Is there a unity option? One suggestion is looking at systems that have been working. I would suggest the Westminster system. Here you have a directly elected House, called the House of Commons (1<sup>st</sup> chamber) with Prime Minister, and also a House of Expertise/Elders or House of Lords (2<sup>nd</sup> chamber) – who are mainly appointed. So for the Palestinians the OCV plus West Bank and Gaza elected politicians would make up the elected chamber. The second chamber of experts/elders would be made up with something similar: tribal elders, religious people, people with expertise in: business/farming/health/transport/education/government/retired politicians/military/lawyers/judges etc. they are normally retired/elderly/experienced. Some people from the 2<sup>nd</sup> chamber can also serve in the Cabinet of the Prime Minister. Appointed people normally serve for life. They are put forward by parties, the numbers similar to the proportion of percent votes in elections. So how many people could there be in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chamber? Maybe start with 100-150. The 2<sup>nd</sup> chamber is normally a revising, with operational expertise, maybe sometimes with a longer view on things, they can only delay laws, not stop them. Maybe starting with an initial maximum delay period of 2-4 weeks, while things get going. In Britain it could be a year.

What would people in the PLO and other bodies do? The people in the PLO could be in the 1<sup>st</sup> chamber and/or 2<sup>nd</sup> chamber. They could also work in various projects for the diaspora/refugees e.g. negotiation teams, helping people in camps.

There are suggestions for having a secular state. Does this look okay? We are talking about the Holy Land – from where so many spiritual leaders and wisdom have come from. Also with Jerusalem being the capital. I feel the desire for a secular state is a reaction to the imbalance from 50-60 years – a totally normal reaction. However I feel that by moving the pendulum from one side all the way over to the other side, you may start the next reaction in the reverse direction. Maybe better to experiment with some options including spiritual wisdom – at least looking at the options. From an outsiders point of view, there are options. In Britain, the monarch – the Queen – is Head of State, and also Head of the Church of England. So, you may be thinking, we have so many religions and churches, how could anything like that work. Who knows, perhaps a rota system. You could try having every 3 months a new Head of State who represents a religion/church. Their role is similar to the Queen in Britain – largely ceremonial, with responsibility for signing laws passed by Parliament. If the leader is unhappy with the law, and feels it is against spiritual wisdom, then perhaps the church deputy could be asked to sign the law. This would allow laws to be passed – also with the ability for the leader to express an opinion. The other suggestion is also for each electoral district to have a petition/referendum system, so that any new law that does infringe a spiritual text, could be put to a referendum, that people could say yes/no for their electoral district. This way, there are options for religious expression – while the Prime Minister with Cabinet system allows the country to be run, and politicians held accountable, and giving different groups some feeling of assurance. The other options include the elected representatives electing a ceremonial President for 1 or 2 years.

So how are laws made? Normally the Cabinet team with the Prime Minister suggests a law in the 1<sup>st</sup> chamber, then it is also discussed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chamber and also voted on – up to 3 times. When it has been approved by the 2 chambers, the law is passed to the Head of State for signing.

With OCV this would also mean that some people in each of these ‘chambers’ would be in different countries, and would need to communicate by telephone, or video conferencing.

So how could the unity be improved? Perhaps learning from Britain in the Second World War. The Prime Minister would be from the largest party, with the Deputy Prime Minister being from the second largest party, and Ministries allocated by vote/seat percent.

Also learning from the Lebanon. Perhaps looking at the mix of positions according to religion, however adding more flexibility. Perhaps alternating the positions for Speaker Deputy Speaker in both chambers, Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, for different groups/parties/religions.

The aim being, you have as best as possible the people who would get the jobs in politics, as if you were to hire them for a company, looking at skills needed for the job and matching them with the candidates skills. Sounds nice, sounds easy?! Well, it would be best to use a continuous improvement approach, that means anything can be improved after implementing , and learning from experience.

So how often would be best for having elections? And are there any other ways of using OCV? With any team development you can go through four stages: forming, storming, norming and performing. Perhaps having elections every two years would help, and speed up the learning curve. Also after OCV voter registration and voting, perhaps people could also do a historical voter registration i.e. who would have been eligible to vote in all the previous elections if they had not been expelled? So the world can see the full picture of previous elections and ‘missing voters’.

What about the indigenous Palestinians living in the state called Israel? Some people suggest abstaining as a form of resistance. I would say do something positive. I would suggest voice an opinion. Register to vote. Then see which parties are supporting Out of Country Voting (OCV) and vote for those parties. If there are none, go into the polling booth and spoil the ballot paper – many countries count spoiled ballot papers – as a vote for ‘none of the above’. The best would be to fully register every indigenous possible voter and vote for a pro-OCV party.

Any offers of assistance, ensure you are happy with the honesty and track record.

The sooner there is voter registration, the sooner the benefits from it can be felt and realised, and the sooner diaspora and refugees can be seen and heard and make more positive assistance.

It’s worth saying that when one thing changes, other thing scan change. Who knows what could happen when the world sees 2 million+ ‘missing voters’ appear? People could already start asking different questions. So any ideas/plans could need to be changed/adjusted.

In summary, this is a self-help initiative. A positive pro-democracy initiative. It mainly needs the will of the diaspora and refugees. The skills are there. The process of OCV has been proved. OCV elections have been internationally recognised. There are a number of options for getting started on the structures that include the many voices. Release the 2 million+ votes, and allow people around the world to see and hear. With more information, it will be easier for people to view things impartially.