

Editorial (Letter to the Editor)

Forensic Document Examination Capacity Building

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The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in collaboration with the Palestinian National Authority, is currently implementing a project in order to support the development of forensic science and forensic medicine capacity within the Palestinian judicial system. The project, wholly funded by Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada is entitled "Forensic Human Source and Governance Development Assistance for the Palestinian Authority."

The aim of the project is to assist the State of Palestine in building the foundation and operational tools for high quality, reliable and sustainable forensic services within the framework of the Palestinian criminal justice system.

A forensic science laboratory facility has been established within the Palestinian Civil Police (PCP) Headquarters. Training is being provided to core groups of forensic scientists in the prioritized disciplines of drug and chemical evidence analyses, questioned document examination, and firearm and tool mark evidence examination. This training is in the form of comprehensive programs developed and customized by regional and international experts in full consultation with local counterparts.

In early Spring of 2014 an expert panel was convened by the UNODC in conjunction with a consultant, a fully-trained FDE from Australia, in order to review the training program to be implemented in the development of FDE capacity for the PCP. Relying on an international team of forensic document examiners and security documents examiners from the U.S., New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi in particular), and Interpol, the meeting ensured that all training and related materials developed were reviewed and approved by this international group and aligned as far as possible with relevant international standards and practices.

Since April, 2014, I have travelled three times to Ramallah, Palestine to deliver Latin-script handwriting and signature examination/comparison training. This module of the training program follows closely LaTrobe University's system. There are six trainees, including the head of section, all eager to learn. Over the course of the past nine months these trainees have completed all theoretical components of the module and many practical assignments, including mock casework, proficiency tests, and collaborative exercises. Lessons have been uploaded to Dropbox as have answers to assignments. Web-chatting filled in for travel, and there has been lots and lots of email traffic. In December 2014 they will complete their training in Latin-script handwriting/signature examinations and comparisons and begin the tentative first steps in casework. I will continue to mentor them in Latin-script handwriting/signature examinations during the first few years as junior examiners. A final step of this module of their training has been to research, in groups of two, topics chosen by me for future publication; elderly writing in Arabic script, the use of Arabic and Latin script signatures in the region, and copybook styles of Arabic script in use. All topics are researched in the context of the Palestinian State and will greatly benefit the group, as well as the many of us who are interested in FDE in other scripts and other countries.

What I have learned during these past few months has been invaluable to my own development as an FDE. In order to teach you must first communicate effectively. This posed its own problems in the beginning as my lessons had to be interpreted in Arabic. While most of the trainees were completely bilingual, understanding technical terms and even subjective terms commonly used in FDE with the same weight and subtleties was difficult. We devel-

oped a good rhythm to the learning, with the six trainees helping each other out, translating and interpreting until everyone's comprehension (including mine) was on par. Slow and steady wins the race!

And during this time my own understanding of Arabic has grown, including my limited knowledge of the script. The principles of hand-

writing examinations seem constant to me, regardless of script, however the weight of significance placed on features can be different. It has been, and continues to be, a fascinating lesson for me. I wish these Palestinian trainees well as they continue their study of the other modules of FDE over the next two years.