

MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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LIVE FROM BETHLEHEM

Transcript

TEXT ON SCREEN: The Ma'an Network reports news on local Palestinian television and the Internet. It is the only major independent Palestinian news outlet. Today, Ma'an is leaked a list of Palestinian prisoners to be released by Israel. Journalists rush to cover the story.

TEXT ON SCREEN: Bethlehem, Palestinian Territories

- Tell all the TV and radio affiliates!
- Call the police to open the road for us.
- You motherfucker.
- There's a new list about the prisoners, they are going to release them and it will be an exclusive for Ma'an to do this, you know?

TEXT ON SCREEN: Ma'an Television Studios

- Where's Nassar?
- What do you mean you don't know?
- Are you ready?
- We're ready. Put us on the air. Nassar is ready. Put us on the air. Get away from behind Nassar!
- Abu-Laben, Monther Rduan Mustafa Abbas, Najdi Ali Sami...

NASSAR LAHAM: Every Palestinian family has a prisoner. Every family sends their boys and girls to the prison.

MOTHER: I hope they free all the prisoners, not just my son.

TEXT ON SCREEN: Sister of Freed Political Prisoner

SISTER: Thank God. Thank God.

FATHER: This is great news, son. I hope God frees all of the men that are with you.

FRIEND: A thousand congratulations. The sweets should be on us!

NASSAR LAHAM: Normally here the people, they are under pressure, they are so sad. Believe me, the most nice things I would like to do, to bring good news for the people.

TITLE: Live From Bethlehem

AMIRA HANANIA: We have a very big conflict between us and the Israelis on the land, its like very complicated situation. Some of the Palestinians find to defend the land through being in Hamas party and the other party, in Fatah, says that, "no we have to negotiate with the Israelis." And this negotiation started since long time, like more than ten years, and we have no achievements. For us, as the Palestinians, news, politics news, it's very much important. We are under occupation and still, even with the Palestinian authority, we are not stable yet. People watch the news more because they may have the hope that maybe they gonna say something new.

AMIRA HANANIA (on screen): Voting is part of the political process. Don't miss your chance, dear citizen, to participate in change. This is Amira Hanania, Bethlehem TV, Ma'an TV network.

RAED OTHMAN: Everybody is looking to Ma'an because they want to have an independent source, and this is what we try to tape. We give the people the two stories, the story of Hamas and the story of Fatah, and of course when we have the story, we tell them our story.

WISAM KUTOM: Media in Palestine has been dominated by the Palestinian fractions.

MUSIC: These are the acts of Martyrdom-Seekers. Palestine - one of its leaders is Ahmed Yassin. Its children carry the knife.

WISAM KUTOM: Hamas will go through their Hamas ideology; it's good to die because God will accept you and put you in heaven.

MUSIC (cont'd): Its children carry machine guns.

WISAM KUTOM: Same thing with the other political fractions, but all over it has been dominated by somebody's vision and somebody's theory and somebody's ideology regardless of the group. So, you will never have any radio or TV station saying what the regular Palestinian is saying about other issues.

RAED OTHMAN: We are trying to build a country here. We're starting from scratch to build a country. So I think the role of media, the first role, is to tell the people the story, what's happening here, without interfering.

WISAM KUTOM: At Ma'an, we decided that we want something that we would report on. I don't want Fatah to tell me what to say, and I don't want Hamas to tell me what to say. I don't want even the president to tell me what to say. I want to say whatever I want to say, because I'm part of this people and I have my views and I have my opinions. And part of

the membership in the network you have to satisfy the need of being independent. You are not part of Fatah, you are not part of Hamas, you are not part of any political fraction. And at any single moment, you're radio or TV station adopts any of this ideologies, you're out of the network.

RAED OTHMAN: We don't judge the people because of their religion, because of their color, because of their beliefs, because we judge the people because of their work. If they do anything wrong, if it is the occupation, or it's United States, or it is Hamas or it is Fatah or it is al Qaeda, we speak against al Qaeda, we speak against Condoleezza Rice. We speak against Hamas, we speak against Fatah, we speak against the fighters, we speak against these people who throw the rockets from Gaza, because we believe that these things are touching the human rights.

NASSAR LAHAM: I wasn't smoking, but when I enter the jail, the Israeli prison, I start smoking because of the stress. And it became a habit, bad habit, or good habit in the Middle East. I make the titles and the headlines in the Israeli newspapers. They know more than us how to make the headlines. I like that: more short, more summarize, more action. I learn the Hebrew language in the Israeli prison, and even in this area have two elements, a Palestinian element and an Israeli element. So I'm giving, and this is the first time in the Middle East, I'm giving the whole picture, the two sides.

TEXT ON SCREEN: Nassar hosts M'an's flagship program, Hebrew Press Tour. Nassar translates Hebrew news in real time into Arabic.

NASSAR LAHAM: A murder in Rishon L'Tzion. His identity is known. He fled the scene and is still at large. The Americans have begun tightening their purse strings. They hope that the dollar will not cripple the value of the shekel.

MAN: Our fate is connected with Israel's. For this reason, we watch Nasser closely. Nassar's live translations are unbiased. He does not take sides. We watch him to understand the Israeli perspective on us.

WISAM KUTOM (in meeting): It started in 2002, as a response to where the economy was collapsing and deteriorating the situation in the society. And local TV stations, with lack of...

WISAM KUTOM: It's very hard to convince potential investors to invest in Ma'an. This is one of the biggest challenges that we're facing at Ma'an Network, which is the donor funding and the sustainability of the organization. This is mainly our main source of revenue to the organization to survive.

RAED OTHMAN: There is always a financial problem. When you speak about media in a conflict area, we live in a country with a war.

TEXT ON SCREEN: Israeli Military Checkpoint

ISRAELI SOLDIER: Can you please not stay here? Stay there, OK? Next to the jeep, OK?

FADITANAS: We're trying to cover what's going on here.

ISRAELI SOLDIER: No problem, just over there. You have a camera, you can do zoom, no problem. Do pictures, I don't care, but not here, okay?

FADITANAS: I told him, "we are in a hurry, we need to go." He said, "just only 30 seconds, and after that you'll be allowed to go anywhere you want." They are moving all the checkpoint and everything. Soldiers usually get more afraid from our cameras more than their weapons. If you have a machine gun, maybe you can shoot him, but nobody will know, but if he got photo for him, but he's doing something against human rights, you can show it to all of the world. It's really hard to feel that you are working and you are always in danger. Just try to think about it, when you go out from the home you just say, goodbye to your girlfriend, or maybe to your parents if you are living with them. Just goodbye, 'cause you don't know if you are coming back or not. Anytime you might be shot, injured, killed. Two rubber bullets in my leg, tear gas goes from the Israeli soldier machine gun straight to my chest, and it was in close range. I got stoned in my back from Palestinians. So we are always getting shot from, Palestinians and Israelis. In our region, photographers are beaten, are shot, are killed. Why in other places they have all the respect? Cause just we are Palestinians? We are just, we are not demonstrator, we are not throwing stones on Israeli soldiers, we are not holding guns or weapons, we are just holding our cameras. My father keep telling me, "Is this what you are looking for to be? Is this is the career that you choose?" My cousins, my uncles, my aunts, everyone. But I told them that this is the thing they I like. I love to do this. I'm not following any faction, or I'm not Fatah, I'm not Hamas, I'm not communist, I'm just journalist.

AMIRA HANANIA: You know why I bought this? When I go to the court, it's a religion court. Religious, sorry. So I'm gonna meet Sheikh, so I must be restrictive, so I have to wear it on my shoulders like this. Some wives and some women really face some difficulties to get divorce or to get their kids in the nursery. It's not one report, so it's a full project. What would be a success? To change it.

AMIRA HANANIA : Based on the Islamic law and the cases you see every day, is marriage law fair to women? Do women protest?

MAZEN AL-JABRINI: The law works well in this society. Years ago we submitted a new Palestinian law, but parliament hasn't considered it yet.

AMIRA HANANIA: Yes, we can discuss that later. But I need an answer for this point. Do you really think a 14-year-old girl is mature enough for marriage?

MAZEN AL-JABRINI: Women at this age are absolutely ready for marriage. But the decision goes to their parents. And this is important.

AMIRA HANANIA: What do you think about marrying at a younger age?

WOMAN: I think it is better off for the girl to wait, and finish her studies and make something of herself.

WOMAN: Religion isn't always clear. So we need state law. Religion shouldn't have anything to do with these laws.

WISAM KUTOM: One of the biggest projects that we would dream to be is the news bulletin, TV news bulletin. And reach the whole Palestinian Territories with a central news bulletin, and this will be the first time that independent media offering in Palestine would do a TV news bulletin.

RAED OTHMAN: We're planning to do this daily news bulletin—we still looking for some money to do that—and hopefully if the thing works good, Amira will one of these people.

AMIRA HANANIA: it will be much easier for me to work on the news bulletin show. I wouldn't have to move from country to country and city to city. Even though I really like from time to time to do features, but it's hard to do it every day, every day. When I get married it was a curfew, when I had my kids, when I delivered, it was a curfew too. The curfew that soldiers in a jeep and say, "no one had to move, no one had to go out from his house" in the speakers, and no one go out. Everybody has to stay in the house till they say, again in the speakers, "you can go now." It's a horrible situation that you are not free to do whatever you want.

AMIRA HANANIA: Just one bite, just one bite.

AMIRA HANANIA: I think Sesame Street program is very good for my kids. I think it's the best kids program in the West Bank, in Gaza, and it's produced in Ma'an.

GEORGE KHLIFI: Having good media for children in Palestine is important for more than one reason. First of all, because children everywhere not only in Palestine, are the people of the future. It is very important to try to maintain for them the notion that they are children. Yes, children in Palestine grow up too quickly, because they have really to confront realities that usually in other societies they do not.

MICKEY MOUSE (on TV): We, tomorrow's pioneers, will restore to this nation its glory, we will liberate Al-Aqsa, with Allah's will, and we will liberate Iraq, with Allah's will, and we will liberate the Muslim countries, invaded by murderers. Allah willing, Allah willing.

GEORGE KHLIFI: Hamas now, trying to keep the masses if you want, they are using things like this Mickey Mouse who is talking to children about war and so, and you know slogans and icons and so on and so on. That's very bad, but it's politics. That's why we don't want to be them.

TEXT ON SCREEN: To raise funds for Ma'an News Bulletin, Ma'an is shooting a commercial.

AMIRA HANANIA: This is a promotion project about this resort. We're doing it like a small feature about them. It's like silly work, it's not serious. We are doing it only for one reason. Yes, it is, it's for money. Am I saying something wrong? It's the truth.

FADITANAS: Thank you. I have a long way to walk. At the beginning, when I start seeing my photos on Google, Yahoo, AP, Reuters, AFP, Washington Times, New York Times, feel that you are not in prison, like we feel here, surrounded with check points and walls. You are here, but your work is surrounded all over the world. You feel proud about it, and you feel that you have done something. You made something.

MUHAMMED GANAIEM: You see the wall? Did you see the wall? Do you like the word, 'slice?' We're going to this king of the soldier to let us pass, and we have to stay in this line until the moment he feel like he has good mood to let us move.

FADITANAS: The worst thing, if you came to his shift after a big fight with his girlfriend, you will never pass.

NASSAR LAHAM: We are going to interview Dr. Saeb Erakat. Hamas, in this moment, if they believe that Saeb Erakat is broken their policy, so it is internal interview, and it will be also about the Israeli-Palestinian conditions.

MAN: A lot of information regarding to the future situation with the Israelis come through Dr. Saeb Erakat.

NASSAR LAHAM: Dear viewers, today we have a new meeting with Dr. Saeb Erakat. Dr. Erakat is the leading PLO negotiator, and a well-known political leader and advisor to the President. Dr. Saeb, to start, where are things going?

DR. SAEB ERAKAT: The collapse of Gaza continues. Palestine is heading toward political disaster in all senses of the word. Our message to Hamas is that you are the government of all Palestinians. There is a difference between the work of a movement and the work of a ruling party. But we want them to succeed.

NASSAR LAHAM: Did Hamas mismanage the situation? As an independent media outlet, we are not taking sides. Now, you are saying to the leaders in Gaza: there are international accords. If you don't honor them, the famine in Gaza is your fault. Am I understanding you right?

DR. SAEB ERAKAT: As a Palestinian who is part of our struggle, I advise that Hamas ends the takeover of Gaza immediately. They must return back to Palestinian law. This is the solution. If we do not help ourselves, no one will help us. How can I ask the world for help if we don't help ourselves first? This is where we are at right now.

NASSAR LAHAM: You sound pessimistic. Are you?

DR. SAEB ERAKAT: This is the biggest disaster Palestinians have faced in 100 years.

TEXT ON SCREEN: As its influence grows, Ma'an is drawing fire from critics.

DR. GERALD STEINBERG: The Ma'an agency, as one of the dominant news frameworks in Palestinian society, is limited. I think it really does represent that mainstream Fatah line, which is sometimes a two-state solution, and always victims, usually blaming Israel.

NASSAR LAHAM: I hate occupation. I'm against occupation. I'm a fighter against occupation. But this does not mean that I'm enemy of any human being.

DR. GERALD STEINBERG: Ma'an mirrors the state of play in Palestinian society. Internally, the idea of a compromise and peace with Israel is still very much of a fringe opinion. On the other hand, when you put out a message that says, "we're ready for compromise," and stripping out some of the rougher language, that send a different kind of message. What I think it really says is that Ma'an as a mirror of Palestinian society is not ready to try to reconcile the two. If they move too far, then they're gonna have bombs thrown at them or killed. And the rise of Hamas has actually made that worse.

NASSAR LAHAM: To be a Palestinian, that means to be in the examination all the time. Just imagine any human being is always, all his life in examination; have to pay 100 masters and to satisfy all of them.

TEXT ON SCREEN: Ma'an ignited controversy for using the Arabic word *Shaheed*.

AMIRA HANANIA: Shaheed means person who fights against occupation and got killed. This is the word Shaheed, means that he got killed while he defending his land.

ITAMAR MARCUS: When a Muslim is characterized as a Shaheed, it means that they have done a wonderfully, positive act of dying for Allah. And by Ma'an, in their news reporting, using the term 'Shaheed' to refer to suicide terrorists, they are by definition giving it not only a stamp of approval, but they are glorifying the act.

AMIRA HANANIA: I mean, normally people on the streets say 'Shaheed'. It's complicated; it's not something that one person can tell you.

ITAMAR MARCUS: And as much as I hold Ma'an responsible here, I hold the international community that's funding Ma'an responsible, because ultimately it is the funding that allows Ma'an to continue. And if they're being negligent, then they bear responsibility as well.

MAN: Most of the words that he mentioned were quotations. When az-Zahar says: "We sent that Shaheedi to Jerusalem." How could I change it? Because if I changed it az-Zahar would say to me: Sorry, I didn't say we sent a suicide bomber."

ITAMAR MARCUS: I fully expect that these countries may cut off funding to Ma'an should Ma'an continue with this type of language.

TEXT ON SCREEN: Donors begin to pull out funding. Cutbacks must be made.

FADITANAS: Actually, I'm leaving Ma'an within 15 days. Problems in the financial department, and they are not able to pay my salaries. So now I'm looking forward to have a new job, 'cause if you want to live, you have to work.

RAED OTHMAN: Unfortunately, we fire some people, or stop the contract with some people because there is no money. Today is the first of August and until today we don't have salary. In the bank we don't have salary. And the reason why is because one of our donors didn't send the payment.

FADITANAS: I'm not married, I'm not engaged, I don't have a lot of responsibilities. I'm looking forward to go to and work in Iraq. I'd like to be there. I want to make a bigger risk in my life. Maybe I'll die. At the end, I'm gonna die. Sooner or later, I'm gonna die. Dying while doing something good, you will be always in the peoples' minds.

AMIRA HANANIA: I like Ma'an. I'm really proud to say I'm working with Ma'an. But if I really had a good offer, I will do it. Absolutely I will do it.

WISAM KUTOM: The TV news bulletin, it got terminated. They stopped the funding and they cancelled the project. And we've been training, we've been developing, we've been preparing the staff to do the project and after that, boom, it's over. We had to cancel all that we prepared. We have to tell them, "cuts and budget, we can't do this and we can't do that, and we can't do this, and we can't do that." And what will happen at the end? We will start losing the people.

AMIRA HANANIA: The boss there, he said, "Amira, I can't give you money today because, because I know you need money," he said, "I know you need money, I know you are in need, but I can't." I said, "why not? I finished your work, and I need to be paid." I know everybody sees me working, working, working, working, but I don't take any money, you know, it's hard. You spend a lot of effort, you spend a lot of money in taxes and this stuff, but you are not paid.

TEXT ON SCREEN: One year later.

FADITANAS: I spent the last six months looking for a job in different places, in West bank with different agencies. And recently, I heard that at this company, they're looking for a salesman who works in Bethlehem. I tried my best of talking with friends of me, journalist friends who went to Iraq and who has a contacts that maybe they know someone, some organization, or some media organization, that they want someone to work in Iraq, to help me to get this contact. But all of them said that, "we don't want you to go there because we care about you." I'm missing the life of being a conflict photographer. Like, we are in danger, but at the same time we keep making jokes, having fun with the guys

around. You don't care for anything. I am a photographer, even I'm working as salesman. I am a photographer. But, the difference between before and now, that before people could see my photos every day in different places. But today, no one can see them except me, but I am a photographer.

TEXT ON SCREEN: Amira leaves Ma'an for Future TV, a satellite network seen by millions.

AMIRA HANANIA: Omade lives in this very simple place. She lived in the hope that others will fulfill their promises to help her. She has struggled for nine years. She hopes the tenth will be better. This mother's patience is waning.

OMADE: An aid organization stood beside us. They helped us.

AMIRA HANANIA: For me, being in the local agency and then go to the international one makes difference to me, to my career. And also, this means that I'm developing myself, which I'm really proud of it. But, on the other side, I was really proud to work in Ma'an Network.

TEXT ON SCREEN: After months of scrutiny, the U.S. State Department provides a grant to Ma'an.

WOMAN: Nasser, did you have some changes for the scene?

NASSAR LAHAM: No. I will change it live.

RAED OTHMAN: I, personally, will stay working in this organization even if there is no money. We thank our donors that they give us, trust us. Me, myself, I am surprised what we did in the last two years, and everybody who looks to Ma'an, he is shocked.

NASSAR LAHAM (on TV): Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to *The Hard Question*. Today on the show we will welcome Prime Minister Salaam Fayaad. Dr. Fayaad was an unknown when he took the post a few years ago. But his popularity has been improving among the Palestinian people.

TEXT ON SCREEN: Funding issues persist, but Ma'an continues to produce news and public affairs shows. The Ma'an website is now the number one source for domestic news in the Palestinian Territories.

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