



IIFWP UPDATE

The Official Newsletter of the Interreligious & International Federation for World Peace UK



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Middle East Peace Initiative: A Window of Opportunity

In a week marking the founding of Israel as both a celebration for the Jews and a catastrophe for the Palestinians, delegates from nearly 30 countries including 20 from the UK, met in Jerusalem for the 15th in-country gathering of the Interreligious International Federation for World Peace's Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI). Some 180 politicians, media, religious and NGO figures held symposia in Jerusalem, Karmel, Gaza and Ramallah as well as fact-finding visits to an Israeli settlement and a Palestinian refugee camp in Gaza between 10th and 16th May. The goal was to help the delegates understand the peace process and explore ways they could support its realisation.



Left: MEPI delegates in front of the Dome of the Rock; Above left: The symposium: "An Innovative Approach to Lasting Peace and Stability" in Jerusalem's Pontifical Centre; Above: Talab El-Sana, an Israeli-Arab member of the Knesset.



Above: David Earle, O.P. Sharma, Pres. National Council of Hindu Temples, WANGO's Taj Hamad, Jerusalem's Old City. Below: Muslim, Jew and Christian at the Western Wall

NGO leaders discussed possible projects that could facilitate dialogue between the Israelis and Palestinians, with a particular focus on young people.

With the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit ceasefire still in place, an opportunity for significant dialogue was clearly in place. The IIFWP went to great pains to be balanced in their approach, visiting both the Separation/Security Wall and the newly-opened Holocaust Museum at Yad Vashem.

There were also visits to the Holy Sites of the three Abrahamic faiths as part of the promotion of religious reconciliation as an impetus to the peace-making process. "Though

the struggle in the Middle East is not caused by religion," said the MEPI's Steering Committee Chairman Dr. Charles Yang at a symposium, "the solution to the problems of the Middle East require the involvement of religions, and not just cooperation and compromise among governments." Dr. Alon Liel, former Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said there was no reason why the international faith community could not become the "lobby for peace," encouraging both the Israeli and Palestinian governments. "This 'window of opportunity' will not stay open forever," he said.

A leading Israeli political commentator compared the Israeli and Palestinian relationship to a failed marriage where divorce was not possible. "We are moving from a double bed to twin beds," said



Channel 2's Arab Affairs expert Ehud Ya'ari at the Jerusalem Symposium, "but we are still sleeping in the same room."

Ran Cohen, a member of the Knesset and former Minister of Industry and Trade, thanked the participants for coming to Israel and asked for their help in the peace process. "It's not just dangerous for us," he said, "it's dangerous for the world."

MEPI delegates met Israelis living in the Kush Katif settlement in Gaza. One settler, Anita Turner said she had not been persuaded by the government's offer of half a million dollars for her family to move out with others as part of the Disengagement Plan. Showing the delegation her greenhouse,

From top: Entering Gaza by the Eretz Crossing, Lord Nazir Ahmed brings hope to the Meghazy Refugee Camp, visiting an IIFWP computer training centre in Gaza, an award for WANGO/IIFWP's "Play Football-Make Peace" Gaza tournament.

she expressed her sense of mission to develop the land she had lived on for three decades. There were fears among the community about the frequent dangers that came with living in the settlement despite the recent ceasefire. One Kush Katif family had been murdered while driving into the settlement.

IIFWP launched its Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI) in February 2003 on the foundation of more than 30 years' work in interfaith dialogue. Over the past two years over 10,000 Ambassadors For Peace from 151 countries have participated in 40 projects in Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

Following the MEPI visit to Kush Katif a representative group was invited to Gaza. They were confronted with donkey pulled carts, some refuse-strewn streets and

"This 'window of opportunity' will not stay open forever."

Dr. Alon Liel
Israeli Foreign Affairs

brought the group to a mosque in the Meghazy Refugee camp where awards of appreciation were presented to Dr. Charles Yang, and Taj Hamad, who had sponsored the *Play Football Make Peace* football competition in Gaza, and to Lord Nazir Ahmed on the occasion of his hope-bringing visit.

There was a review of the *Palestinian National Association of Youth*, Moon Cultural Centre



Top right: views of Gaza and IIFWP's Dr. Thomas Walsh meets the Gaza IIFWP Representative Karmel Thabet; European MEPI participants at the Pontifical centre.

destroyed buildings juxtaposed with new apartment buildings being built with foreign investment.

Abu Ali Shaheen, a Member of the Palestinian Parliament,



Above: Anita Turner, an Israeli settler at Kush Katif in Gaza shows delegates and the press her greenhouse.

which had given IT training to hundreds of Palestinians, creating business opportunities over the internet unhindered by checkpoints. Rev. Sun Myung Moon had donated 50 computers to the centre which was being maintained by the IIFWP in Gaza.

On 15th May a MEPI symposium, attended by approximately 100 people, was held in Gaza entitled, *Prospects for Nation-Building and Peace-Building in Palestine: Trends of Hope*. Abu Ali Shaheen, a Palestinian MP, thanked IIFWP for their investment in Gaza. He



also thanked the Palestinians for maintaining their ceasefire but said it was difficult to continue without hope of a viable Palestinian state. The growth in popularity of Hamas within the Palestinian population was a sign of the pressure the Fatah leadership were under to bring results through the ceasefire.

Bringing a message of welcome from President Abu Abbas' office, Hon. Kamal Schrafi, said that all efforts to support the peace process are urgently needed at this time, adding that he was disappointed by the lack of clear support by Arab leaders in the region in response to positive steps taken by the Palestinian Authority.

Lord Ahmed, noted that while the IIFWP delegation came with a clear message of hope, he was sorely dismayed as he made his way through the security check points into Gaza, which felt as though he was entering the world's largest prison. He looked forward, he said, to returning to an international airport in Gaza next time. Through the visit delegates could ap-

precipitate the frustrations of the people of Gaza and their need for opportunities for development. The NGO representatives took time to discuss the possibilities to develop programmes such as a football league and medical assistance in Gaza. ‘Your coming here eases my pain,’ one young man was heard saying to a delegate.

On May 14th Kamal Manzur, the President of Israel’s Special Adviser on Non-Jewish Religions, spoke to MEPI delegates in the Galilee city of Carmel in Northern Israel. “It is a fact of life that Jews and Arabs will live here forever.” He suggested that Jews be encouraged to study Arabic, on the basis that Israel was part of the Middle East.



Dr. Raheem Khan, Founding Member of the Muslim Council of Britain



Dr. Peter Patel of Birmingham Rotary and IIFWP-UK Vice Chairman Dr. David Earle



Ran Cohen, Member of the Israeli Knesset



Mrs. Lola Ayonrinde, former Mayor of Wandsworth

Mr. Walid Sadik, former Deputy Speaker of the Knesset said that in terms of assigning roles to peace brokers, “the 1.2 million Israeli Arabs living inside Israel should have the role of mediating between the two sides.”

The Palestinian MP and Director of Relations with Religious Communities, Dr. Emil Jarjoui, said that the only way to end the Middle East conflict was by common sense and by negotiation with the Israelis. “We are fed up with wars and funerals and blood,” he said speaking on behalf of Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmet Qurei. “We want to live like any other people under the sun and in the world. But to

do this we need for both parties to sit together as friends, as neighbours who can decide the future. We hope that your group might be the hand that is reaching to help us end this conflict.” □



Left to right: David Sasson, Ehud Ya'ari, Dr. Amir Bayati and Rohema Miah

A nanny state that’s “badly behaved”

Speakers at an IIFWP conference ask how UK legislation could be more family-focused and morals-driven

The author and columnist for the *Independent*, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown said that the Labour Government was doing some good to help parents in desperate circumstances through the *Sure Start* programme, and also in teaching parenting skills, but pointed out that while politicians lectured people on their responsibilities they were themselves “badly behaved.” She was speaking at an IIFWP conference looking at the relationship and the tensions between ‘The Government and the Family’ on 12 March.



Dr. Patricia Morgan said that legislation including children’s rights and anti-smacking laws were signs of greater intervention by the Government, courts and extra-judicial agencies, into families and the raising of children.

Mr. William Haines, of the *International Education Foundation*, said that Government and religion had a dual role in dealing with the problems of the family in that laws should be in accord with the common moral values of all religions.

Mrs. Nila Parmar, who is the current Chair of the Birmingham Council of Faiths, emphasised from a Hindu perspective, the centrality of the family as being the fundamental starting point for basic values and relationships which then emanated out into school and the wider society.

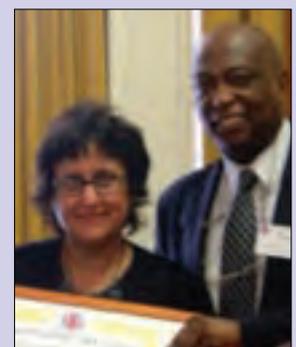
Cllr. Chief Mrs Lola Ayonrinde, Mayor of the London Borough of Wandsworth, also challenged Britain to think about the family in spiritual terms where God should

reside. At the close of the first session she and Mrs. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown were presented with Ambassador for Peace Awards.

Rev. Dr. Clinton Bennett said the conference

dwelt on the role of religion in forming policy in Government and although the religious voice should not be legally privileged it should have its place.

The academic journal *Interface* (an inter-faith and academic publication designed for policymakers) focuses on many of the points brought out in the conference proceedings. □



Yasmin Alibhai-Brown receives an AFP award from the IIFWP’s Prof. Ian Hall.

Other Recent Events

Making Poverty History in Africa



Alice Ukoko, Director of the *Women Of Nigeria International*, did not want non-African leadership to miss the opportunity to 'Make Poverty History in Africa'; a common theme that emerged in the Interfaith Meeting on 7th June at the IIFWP headquarters in London. The principal speakers, including Frank Mugenyi of the Centre for African Development have formed a coalition to organise a conference on 6th July in Edinburgh in parallel with the G8 Summit.



Post-Election Iraq Interfaith Peace Meeting

'Mr Kamiran Ahmed, an Iraqi journalist, spoke on the post-election situation in Iraq. He raised his inked, index finger and said - 'I am showing my great happiness at this time.' One or two also in the audience raised their own inked fingers on 23rd February at the IIFWP headquarters in London.

Convocation to be held in Autumn 2005

In this time of globalisation, resulting in increasing multi-cultural societies, the merit and contribution of all people regardless of race, nationality, creed and gender are equally valued by the IIFWP. For many years it has sponsored interfaith and inter-racial conferences, attended by a wide range of backgrounds, to facilitate dialogue and understanding.

For future conferences please contact IIFWP Secretariat (below).

Visit of Israeli-Arab former Knesset member



Walid Sadik, the former Deputy Minister of Agriculture, visited the UK to speak in a number of forums about the peace process and to encourage reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. He was invited to speak by Lord Nazir Ahmed in the House of Lords about Israeli/Palestinian relations. As an Israeli/Arab he views his role as a mediator between the two peoples.



About The IIFWP



This vision of world peace underlies all the programs and activities of the IIFWP (Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace). Specific initiatives may pursue this quest from distinctive vantage points or in relation to a particular constituency, for example in diplomacy, politics, community activism, academia, or religion. IIFWP recognizes that the task of achieving genuine peace requires an integrated, cross-disciplinary, and collaborative approach among all disciplines, various organisations, cultures and peoples. That is, peace cannot be established merely by academics, by politicians,

or by religious leaders alone. Therefore the tendency for peace efforts to be fragmented and disunified has to be overcome.

Founded by the Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon in 1999, a unique feature of IIFWP's vision is the inclusion of the world's religious leaders, who bear the wisdom of their respective traditions, in the pursuit of peace. This affirmation of religion's contribution is fully interreligious in spirit, welcoming the participation of all the world's great religious traditions.

IIFWP is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

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