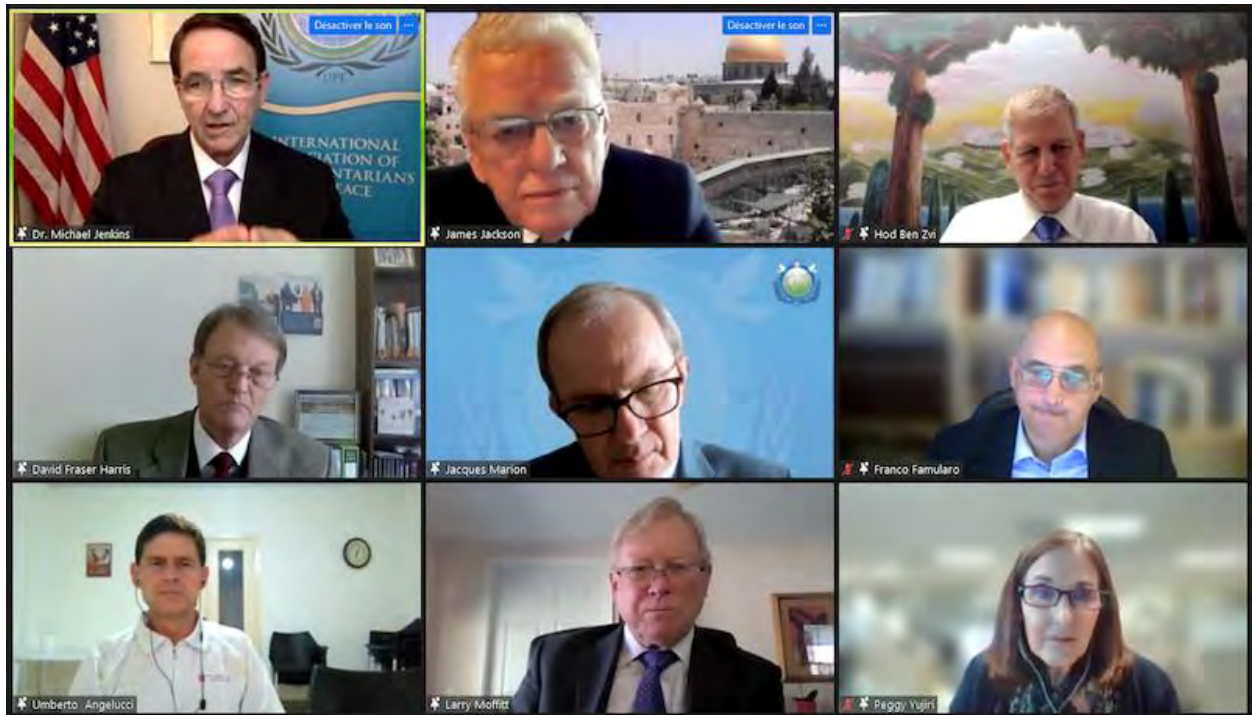


UPF Middle East Peace series: Extending Hand of Friendship through Health Care

David Fraser-Harris
September 30, 2021



The Middle East -- A UPF webinar from the Middle East Peace series focused on international cooperation in the field of health, particularly in providing health care to Palestinians.

The online conference "A Helping Hand: Cooperating for the Health of All Citizens" was held on September 30, 2021, as a joint effort of UPF of North America and UPF of Europe and the Middle East.

The moderators were **Dr. Michael W. Jenkins**, the president of UPF International, and **Hod Ben Zvi**, the chair of UPF-Israel.



The first speaker, **Dr. Asher Salmon**, head of the International Relations Department at the Israeli Ministry of Health, said the area that needs the most attention is improving the health system itself, which will involve investment in both infrastructure and training. Part of the challenge is to convince leaders and the public of the importance of spending in this area. However, before focusing on that, Dr. Salmon gave an overview of the response to COVID-19.

In the early stages of the pandemic Dr. Salmon had a discussion with Palestinian health authorities in the West Bank and Gaza on what needed to be done, and how to create the necessary infrastructure. With the West Bank, Israel's Ministry of Health had a daily connection on a working level, planning together the construction of a COVID-19 department, supplying protective gear and helping to build a testing facility. The West Bank soon had six such labs well-equipped and running, as they still are. Guidelines were developed that made it possible for 170,000 Palestinian workers to cross into Israel daily.

Although the Ministry of Health had expected many Palestinian demands for treatment in Israel, in fact the Palestinians themselves handled everything well. Israel provided modest help, enabling Palestine to receive international vaccines and to fully vaccinate all Palestinian workers in Israel. In the case of Gaza, the Ministry of Health supplied equipment directly, as well as the proper share of the vaccine. At the time of speaking, Gaza had more than 2 million doses of the vaccine waiting to be taken up. Dr. Salmon said that in the process he came to know his Palestinian colleagues well.

**A HELPING HAND:
COOPERATING FOR THE HEALTH OF ALL CITIZENS**
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 10 AM EDT/1600 CET



Join us for a discussion of broad, multi-partisan, humanitarian medical aid for the Middle East and Africa.

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Dr. James Jackson Founder & Chairman Emeritus, Project CURE	Dr. Asher Salmon Director, International Relations Department, Israeli Ministry of Health	Mr. Hod Ben Zvi Chairman, Universal Peace Federation Israel	Dr. Michael Jenkins President, Universal Peace Federation International

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Turning to the wider health situation, Dr. Salmon explained that, based on international agreements, the Palestinians are to run their own health system. Of course, Israel does accept Palestinian patients under special agreements for things such as complicated surgery. The best solution in the long term, he said, would be to create a situation in which the Palestinians themselves are well-equipped and well-trained. Israel does take young Palestinian doctors for full residency, and for training in specializations. This helps to create long-lasting connections between professionals. Dr. Salmon believes that Palestine should move toward a universal health coverage system, and the right strategy should make that possible over the coming decade.

The second speaker was **Dr. James Jackson**, founder and chairman emeritus of the board of the humanitarian relief organization Project C.U.R.E. Before explaining the spirit and scope of this massive worldwide project, Dr. Jackson responded directly to the health needs of Palestine as expressed by Dr. Salmon.

"We don't actually create health systems, but we do see the possibility of using medical infrastructure as a vehicle for peace," he said. "We can meet basic needs, we can cross all sorts of borders, and we are

available to provide our assets in whatever way we can."



After Dr. Jackson spoke of being invited in 1995 to come to Israel to visit the hospitals and of their early investment, he asked Dr. Salmon what kind of help would be most useful for the Palestinian people now. Dr. Salmon suggested that the best possible help would be to provide scholarships for 100 brilliant Palestinians. "Equipment is important, but it is also the easiest thing to give. Training is invaluable," Dr. Salmon said.

Dr. Jackson then explained the fundamental approach of Project C.U.R.E., which was founded in Colorado in 1987 to address the staggering shortage of medical resources around the world. It is now the world's largest distributor of donated medical supplies, equipment and services to doctors and nurses serving the sick and dying in more than 135 countries. "We provide effective aid, which can also be a bridge of peace, but it all starts with relationships," he said.

The project provides help to a country only if the government invites them to bring it, "but we have to earn that invitation, and the process usually starts with a grass-roots request for help."

Dr. Jackson spoke of an occasion when they were providing badly needed medical aid to hospitals in Israel. When some Israeli doctors asked Dr. Jackson if he would be able to go into Palestine to set up rehabilitation centers there, "I said, 'Of course,' and eventually we went in and spent millions of dollars helping to establish rehabilitation centers." The success of this led to more requests from the Palestinians and more help provided.

Then, "when the Palestinians found out that it was the Israelis who had encouraged us to come and help them, of course it built goodwill."

As he drew to a close, Dr. Jackson addressed Dr. Michael W. Jenkins, the president of UPF International: "Dr. Jenkins, I think you know my heart, and you know how excited we are to be able to build those kinds of bridges all over this world by utilizing this crazy common denominator of health care."

Dr. Jenkins took us on a whistle-stop virtual tour of Project C.U.R.E.'s many projects, adding: "Dr. Jackson, we are thrilled at your work and the possibility of UPF cooperating together with you to open up these relationships. You've got so many, and I hope a new one opened up today with Dr. Salmon."

Then he turned to Hod Ben Zvi, chair of UPF-Israel, asking how Project C.U.R.E. might be able to help in Palestine.

Mr. Ben Zvi said he saw many new avenues for cooperation emerging. He referred to a recent discussion with Israel's minister of regional affairs. In fact, he said, on the same day that this webinar was taking place, the minister was convening the ministers of health for Israel and Palestine in order to advance just this kind of cooperation.

Mr. Ben Zvi made a specific proposal related to medical equipment. He referred to an Israeli NGO called Yad Sarah, which provides, at no cost, medical equipment which people can borrow to take care of themselves in their own home. He suggested that the same system could be applied in the Palestinian areas.



As Mr. Ben Zvi mentioned the name "Yad Sarah," we heard a chuckle of recognition from Dr. Jackson, who said: "You hit the target on that! Meir Meyer, who is the [vice chairman] of Yad Sarah, is a very dear friend of mine. We've given Yad Sarah millions of dollars. And that's where we're strong: We can go in and help others with ventilators, respirators, whatever it is."

Dr. Jenkins then introduced other UPF representatives from Europe and the Middle East: **David Fraser Harris**, who spoke of webinars focusing on health matters featuring doctors and health ministers from North African countries such as Morocco and Tunisia; **Umberto Angelucci**, the chair of UPF for the Middle East, who spoke of UPF's efforts in Afghanistan; and **Jacques Marion**, the co-chair of UPF for Europe and the Middle East, who expressed interest in connecting Project C.U.R.E.'s work to UPF's network in Africa.

As different parts of the world were mentioned, it became clear that Project C.U.R.E. really is active everywhere. Alongside real opportunities to improve the quality of health care in Palestine, we could see great potential for cooperation in many parts of the world, where health care and building bridges of peace overlap. As Dr. Jackson said, "It's all about relationships."

