

**Conflict management and crisis prevention in the ongoing crisis –
The Middle East conflict from the perspective of civil society.**

With the outbreak of the second (“Al Aqsa”) intifada in September 2000 the Middle East conflict returned to a new spiral of violence. Seven years of relative tranquility between the 1993 signing of the Oslo Agreement and the failure of the Camp David summit in July 2000 had clearly not been used to secure peace, in what is arguably a classical example of missing an opportunity to prevent and deal with conflicts.¹ This failure applies equally to the international, state level with its multiple levels of mediation and intervention (UN resolutions, American mediation, etc.) as well as to the level of civil society, with numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) doing their utmost to set up lasting “people-to-people” structures for dialogue, with the goal of avoiding and dealing with conflict. Similar comments can be made about the “internal” strife between Israel’s Jewish majority and Arab minority, which in the wake of the second intifada has developed its powerful potential for conflict in a highly dramatic fashion.

The present paper attempts to sketch these two conflicts from the perspective of civil society viewpoint, and then to portray the efforts by Israeli NGOs – whose activities are supported by western donors - to prevent and deal with conflict.

¹ On the concepts of “conflict prevention”, “crisis prevention” and “dealing with conflict”, cf. Andreas Mehler/Claude Ribaux, *Krisenprävention und Konfliktbearbeitung in der Technischen Zusammenarbeit*, gtz Eschborn (unpublished ms.); Ulf Engel/Andreas Mehler (ed.) *Gewaltsame Konflikte und ihre Prävention in Afrika*, Hamburg, Institut für Afrika-Kunde, 1999.

1. Between peace and justice - The ongoing crisis in the Middle East

Practically no other conflict in the last hundred years or so has been as intractable on a long-term basis, or to some extent so “internationalized” as that between Jews and Arabs (now commonly referred to more accurately as Israelis and Palestinians). In its current form it has lasted since Israel’s 1948-49 “War of Independence” (which the Palestinians refer to as the “Nakba” or “Catastrophe”), but its roots go right back to the beginning of Jewish acquisition of land in what was then Ottoman Palestine at the end of the nineteenth century. Tellingly, the Jewish State’s “birth certificates” indicate the international dimension of the conflict: first the 1917 Balfour Declaration, in which Great Britain promised the Jewish people a “homestead” in Palestine, and then U.N. General Assembly Plenary Resolution 181, which in 1947 declared the partition into a Jewish and an Arab state of what at the time was the British mandatory territory of Palestine. The subsequent path of the Middle East conflict is literally “littered”, not to put too fine a point on it, with UN resolutions, the most important of which – concerning Palestinian refugees’ right of return (1948), and above all Resolution 242 about returning occupied territories (1967) – still lie at the heart of all efforts to achieve peace.²

Considering this situation from the perspective of conflict management and crisis prevention, there are two aspects (or issues) which are of special interest:

- How is it that, despite these multiple possibilities for intervention, accompanied by the backing of sanctions in international law, the international community’s contribution to solving the conflict has been so limited?
- How can the basic principles of peace and justice (which in this case seem to be incompatible) be reconciled?

The first question is only indirectly relevant to the topic of this essay, concerning, as it does, ways that states or interstate organizations bring

² See A. Timm, *Israel, Geschichte des Staates seit seiner Gründung*, Bonn, 1998.

influence to bear. However, it has considerable repercussions for civil society and the work of NGOs, with the latter frequently being forced to act as both ground-breakers and stopgaps to offset the inadequacies of the “official” authorities. This has had both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages were a result of the way that non-state or pre-state organizations took advantage of the opportunity, smoothing the way behind the scenes for official contacts and negotiations. Here the most spectacular example is the pre-Oslo process, when Israeli “academics” (who later constituted the Economic Cooperation Foundation) and representatives of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) met in Oslo under the auspices of a Norwegian NGO and steered a course for the “peace process”, which is so symbolically bound up with the name of the Norwegian capital and which today – on both sides – appears to have largely been discredited. The disadvantages are all too glaringly obvious: the NGOs were burdened with too much responsibility, and were consequently blamed for whatever subsequently went wrong on the international level, with all the attendant results for the vital relationship of trust between both sides’ civil societies.

Beyond this narrower context, there is obviously no way that the asymmetries and animosities of the state and international players in their mutual relationships could fail to impact on civil societies and their representatives. In this respect, a number of paradoxes can be identified in the Middle East conflict: the State of Israel may have started out as the “offspring” of the international community, but its relationship with the international authorities, and above all the UN, soon became one of intense hostility. This can primarily be ascribed to the numerous UN resolutions by means of which the international community sought to correct the outcome of the various wars between Israel and its Arab neighbors (1948-1949 War of Independence, 1956 Sinai Campaign, 1967 Six Day War, 1973 Yom Kippur (October) War, 1982-85 Lebanon War). From Israel’s viewpoint, in all these cases either the Arabs were the aggressors, or Israel carried out preventive strikes in order to safeguard its own existence. Consequently, for Israel the UN resolutions, which mainly favored the underdog, appeared to be rewarding the aggressors and punishing the side which had been defending itself. In particular, this

animosity was further heightened by the Israeli occupation of Palestinian areas which took place in the wake of the Six Day War, the annexation of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights in violation of international law, and the incipient Jewish settlement activities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

For the Palestinians and their Arab allies, an inverse development can be traced: in 1947, they flouted the United Nations Partition Resolution, and invaded with five regular Arab armies the weak Jewish polity that had just come into being in Palestine, but since then references to all relevant UN resolutions and calls for international intervention have constituted the mainstay of Palestinian demands in the peace process. This is above all true today, where in the dead end of the second intifada only an international solution appears to be possible, but this is rejected by the Israelis who refer to the dismal performance of UN peacekeeping troops in Southern Lebanon (UNIFIL) and elsewhere (Bosnia-Srebrenica, Somalia).

This is not the place to discuss justification for any particular position. Viewed from the perspective of initiatives by civil society to prevent and/or reduce conflict, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that these asymmetries and animosities on the state/international level, as well as the resulting differing perceptions of right and justice, have – by necessity – inevitably impacted on the work of NGOs in the area of peace policy. Only a few Israelis and Palestinians have been able to shake off the prevailing national dictum, which on the one (Israeli) side states: (international) law may be against us, but we are fighting in order to survive, while on the other (Palestinian) side terrorism is justified as a legitimate means in a national struggle for liberation.

The question that invariably arises here concerns the relationship between peace and justice. For crisis prevention, this is an important question that appears in some cases to be practically insoluble.³ This is particularly true of the Middle East conflict, where ethnic-national, religious, historic, linguistic, cultural and psychological contrasts and claims clash with each other. In this

confused situation, justice would scarcely seem to be achievable, as shown by the refugee issue: for the Palestinians, the return of refugees is an inalienable right backed by UN resolutions, while for the Israelis it calls into question the very existence of the Jewish state. In such a situation, the most important task of crisis prevention – including for the NGOs tackling it – cannot be other than to prevent this conflict from acquiring a violent dimension (or, as in the current situation, limiting the violence): in other words, focusing primarily on the subject of “peace” and initially excluding the thorny question of “justice”. Whether this has any chance of succeeding is one of those questions which will decide on war and peace in the Middle East. In this sense, the NGOs’ contribution involves multiple small steps in the areas of confidence-building measures, practical cooperation, encounters and forms of dialogue, and no less importantly creativity in the quest for future solutions which might form a foundation for negotiations on an interstate and international level. In these endeavors, the supporting/mediating foreign NGOs must be careful to observe the basic rule that a stable peace cannot be imposed from outside: “it must be wanted by those who are directly involved. As a result, conflict prevention is oriented in a basically cooperative fashion: the goal is to strengthen those local and regional forces which support and are capable of peace.”⁴

2. The interior aspect conflict– the Arab minority in Israel

When Israel signed the armistice agreement with its Arab foes in 1949, only some 160,000 Arabs still remained in its (expanded) national territory – as much as 14% of the total population. The majority had fled or been expelled to the neighboring countries: bitter arguments still rage in Israel today over the primary cause of this state of affairs. Irrespective of the answer to this question, which is important not in terms of international law but purely on a moral and psychological level, the refugee question – as indicated above – is today one of the thorniest problems for a peace settlement. The problem of

³ Cf. Norbert Ropers, Towards a Hippocratic Oath of Conflict Management?

<http://carryon.oneworld.org/euconflict/guides/themes/pp4.htm>

⁴ E. Lübke-meier, “Rechtzeitiges Vorbeugen”, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 13.7.2001.

the Arab minority in Israel is thus inextricably linked with the Middle East conflict, because there are hardly any Arab families in Israel without relatives among the (former) refugees: "This issue is an integral part of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and affects considerably the Israeli debate about the nature of the state and the meaning of citizenship."⁵

Today – due to high birthrates and as a result of (illegal) immigration in the last ten years – practically 20% of the Israeli population are now of Arab origin, and the trend is upwards. As a result, in all debates about a possible peace settlement and the State of Israel's future character, the "demographic question" is becoming more and more important, because even obstinate supporters of "Eretz Israel" (Greater Israel from the Jordan to the Mediterranean) must today face up to the fact that the more Palestinian territories they wish to retain under Israeli sovereignty, the greater the danger that the Jews will become the minority in "their" state. The debate is therefore already shifting imperceptibly towards a different direction: when peace is concluded with the Palestinians, should an ethnically motivated territorial exchange not be made, with the large Jewish settlements in the West Bank near the border being exchanged for Arab towns and villages in Israel which are just as close to the border?

This discussion, which is, for the moment, not taking place in the open, points to a central problem in Israel today: the question about the Jewish character of the State. Israel is indisputably a democratic state – the only one in the Middle East apart from Turkey. But the foundations of this democracy are at risk, not least because of the mere fact that there is a large Arab minority which does not fit the image of the Jewish State. It is unable to come to terms with its flag and its national anthem, let alone the "Zionist" ideals disseminated in the educational system and the media. The externally most telling example of this conflict is Israel's Independence Day: while the Jewish majority proudly celebrates the founding of the first Jewish State after 2000 years of exile, a state intended to provide a safe homeland for persecuted Jews worldwide for

⁵ S. Ossatzky-Lazar (ed.), *Seven Roads, Theoretical Options for the Status of the Arabs in*

ever, their Arab fellow citizens mourn the loss of their identity, their country and their relatives.

The basic question – a Jewish state or a state of all citizens – has remained unresolved to this day, and as a result of deliberately discriminatory measures and/or plain neglect of the Arab minority, it has lost none of its relevance: rather, recently it has become more acute. Until 1966, Israel's Arab towns and villages were under military administration, and to this day their infrastructure, especially the educational system, is underdeveloped compared with the Jewish sector, and their unemployment figures are the highest in the country. Despite higher demographic growth, more and more land has been expropriated for use by Jewish settlements, and to this day houses which have been built illegally are demolished by the authorities. Dissatisfaction among Israeli Arabs has regularly been vented in violent demonstrations, which peaked – for the moment at least – in October 2000 when 13 demonstrators were shot by the police in the context of the outbreak of the Al Aqsa Intifada.

This unrest might bring about a turning point in Jewish-Arab relations within Israel were it to represent something like the culmination of long-term trends which may perhaps have become irreversible. Portrayed briefly, these trends indicate that within the Arab minority there has been a strengthening of currents which are no longer interested in achieving equal rights or even integration within Israeli society. Unlike the prevailing approach of the past, they rather focus on separation and the assertion of their own identity, going as far as cultural autonomy and solidarity with their Palestinian brethren on the other side of the "Green Line". Some of these trends are of Islamic provenance, others more nationalistic. Above all, the fact that they expressed solidarity with the Al Aqsa Intifada in the October riots and the fact that increasingly both individuals and small cells of Israeli Arabs are involved in terrorist activities of Palestinian groups have (again) aroused the old fears

among the Jewish majority of a “fifth column” in their own country.⁶ In a scenario-based planning game, initiated by the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, the members of the scenario team, comprising representatives of all the relevant social and political groups, consequently concluded that the question of the Arab minority was one of the most explosive problems for Israel’s future (see below).

The Israeli NGOs dealing with aspects of crisis prevention and conflict management are therefore increasingly faced with the challenge of how to include both sides of the conflict – the “external” Israeli-Palestinian and the “internal” Jewish-Arab one – in their work on an equal footing. In the seven “peaceful” years between Oslo and Camp David, this connection was frequently forgotten. As for Israeli society’s other pressing problems – such as the religious-secular divide or the deteriorating social domain – the motto which applied here too was: first achieve external peace, and then the country’s domestic problems can be solved. This focusing on questions of security and peace has not only made Israeli society more vulnerable to external threats, but time and time again has brought about the electoral victory of those forces which tend to favor the cementing of existing relationships – on both the external and domestic levels. One of the consequences of this state of affairs is that the forces of civil society were again expected to assume too much responsibility for solving problems which are nothing short of existential in nature. Nowhere can the failure of the State and its institutions be seen more clearly than in the question of the Arab minority; notwithstanding the major efforts by the NGOs – primarily supported by western donors – to prevent the eruption of violence, this inevitably exceeded their capacity. In the light of these facts, the debate instigated by nationalist and conservative forces about support by western donors – above all the European Union – for pro-peace NGOs seems really disturbing: of all things, those who have gone all out to prevent the conflicts from taking on a violent form are now being pilloried for having accepted external support –

⁶ Cf. A. Ghanem/S. Ossatzky-Lazar, *The Al Aqsa Intifada*, study paper (as yet unpublished), Givat Haviva, May 2001.

support which according to all common-sense criteria should really have come from their own state.

3. Moving between the Middle Eastern worlds – civil society and crisis prevention

Civil society in Israel and the Palestinian territories

Fundamental differences exist between the structures of civil society in Israel and Palestine with regard to their development and agendas. On the Israeli side, in the last 50 years numerous civil society players have evolved in the framework of a state structure, following the multiethnic, religious-cultural, philosophical-political and socio-economic lines of society.⁷ In contrast, on the Palestinian side, a highly diversified movement of activists has also taken shape, which developed however not within the setting of a state but in resistance to the Israeli military administration which began in 1967. In Israel, the organizations of civil society constitute a supplement to parliamentary democracy, and often also act as a corrective to the political system's undemocratic traditions. The individual players' interests may be divided into the four fields referred to above: 1. Dealing with the ethnic diversity of the population: special reference must be made here to the practically separate civil society formation of the Israeli-Arab population. 2. Discussing the relationship between the state and religion. 3. Arguments about the future of Israeli-Palestinian relationships. 4. Debate about social questions, the rule of law and equal rights.

In the Palestinian territories, the interests of the civil society players, who in 1967 were pushed underground by the Israeli Military Administration, initially focused on ending the Israeli occupation and achieving national independence. The movements here may be divided into three main camps, with nationalist-traditional, Marxist or Islamic leanings.⁸ The absence of

⁷ On this subject cf. A. Timm, Die israelische Zivilgesellschaft vor neuen Herausforderungen, background paper, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Israel, 2001.

⁸ See: A. Jamal, Zivilgesellschaft ohne Staat, in: F. Ibrahim/H.Wedel, Probleme der Zivilgesellschaft im Vorderen Orient, Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 1995.

sovereign structures and the neglect by the Israeli military government lead the different political-ideological forces in the Palestinian territories to assume quasi-state functions in competition with each other, in other words, i.e. they set up or maintained, among other things, economic, social and medical infrastructures.

The forces of civil society and the peace process

The contributions by the regional forces of civil society to the peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are very unlike, due to the differences in structures and agendas described above, as well as the inequalities in the balance of power of the civil society players caused by political-economic reasons. In Israel in the 1970s and '80s, the influence of what was known as the "peace camp", which pushed for reconciliation and understanding between the two peoples, extended upwards to the political decision-makers. In contrast, the interest within the Palestinian territories in peaceful coexistence with Israeli society, which was identified with the occupying power, was present on a low level only. The common denominator uniting the different groupings was their anti-Israeli dogma. Only with the recognition of the PLO as the Palestinians' official representation and the beginning of the Oslo Process, in which the two peoples' rights to national independence in the region were confirmed both implicitly and explicitly, did the moderate forces among the Palestinian players who supported peaceful coexistence with the Israeli state, receive a boost. Beginning in the early 1990s there were numerous initiatives, e.g. by academic institutes, peace and women's movements, environmental associations, etc., which resolved to jointly pursue common interests and in this way contributed actively to bringing the two civil societies closer. However, both at the time and also at present, such initiatives have depended greatly on the progress of the peace process, particularly on the Palestinian side, where the right to independence and self-determination, which remains the supreme goal, has not been implemented and civil society players are very dependent on quasi-state institutions such as the Palestinian Autonomous Authority (PA).

The Palestinian population's increasing frustration over the continuing Israeli occupation, the economic situation which is exacerbated by the closures, and the dissatisfaction with the policy of the PA, which in their eyes is incapable of guaranteeing legality, security or welfare, strengthen the locally organized radical and in part militant factions which wish to achieve the establishment of a Palestinian state without consideration for Israeli interests and challenge the legitimacy of the Palestinian Autonomous Authority. Since the outbreak of the Al Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, the power struggle between the political factions in the Palestinian territories has also increasingly been played out in the public arena.

On the Israeli side, the peace camp has suffered a major setback. The failure of the Camp David negotiations, the increasing number of terrorist attacks perpetrated by Palestinian extremists and the violent clashes in Israel between Israeli Arabs and the security forces were interpreted by many former peace activists as a betrayal and the rejection of the idea of peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arabs. Many peace initiatives discontinued their work, binational cooperation both between Israeli-Palestinian and also Jewish-Arab organizations became a rarity. This was widely interpreted as confirmation of civil society's inability to make a fundamental contribution to the peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict. However, such views ignored the fact that the surviving initiatives could act as models for successful conflict management by civil society. The following section will present a number of actors in Israeli civil society who are fighting within the binational framework for a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or who are tackling in Israel itself the Jewish-Arab conflict which, as shown above, is closely related. The selection of organizations/projects was made from the perspective of the work of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) in Israel, and in no way claims to be a comprehensive presentation of the position of all those involved.

4. The long road to peace – Israeli non-governmental organizations in the Middle East conflict

The Economic Cooperation Foundation –think tank and practical crisis management

Set up in 1991, the Economic Cooperation Foundation (ECF) is well-known because of its founders – Ron Pundak, Yossi Beilin and Yair Hirschfeld, all players in the regional peace process – as a think tank for developing strategies for the peaceful shaping of Israeli/Palestinian/Arab relations. Apart from the scientific analysis, the results of which are intended primarily for political decision-makers and offer guidelines for action in order to bring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to an end, the ECF is also involved in practical regional initiatives which promote cooperation and hence peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians/Arabs. The measures concern sectors of society, which like the political arena involve issues with fundamental potentials for conflict: security, the economy, medical care and the environment, as well as sectors in which strategies such as science and education are to be developed jointly in order to prevent conflict in the future.

ECF in the Israeli/Palestinian/Arab conflict

One project co-initiated by the ECF is “Cooperation North”, which is described in detail in the next section. This is a model for a comprehensive concept of crisis prevention and conflict management, which takes into account both the socio-economic and the political-psychological aspects of the Israeli/Palestinian/Arab conflict. Many years of expertise in handling conflict, as well as acquiring and networking of experts, have also made the ECF a comparatively successful player in the area of acute conflict management. Consequently, ECF representatives have often functioned as intermediaries and communicators of information between both sides’ military and civil security forces or local political representatives. As a result, on a number of occasions it was possible to prevent provocative actions by one party or the other and to improve the security of the local population. Although such mechanisms to stabilize the situation are still confined to a few areas only, they might however serve as a model for acute conflict management. Apart

from these measures, which primarily address personal and military security, the goal is also to alleviate the socio-economic consequences of the conflict which primarily affect the Palestinian population, so as to reduce additional potential for frustration. Just two examples from the Jerusalem area: When the unrest erupted in October 2000, telephone connections in East Jerusalem were disrupted for weeks because Israel's telephone company employees did not dare venture into these parts of the city for security reasons; the collecting of garbage and other similar services were suspended for the same reason, all of which made life very difficult for residents. By arrangement with the political decision-makers of the city of Jerusalem, the various parts of the city and other partners, the ECF managed to resolve these problems and to establish itself as a mediating body on a regional level. Based on this kind of "first aid measures", the ECF has developed a concept for acute conflict management which outlines the most important measures to be implemented:

1. Personal security
2. Ending the economic blockade
3. Removing damage
4. Reviving cooperation projects already begun, with the help of third parties.

The ECF is currently committed to disseminating this concept, which involves no preconditions to be met by the individual parties, on a regional level.

ECF in the domestic Israeli Jewish-Arab conflict

Apart from acute crisis management in relationships between the Israeli and Palestinian populations, the ECF, together with other institutions such as Haifa University, is also working to improve Jewish-Arab relations in Israel. For this purpose a Jewish-Arab forum has been set up with experts representing practically the entire political spectrum who develop or evaluate strategies in working groups in order to achieve greater equality for the Arab population. This has already led to one project which has had a certain degree of success: lobbying together with other national initiatives for the needs of Arab Israelis, which has resulted recently in Knesset approval of a four-year program amounting to some one billion US dollars for the Arab sector which

was already planned under former Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Another innovative project is the development of a kind of code of conduct for the Israel Police when dealing with Arab Israelis. As confirmed by the Amnesty International report which came out recently, the way the police act with respect to Israeli Arabs, for example during public demonstrations, but also in day-to-day routine checks, is influenced by prejudices, and as a result marked by disproportionate harshness. By cooperating representatives of the Israeli security forces the ECF tries to make police officers aware of this problem area during both initial and in-service training, with the aim of gradually bringing about a change in behavior.

ECF in civil society

The Economic Cooperation Foundation is probably one of Israel's most important civil society initiatives that is dedicated to deal with the Middle East conflict in a peaceful fashion. The examples given above are a cross-section of the wide-ranging concept of conflict management pursued by ECF in an attempt to do justice to the complexity of the Israeli/Palestinian/Arab conflict. The latest developments in particular have proven that the ECF, unlike many peace initiatives in Israel which have been forced to discontinue their work because of insufficient participation, is regionally recognized as possessing expertise in peaceful methods for dealing with this Middle East conflict: the highly ramified network which has developed over a period of years guarantees constant and sustained debate over crisis prevention issues and the continuation of the regional peace process.

A diversified model for conflict management – “Cooperation North”

Since 1996, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Israel/Palestine has been promoting knowledge of European models of cross-border cooperation with the help of experts in border cooperation, such as that which exists between Germany, Switzerland and France in the Upper Rhine region (Tri-Rhena Region). In 1997 a workshop was held in Brussels with Israeli and Palestinian participants from the Israeli regions of Gilboa, Haifa, Beit Shean and the Palestinian autonomous areas around Jenin, in which participants heard

about the concept of regional cooperation and contacts were arranged for them with a view to subsequent implementation of the project. Subsequently a number of meetings took place with the representatives from both sides, and on February 15, 1999 the signing took place in Haifa of an unprecedented agreement on cross-border cooperation between the Palestinian “Governorate” of Jenin and the neighboring Israeli regions of Beit Shean, Gilboa and Haifa.

Regional integration and cooperation constitute a decisive instrument for joint development work, capable in the long run of contributing to regional stabilization and pacification. In cross-border cooperation, known worldwide as CBC, the emphasis is laid on the common ground in neighboring countries’ economic, political and cultural interests and common strategies are developed for how these can be transposed into hands-on measures to the benefit of both sides. This concept was summarized by the European Council in 1996 as follows: “A cross-border region is a potential region, inherent in geography, history, ecology, ethnic groups, economic possibilities and so on, but disrupted by the sovereignty of the governments ruling on each side of the frontier.” In CBC, therefore, right from the beginning the focus is on the economic, social, ecological as well as political integration of neighboring regions. Instead of the normal approach of developing strategies separately, a heightened level of cooperation is fostered. As a result, this also means dismantling psychological barriers in the form of historical stereotypes and reducing the expression of hostilities in areas of conflict.

The area covered by the Cooperation North project covers a large proportion of the northwest of Israel and parts of the West Bank under Palestinian administration. A number of reasons dictated the selection of this region: unlike other regions, in principle the demarcation of the border is clear, and there are only a few small Jewish settlements in the Palestinian areas, whose inhabitants are not among the extremist settlers. A total of 233,000 Palestinians live in the area, and 290,000 Israelis. A large part of Israel’s Arab population lives in the districts of Haifa, Beit Shean and Gilboa. Located in outlying districts, their towns and villages are often poorer than other towns

and villages in Israel, with inferior infrastructure and higher levels of unemployment. On the Palestinian side, as a result of years of political uncertainty the situation is even more dire: often the simplest urban infrastructure, such as sewage and refuse facilities, is lacking, with negative ecological consequences also for the Israeli border areas, e.g. in the form of untreated sewage, which in particular inflicts damage on the Israeli side during the spring floods. Under the Cooperation North plan, such problems would be solved by mutual agreement, and above all there would be long-term support for the region's economic development. One sub-project is the establishment of an industrial park in the area around Jenin, from which all sides would benefit in the form of increased trade, expansion of infrastructure, etc. Strategically the region would act as a junction between the port city of Haifa and the Jordanian capital, Amman, which would be beneficial to the parallel expansion of the project in the direction of Jordan as well as to the creation of a regional economic cooperation area. Another decisive reason for implementing the project in this region was the fact that on both sides there was a willingness to talk which was expressed even at times when political events in Israel and the Palestinian autonomous areas were not exactly conducive to dialogue.

The political concept agreed jointly by the Israeli and Palestinian participants emphasizes the principles of cooperation on an equal footing, with the goals of securing lasting social and economic development, bringing about neighborly, peaceful relationships, and in this way making a long-term investment in regional peace. The resulting program concentrates on the implementation of the following measures: 1. Expanding the regional and cross-border infrastructure, i.e. roads, electricity, water supplies, sewage management, garbage disposal, and so on; 2. Economic cooperation in the areas of industry, tourism, agriculture; 3. Promoting dialogue between the populations, in particular between youth, and 4. Cooperation in the area of security.

Cooperation North in practice

The Cooperation North (CN) program is coordinated by a Steering Committee,

Committee, which is comprised of an equal number of Israeli and Palestinian members, and both plans and monitors the activities of individual working groups, which also have a matched membership from both sides. These groups are responsible for the areas of infrastructure, economics, education/culture and security. The intention – which cannot be implemented at present – is that those involved will discuss developments at regular meetings and reach joint agreement about new measures. In the first two years, by way of preparation for the actual implementation of the program, intensive exchanges took place with experts from areas with similar conflicts such as South Africa and Northern Ireland, but in particular trilateral cooperation with experts from the Tri-Rhena European region was also consolidated in order to become more familiar with the concept of regional cooperation. As part of this approach, CBC representatives visited the Upper Rhine area (March 1999) in order to get an idea on the spot of the successes and problems; experts from the Upper Rhine area came to Israel to carry out an assessment (June 1999); and experts and politicians gave lectures to Cooperation North representatives, for example about aspects of cross-border environmental policy (German member of parliament Marion Caspers-Merck, March 2000). There was great interest in two workshops which were held in February 2000 in Ramallah and Jenin with the German coordinator of the Upper Rhine Joint Center for Police and Customs Cooperation, Bernd Belle, who spoke about the cooperation between the German and French police. Senior Israeli and Palestinian police officers took part in these events. It became clear that certain concrete cooperative measures, such as joint training events, exchanges of liaison officers, and joint analysis of crime patterns and figures are not yet possible in the framework of Cooperation North, in part because of the political situation. However, the long-term goal provides for institutionalizing communication between both sides' security forces, particularly with respect to the establishment of a Palestinian State. As has been seen recently, confidence-building measures between the military and civilian security forces in Israeli-Palestinian cooperation are crucial building blocks in the creation of regional stability. Particularly in a politically heated atmosphere, such relationships can help prevent instances of unnecessary provocation and violent clashes.

Preserving Cooperation North during the crisis

The dramatic deterioration in the political situation towards the end of 2000 sorely tried the fledgling Cooperation North and its initiatives. In light of the current violent clashes, which have led to loss of life on both sides also in the area around Jenin, there is hardly any chance of official on-the-spot Israeli-Palestinian cooperation. Things have come to a complete halt on many levels of cooperation and communication between the two societies. The plans to establish an industrial park around Jenin and the activities designed to build up social-cultural dialogue have had to be put on ice. This applies especially to “people to people” programs, i.e. exchanges between local initiatives, interest groups and schools with the goal of above all reconciling both sides’ younger generations in order to develop a stable basis for peaceful dialogue. Nevertheless, both sides are continuing their work by trying to implement on a unilateral basis measures which have already been decided on. At the moment, direct exchanges between individual participants about on-the-spot developments or brainstorming new strategies, are practically only possible abroad. As a result, in the autumn of 2000 (after the outbreak of the new intifada) the Israeli project coordinator and her Palestinian colleague traveled together to Europe, where they studied concrete examples of cross-border cooperation in a number of regions. In the area of civil security, the confidence-building measures taken prior to the outbreak of the crisis bore their first fruits. Because of the committed attitudes on the part of all those involved, and in particular constant exchanges of information about the situation, it was possible to at least selectively contain conflicts, or sometimes to completely prevent rioting. Efforts are currently being made to establish “islands of certainty” which are intended to serve as models for the peaceful management of conflict at times when violent clashes are taking place in other areas. Special stress should be laid here on the role played by individual “multipliers” (?) from the northern regions and their willingness – if possible demonstrated publicly – to continue cooperation. It becomes clear here how important it is in cross-border cooperation to first base approaches on the local population and their political representatives, who even when the political

situation has deteriorated will still be able to derive inspiration from the positive experiences already achieved.

The Mitchell Report also supported the idea of disseminating Cooperation North as a regional cooperation model on both the national and international levels. Unlike most initiatives in the region, Cooperation North offers a comprehensive concept for a lasting, peaceful structure of relationships between the populations of this region: Israelis and Palestinians, who today are still embroiled in violent struggles over the shape of the future of both nations and territories, will after the settlement of this conflict – which hopefully will come about soon – and the establishment of a Palestinian state have to learn not only to exist side by side, but also to co-exist. As Robert Schumann said as long ago as the 1950s: “Peace is not solely the absence of war but the achievement of common objectives and peaceful tasks undertaken together.”⁹ In other words, regional problems and interests, whether economic, social or ecological, should be tackled jointly in a long-term perspective by the neighboring populations. Cross-border cooperation can offer the requisite framework for achieving long-term goals such as the political stabilization of the region and for implementing lasting, i.e. socially and ecologically acceptable economic development.

Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies (JIIS)

The JIIS is a think tank which for years has been addressing issues of peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians, in this context focusing in particular on Jerusalem’s role and future in the conflict. The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies has been working with the (Palestinian) International Peace and Cooperation Center on these questions for over six years. Apart from academic analysis of issues relating to the regional peace

process, the two institutes also make an important contribution to practical conflict management, especially in the Jerusalem area.

Jerusalem – the sacred bone of contention

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, institutional cooperation focuses on the example of Jerusalem, which both parties have declared to be their capital and religious holy place. In this city, which is Israel's official capital, Orthodox, national-religious and secular Jews, both old-established and new immigrants, and Christian and Muslim Arabs, both moderates and fundamentalists, live side by side and in each others' midst (Jewish settlers in Arab-Palestinian parts of the city). The division of Jerusalem into Jewish and Arab-Palestinian residential areas is obvious: the western part has a modern infrastructure as befits the requirements of a city, complete with modern town planning resources; in the eastern part, there are unmistakable signs of years of neglect by the city administration – residential areas expand with relatively little structuring, so that some of them have developed out of former refugee camps. Extremely complex red tape and unresolved issues over land have meant that entire residential quarters have been constructed without building permission. The Israelis are able to pull these down with the backing of the law, and such demolitions occur time and time again, contributing – understandably – to great frustration as well as outbreaks of violence.

Conflict management by JIIS and IPCC

In their research work, the JIIS and the IPCC try to work out starting points for solutions to the city's diverse conflicts, and hence to jointly solve the "Jerusalem question", which is of such symbolic importance and time and time again and again is a contentious issue in political negotiations. "Vision 2020" is the name given to a scenario which sees Jerusalem as an open international city as well as a capital for the Israeli and Palestinian populations. Jerusalem is to become a model for the peaceful solution of regional conflict. A total of 12 Israeli-Palestinian working groups are specifically considering how this idea can be implemented in detail, debating

⁹ Quotation from: A. Kacowicz/Y. Bar-Siman-tov/O.Elgröm/M.Jerneck (eds.), *Stable Peace*

the political, economic, legal, social and cultural issues. Third-party expertise is also called upon, and in this connection an exchange of experience has been organized with the reunited German capital of Berlin. Having for decades been a divided city, today Berlin has a wealth of knowledge in integrating previously divided populations and districts.

In addition to the scientific work which adopts a theoretical approach in addressing the different levels of conflict in the problematics of Jerusalem, in order to pass on the resulting concepts to political decision-makers the two institutes also participate in the hands-on peaceful settlement of conflict. As a result, they function as a mediation body for disputes between Jewish and Palestinian-Arab neighborhoods, or Jewish employers and Palestinian employees. So as to disseminate the experience gained in this process as widely as possible, a joint mediation center has been set up where people with the requisite professional qualifications, such as lawyers or social workers, can be trained as mediators and then act as such in their home settings.

JIIS and IPCC in civil society

The two institutes constitute a source of theoretical and practical specialized knowledge of the subject of resolving conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians, particularly over the question of Jerusalem. As a result, their concept of Jerusalem's future status provided a basis for discussion in the Camp David negotiations in July 2000. The widespread acceptance of their work by all constitutes a success story which is above all based on the professional cooperation on an equal footing that takes place between the two institutes, as is demonstrated time and time again in public also by their representatives such as Prof. Rami Friedman (JIIS) and Dr. Rami Nasrallah (IPCC). It may well be that it is specifically this atmosphere of respect and reciprocal recognition which makes this cooperation so unique and exemplary.

5. The long (?) road to reconciliation – dialogue to avoid conflict within society

Israel 2025 – Dialog within society about the future

Violent explosions of conflicts in a society often occur unexpectedly, but on subsequent investigation of their causes it generally becomes clear that there were early warning signs which the political decision-makers failed to heed as a result of a classic “head-in-the-sand” policy. Israel is no exception to this rule: for many years, as the external Israeli-Palestinian conflict continued, the stresses and clashes within highly heterogeneous Israeli society were ignored. However, the faltering peace process and uncertainty about further political development of relationships with the Arab states have made clear that above all Jewish-Arab relations within Israel are not in good shape and there is no consensus within society about the cooperation of Jews and Arabs in Israel. This area contains major potential for conflict, which in recent months has emerged in violent clashes, such as the bloody rioting of October 2000, in which 13 Israeli Arabs lost their lives when police forces were sent into action with live ammunition, and also in the aggressive protests by Jewish Israelis in Arab localities or the attacks on Islamic institutions and symbols such as the Hassan Al-Beq mosque in Tel Aviv after the May 2001 terrorist attack on a discotheque.

In addition to this center of conflict, which is directly linked to the Middle East conflict, there are many other foci of conflict in Israeli society, such as the arguments about the influence that religious circles have on the country’s political scene, the absorption of the large numbers of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, the widening gap between poor and rich, the influx of foreign workers and so on. However, because of the politically tense situation these issues are suppressed so that on a short-term basis they lose their potential for violence. In accordance with political practice, the conflict-management strategies followed by party manifestos are geared on a relatively one-dimensional basis to specific sections of the electorate, and

therefore the analyses and guidelines for action offered by them tend to be incomplete. Under these circumstances, a comprehensive analysis of society, the conflicts within society, and tendentious developments is not exactly a practical possibility. What is called for is a common discussion of all political directions and interchanges about the future development of society, including which tendencies can be promoted or foiled.

This is precisely the goal pursued by the “Israel 2025” scenario project of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Israel, which was developed on the basis of a 1991/1992 future planning game in South Africa which was also instigated on the initiative of the FES. Scenario-based exercises originally developed as strategic planning instruments for the economy, where they are applied in order to evaluate factors which impact on the economic development in a relevant market segment so as to identify the alternatives for future developments. The goal is to use the different scenarios in order to draw attention to possible dangers and to develop an advance plan for dealing with them. As the two scenario projects in South Africa and Israel have shown, it also makes sense to apply such a future-oriented planning game in political settings. The process and its results will be outlined below using the example of “Israel 2025.”

The scenario project

Following meticulous preparation and dissemination of the idea among representatives of all relevant political trends, potential participants in this planning game, which was structured to last a number of months, met for the first time at the beginning of 1999. At the first workshop, emphasis was laid on participants getting to know each other, as well as explaining to them how this process would proceed and what their role in it would be. Even before this stage a number of people withdrew their agreement to participate, because they were running in the parliamentary elections which had been brought forward and feared negative reactions from the public to what might be perceived as cooperation with political opponents. It was necessary to make it clear to those participants who did turn up for the first meeting that it was not a question of convincing the other person of their individual ideology or

opinion, but simply of presenting his or her views about the state of Israeli society so as to jointly develop alternative ways of acting. The purpose and aim of the exercise were not to produce a consensus about a future which everybody would welcome, but to realistically evaluate all “internal” and “external” influencing factors so as to use this knowledge to devise several plausible future variants. This should help to avoid any shock effect over the course of political development and to encourage decisions about actions, so that certain variants for the future and others can be promoted.

Involvement in civil society and discussion

The 22-participant scenario team, which met regularly over a period of nearly two years, consisted both of representatives from national-religious, Jewish Orthodox, national-conservative trends and also representatives from secular and left-wing as well as Arab and “Russian” (immigrant) groups.

Consequently, the people who got together comprised a largely representative cross-section of Israeli leaders of opinion. In the first few encounters, which generally lasted several days, the team which was divided into two groups concentrated, with the help of contributions by experts, on analyzing the current political, economic and social state of Israeli society. In subsequent workshops every participant took the information obtained through the lectures, as well as their own knowledge and experiences, and first of all converted them into a personal scenario, after which they worked jointly with the others in order to identify the main emphases for drawing up four joint scenarios. In doing so, it became clear that while external factors such as the course of the peace process and relationships with neighboring countries were considered to play a certain role in Israel’s future development, internal factors such as the relationship between the State and religion, dealings with the Arab minority, the development of the economy, etc. are actually far more important. This became clear in the four scenarios which were finally worked out: all of them addressed the relationship of Israel’s Arab minority with the Jewish majority, or the power struggles between secular and religious Jews. The scenarios were then subjected once more to evaluation by a group of academics and political figures who had not been involved previously, in order to review the relevance of the topics addressed and presented. The reactions

expressed were very positive, with everybody stressing the importance of the problems presented for the country's future. However, during and following the first major public presentation of the "Israel 2025" scenario at an FES conference (Berlin, March 2001) on the State of Israel's future it became clear that the topics referred to are explosive and delicate, requiring far more in-depth deliberation. The representatives of the Knesset, political organizations and so on who took part in the event debated the questions raised about the future of the State not only at the congress, but also for weeks afterwards in the Israeli media. Additional presentations of the scenarios to political decision-makers and important institutions also contributed to an in-depth process of discussion. In this way, one goal of the future planning game has already been achieved.

Other "side effects" of the scenario process must also be referred to: the scenario participants, who are either themselves leaders of opinion of their political leaning or have close ties with decision-makers, over a lengthy period actively crossed ideological borders by arguing with their political opponents with an eye to a common goal. They were able to actively test out the possibilities for dialogue and cooperation. People came to know the other side's positions in detail and to respect them, and also established informal networks.

The contribution of such an exercise to preventing social conflicts can perhaps be summarized in the following points:

1. Comprehensive analysis of the society's condition and its inherent conflicts
2. Social-policy dialogue, particularly among opinion leaders and decision-makers, concerning the existing dangers or conflicts
3. Model for the cooperation of social groups in conflict
4. Development of consensus-building instruments.

It is obvious that this type of exercise can never be a high-speed cure for solving acute conflict. However, viewed in the long term it can be a suitable instrument for developing conflict-prevention strategies which are geared to a particular society.

Givat Haviva – Through dialogue and participation to peaceful coexistence

Givat Haviva is an established institution for education and dialogue, which is also known beyond the borders of the region for its programs in education for democracy and peace, as well as for its commitment over many years to Jewish-Arab rapprochement and understanding. Givat Haviva's expertise in running coexistence programs is recognized and in demand worldwide. In these programs, people with a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds – both adults (especially teachers) and young people – learn to understand each other. Acting on behalf of their ethnic/national group, they discuss existing conflicts, particularly those with psychological-cultural overtones, and test out possibilities for dealing with them on a peaceful basis. The concepts used for workshops and seminars, known as “face to face” approaches, have become widely used in countries and regions with similar conflicts, in other words where violent clashes repeatedly occur between nationally, ethnically or religiously different population groups or where societies are split along these lines, a state of affairs which is often reflected in economic and social factors.

In Israel the coexistence programs run by the peace center in Givat Haviva, with its equally matched Jewish-Arab management, focus above all on the psychological components of the conflicts within society between Jewish and Arab-Palestinian Israelis, including work on multilateral projects also between Jewish and Arab groups (Jordan, Palestinian autonomous territories). The programs are developed on the basis of the recognition that the image of other cultures, ethnic groups or peoples is often marked by profoundly internalized stereotypes which have passed down over generations. Clichés of this type play a major role specifically in Jewish-Arab relationships. In order to bring about a change in this area and to provide dialogue between societies with a basis for understanding and respect, Givat Haviva has concentrated on dialogue-oriented work in the educational sector, which plays an essential role in conveying social values.

The program's main goal is to show participants who the other side – which is perceived as a stereotype – is, what similarities and differences there are, and how one can deal peaceably with the differences. This means, firstly, bringing home to the participants the other side's foreign language, culture and history, so that they can learn to understand the Jewish or Arab/Palestinian mentality. As a result, there are professionally led workshops, for example, with high school students from Jewish and Arab schools, which meet regularly over several months and discuss questions of identity, stereotyping and so on. This gives them the opportunity to have a good look at their own prejudices and at clichés about the other group, and to question them.

Jewish and Arab children, as well as their teachers, are also involved in a similar approach called "Children Teaching Children". Over a two-year period the teachers take part in coexistence workshops which examine issues of teaching religion and history and dealing other cultures, and so on. The dialogue which begins in this way is then continued with the school classes. There is great interest in this kind of program, and with its more than ten years of experience Givat Haviva has managed to bring about a sphere which all sides accept for public discussion and exchanges between members of the Jewish and Arab population groups. Another project, still in its initial stages, is the multilaterally designed "Crossing Border" newspaper, in which Arab youth from Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian territories as well as Jewish youth report on their everyday lives and the impact that the political situation has on their personal situation. Copies of the paper are distributed in the three countries, primarily in educational institutions. This constitutes part of Givat Haviva's practical conflict-prevention work.

Another type of program specializes in promoting political participation by the Arab population. This is based on the realization that years of neglect by Israeli politics of Arab interests, generating both economic and social disadvantages, has contributed in no small measure to the deep-rooted frustration and aggression which is reflected in the widespread comment about being "second-class citizens". In order to reduce the gulf that exists between Jewish and Arab Israelis in terms of political influence, Givat Haviva

provides initial and further training management courses for decision-makers from the Arab population in the areas of politics and administration. The idea is that these individuals should subsequently, under improved conditions, i.e. armed with the knowledge about the major political-administrative instruments, represent the interests of the Arab section of the population on both the municipal and the government level. In order to separately promote the political-social participation of the up-and-coming generation, there are other projects which are designed to train and develop the abilities of politically interested and involved Arab youth.

The experiences gained from Givat Haviva's practical work are of course analyzed in the research activities which provide the theoretical underpinnings of education for peace, promoting democracy and coexistence. And in turn the results of the research by the experts who analyze the political, economic and social situation of Arab Israelis impact on the content and further development of the various programs. The study which appeared recently [Translator's note: date instead of recently?] on the situation of the Arab minority and the causes and effects of the Al Aqsa Intifada once again described the discriminatory disadvantages, largely caused by official policy, suffered by this section of the population, but also the deficiencies that are to be found in this group and impede integration into society and greater consideration of their interests.

Peace Child – Getting to know the person behind the mask

Founded in 1988, this non-profit-making organization is dedicated, like Givat Haviva, to education in democracy, tolerance and pluralism, and in this context primarily to dialogue between Jewish and Arab youngsters. Here, however, different methods are applied: 15-16 year old high school students from Arab and Jewish schools meet once or twice a week in theater workshops spread over a number of months, and rehearse for a joint performance which is staged at the end of the workshops in local theaters and other schools. The media enjoy running reports about these shows, the youthful actors and the project generally. The media spin-off makes it possible

to reach broader sections of the population than the target group involved directly.

Process of inner and external dialogue

Every year between 10 and 20 such workshops are run throughout the country, particularly in towns with mixed Jewish-Arab populations and where kibbutzim and Arab villages are contiguous. The young people come from local schools which have indicated their willingness to cooperate. Under the supervision of a social worker and a drama teaching specialist, one of whom is Jewish and the other Arab, theater groups are formed with approximately equal representation of the different ethnic groups. This shows clearly to the young participants the nature of the majority/minority problem, dominance of cultural values, etc. Suddenly both groups' languages, symbols and religions are placed side by side on an equal footing, something which is not normally the case in day to day Israeli realities. In preparatory discussions and role plays the youngsters tackle issues of democracy, tolerance and identity. This somewhat theoretical analysis is continued on a practical level in the actual development of the play. In deciding on the subject matter, the actors, how to turn ideas into action, and so on, participants have to reach agreement on the basis of democratic rules of the game, and accept successes or defeats. In the weekly meetings and rehearsals, which ideally are held alternately in a Jewish and an Arab school, participants are confronted again and again with the world – otherwise often perceived as a stereotype – of the ethnically different group: they get to know the people behind the social masks.

The friendships which develop between the youngsters in the course of the process and about which the media often carry reports are a publicly effective side-effect of this dialogue-oriented project. In the form of a small group of high school students, a demonstration is provided here that, despite all the social barriers and clashes of interests of the ethnic groups, on the basis of equal rights, understanding and confidence, it is possible to jointly agree on goals and how to implement them on the basis of equal rights, understanding and confidence.

6. Crisis prevention – limits and possibilities of the Israeli NGO's activities

At the beginning of the new millennium the peace process in the Near East came to a halt. Both sides saw themselves disappointed in their hopes - the Israelis, who had promised themselves peace and security, and the Palestinians, who had expected independence and self-determination. The sense of progress during the early 90's has been replaced by a widespread public frustration. The NGOs have appeared powerless against the terror attacks of Palestinian extremists and the reprisal actions of the Israeli Army in the Palestinian territories. The willingness for cooperation and continuation of dialogue has diminished on all levels. Radical forces that promise simple solutions that disregard the interests of the other party in the conflict have gained support on both sides. But their concepts will not lead to a long-term appeasement and stabilization of the region. All parties are aware, in principle, that only a return to the negotiation table will bring about a prospect for peace. The activists of civil society that are capable of peace prove their potency here, as they continue the dialogue and the exchange of information and thus maintain a basis, albeit a limited one, for trust. In the long run the activities of the NGOs create the ties that will be necessary when the violent conflict will be over, and the future of Israelis and Palestinians together and not against each other will once more be a viable option. Until then they serve as a model for peaceful coexistence, a function that should not be underestimated in its psychological effect. The contribution of Israeli NGOs to crisis prevention and conflict management in the Near East conflict, regarding both Israeli-Palestinian as well as Jewish-Arabic relations, can be summarized in the following:

- 1) Analysis of the existing conflicts and early warning
- 2) Definition of the conflicting parties' common interests
- 3) Development of tools that are able to bring about consensus
- 4) Presenting models that show the cooperation of conflicting parties
- 5) Information and lobbying for the possibilities of peaceful coexistence
- 6) Limited prevention of conflicts in times of crisis

“Peace is not an abstract goal but a process; it must be built over a long period of time. Building peace must be an organic process, growing at all levels of societies”, says Paul van Tongeren, a Dutch expert on questions regarding

conflict management.¹¹ The civil society projects presented in this essay are able to gain access to many levels of society and are able to provide input accordingly. They cannot shoulder the peace process by themselves. This responsibility falls on the national, but also international political decision-makers and the willingness to embark upon this slow and arduous process.

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¹¹ Tongeren, Paul van, 10 Reflections on Peace Building, Studie for European Platform for Conflict Prevention, http://carryon.oneworld.org/euconflict/pbp/part1/10_refle.htm