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REGIONAL COOPERATION THROUGH LOCAL GOVERNMENT: LESSONS FROM EUROPE, PROSPECTS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

A Panel Session of the First Annual Local Government Conference
Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy
Tel Aviv University

Participants:

Professor Shimon Shamir

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Dr. Ron Pundak

Director General of the Peres Center for Peace

Mr. Efi Stenzler

Head of the Union of Local Authorities International Relations Committee and
Mayor of Municipality of Givatayim

Dr. Hussein Al-Araj

Deputy Minister of Local Government, Palestinian National Authority and
Former Acting Mayor of Nablus

Mr. Meir Nitzan

Mayor of Rishon Le'zion and Chairman of the Union of Local Authorities, Peace
Initiative Team, Israel

Mr. Jacques Wallage

Mayor of Groningen, Netherlands

Councillor Gearóid ÓhEára

Mayor of Derry City Council, Northern Ireland

Ms. Katalin Pallai

Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Hungary

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Program

Greetings and Introductions:

Professor Shimon Shamir, Head of the University Institute for Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation

Mr. Efi Stenzler, Head of the Union of Local Authorities International Relations Committee and Mayor of Municipality of Givatayim

The Middle East Experience:

Dr. Ron Pundak, Director General of the Peres Center for Peace

Dr. Hussein Al-Araj, Deputy Minister of Local Government, Palestinian National Authority and Former Acting Mayor of Nablus

Mr. Meir Nitzan, Mayor of Rishon Le'zion and Chairman of the Union of Local Authorities, Peace Initiative Team, Israel

Lessons From Europe:

Mr. Jacques Wallage, Mayor of Groningen, Netherlands

Councillor Gearóid ÓhÉara, Mayor of Derry City Council, Northern Ireland

Ms. Katalin Pallai, Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Hungary

The First Annual Local Government Conference Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy Tel Aviv University

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A Note from the Workshop Hosts

From 30-31 May 2005, the Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy held the First Annual Local Government Conference, in which many of the critical policy and management challenges facing local government in Israel were discussed and debated by professionals, academicians and members of Knesset. As part of the conference, the School together with the University Institute for Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation were proud to host a workshop on the topic, *“Regional Cooperation Through Local Government: Lessons from Europe, Prospects for the Middle East”*.

The workshop brought together veteran local government officials from Europe, the Palestinian Territories and Israel, to discuss the opportunities, obstacles, and relevant successes in utilizing local government as an instrument of regional cooperation, co-existence and dialogue. The session was co-chaired Professor Shimon Shamir and Mr. Efi Stenzler, Head of the Union of Local Authorities International Relations Committee and Mayor of Municipality of Givatayim.

Keynote addresses were divided into two sections, the Middle East experience, and lessons from Europe. Speakers included Dr. Ron Pundak, Director General of the Peres Center for Peace; Dr. Hussein Al-Araj, Deputy Minister of Local Government, Palestinian National Authority and Former Acting Mayor of Nablus; Mr. Meir Nitzan, Mayor of Rishon Le’zion and Chairman of the Union of Local Authorities, Peace Initiative Team; Mr. Jacques Wallage, Mayor of Groningen, Netherlands; Councillor Gearóid ÓhEára; Mayor of Derry City Council, Northern Ireland; and Ms. Katalin Pallai, Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Hungary. Each speaker shared their personal experiences and provided fresh perspectives on the issue of local government as an instrument of regional cooperation.

The workshop comprised a further outstanding example of the Local Government Conference's capacity to bring local government to the fore, in all its diverse capacities. We would like to give special thanks to The Peres Center for Peace for their assistance in relation to the workshop, as well as to the European Union, The Pears Foundation, the British Council and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung for sponsoring the workshop and for their overall support for the conference.

Professor Yossi Shain



Head of the Harold Hartog
School of Government and Policy

Professor Shimon Shamir



Head of the University Institute for
Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation

Dr. Ron Pundak



“If there is a two-state solution one day, then we will have a vested interest in creating good neighborly relations with the Palestinians, even beyond that of governments. That relationship needs to extend to the level of civil society, to the level of people, to the level of individuals, to the level of communities.”

Dr. Ron Pundak played an important part in starting the Oslo peace process in 1993. Through his work in the early '90s with Israeli-Palestinian economic cooperation, Dr. Pundak established relationships with Palestinian leaders. He became an intermediary between Palestinian and Israeli political leaders who had not yet held official meetings. Dr. Pundak is Director General of the Peres Center for Peace, which sponsors grassroots programs for Israeli and Palestinian peace and cooperation. Dr. Pundak was also part of the core group behind the Geneva Initiative, a non-governmental plan for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement written by Israeli civilian leaders and politicians.

Dr. Hussein Al-Araj



“There are one million Palestinians currently living in Israel and three million in Jordan, Syria and the neighboring Arab countries. This makes regional cooperation through local government essential. We have to work on the local level just as we are currently working with the local authority of Rishon le Zion and with those of other cities.”

Dr. Hussein Al-Araj is the deputy minister of local government for the Palestinian National Authority and was previously the mayor of Nablus. Before that he was also a professor of public administration at Al-Najah University.

Mayor Meir Nitzan



“I suggest that we open a channel of communication through which each mayor can choose a counterpart from the other side and meet with him at least once a month, alternately once in Palestine and once in Israel. These meetings will serve to discuss both side’s problems and will attempt to find solutions to them.”

Mayor Meir Nitzan is the mayor of Rishon-LeZion, Israel. Nitzan has served as mayor since 1983. He has served more than 20 years in office and is considered to be one of the most active mayors in both Israel’s and Rishon-Lezion’s history. Before becoming Mayor, Nitzan served in the Israeli Defense Forces, reaching the rank of Brigadier-General.

Mayor Jaques Wallage



"The army, the government and national parties are in a weaker position to create a new reality than the people in their own local communities are. It is not for the national government or for national entities to begin to solve these problems, it is for local initiatives – mayors, local communities, seeking out their counterparts."

Mayor Jaques Wallage has been mayor of Groningen since 1998. He had previously served as the Alderman of the city of Groningen (responsible for Education and Culture; later Education, Traffic & Transport). He has served as Secretary of State for Social Security and Employment and Secretary of State for Education and Science. Between 1981 and 1989, Mr. Wallage was Member of Parliament for PvdA, spokesman for higher education, chairman of the science committee of the parliament. He served as a Member of Parliament and leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party from 1994 until 1998. Mr Wallage has a Master's degree in sociology, from the University of Groningen.

Mayor Gerry Ó hÉara



"We live with the legacy of all of those centuries of killing and hatred and now we have to actually make friends with the community that inflicted suffering on us, and that we inflicted suffering on. That is hard work; it is really hard work. It requires compromise and it requires that we come at it with an open heart. "

Mayor Gerry Ó hÉara has been involved in community development and cultural activism in Derry and throughout the North West of Ireland for the past 30 years. He was a member of the Ard Comhairle (National Executive) of Sinn Féin and was a member of the 1994 Talks Team at Stormont. He served as Northern Chairperson of Sinn Féin from 1994 to 1999. Elected to Derry City Council in 1989 for the Shantallow area, O'hEara was the leader of the Sinn Féin councilor group until February 2005. He is a Board member of the North/South Irish Language Body, Foras na Gaeilge, established under the Good Friday Agreement. He was elected Mayor of Derry in June 2004.

Katalin Pallai



"I think that in Bosnia, the most important issues were not the big ideological ones, but down-to-earth ones. This is what local government can bring into the equation. It thinks about what is most important for the lives of everyday citizens. It generates local resources and more importantly, establishes some kind of involvement and dialogue between different ethnic groups, on down-to-earth issues, on issues where decisions can be made."

Katalin Pallai has assisted various governments and donors to elaborate decentralization strategies and policies all over the post-communist world. Since 1991 she has worked directly for the Mayor of Budapest as part of the city's policy expert group. She was a participant in the development and implementation of the economic and urban policy reforms in Budapest and Hungary. Ms. Pallai has been commissioned to design and direct courses on decentralization and urban strategies and has published numerous books and articles on urban management, development planning, decentralization and local governance reform.

Introductions:

Professor Shimon Shamir: Ladies and gentlemen, this special session is conducted under the sponsorship of the Peres Center for Peace, of which Dr. Ron Pundak is the director-general, and the University Institute for Diplomacy and regional cooperation, of which I have the privilege of being the director. I shall introduce the speakers shortly but I would like to first say a few sentences by way of introduction.

The life of the individual in many places and in many cases, is regulated by local government more than by central government. Local governments are more involved in the life of the community and, hence, local governments are also involved in communal conflict because conflict is part of life. People in local municipalities thus quite often find themselves engaged in conflict resolution.

Conflict resolution can deal with inter-communal conflicts or intro-communal conflicts. In Israel's specific case this usually means conflicts between Jews and Arabs on the local scale or between Israelis and Palestinians on the broader level. It is this broader level that will constitute the main subject of this session. We will divide the session into two parts: the first part will deal with Israeli-Palestinian relations on a local government level and attempts for cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli municipalities. In the second half, our European guests will respond to what they have heard here and speak to us about their own experiences of local government in Europe. I would now like to call on my co-chairman, Mr. Efi Stenzler, the mayor of Givataim, to say a few words.

Mayor Stenzler: Thank you Prof. Shamir. Israel (a democratic state in the center of the Middle East) has to promote and advance relations with the Palestinian people, the Palestinian authority and the country of Palestine; The question is: How are we going to do it? I hope that in this session we will be able to discuss this important issue in the hope of moving forward. As chairman of the international relations forum of local authorities in Israel, I can assure you that we are making every possible effort to do this, but it is an effort that requires work from both sides. It is not enough for one side to make an effort; it takes two to tango. I truly hope that sometime in the near future both our respective sides can dance this tango together.

Professor Shimon Shamir: Thank you. I would now like to call upon Dr. Ron Pundak, our first speaker. He is one of the architects of the Oslo agreements, has been engaged in dialogue with our Palestinian neighbors for a very long time and now, and as the director of the Peres Center, has initiated and conducted such a wide range of activities that it would be futile even to begin to mention them. The Peres Center is active in cooperation between local governments on the Palestinian-Israeli axis.

Dr. Ron Pundak:

I don't think that it is my duty to dwell on too many details regarding ground level activities, of which I am sure our friends from both the Israeli and Palestinian sides will give you some examples. Instead, I would rather discuss the entire framework and wider context of the issue. The guiding philosophy of our activities, and indeed, my own activities since 1992 regarding cooperation in Israeli-Palestinian society, is based on one fact, that at the end of the day, despite all the hurdles and all the struggles, there will be, standing together side by side, two states; an Israeli state and a Palestinian state.

If we choose to ignore this fact, neither side will survive; it is thus in the interest of both sides. It should happen as fast as possible and through serious cooperation. Because of the tiny distance between the two societies, it will be harder to achieve than was peace with Egypt. The fact that we have within Israel over one million Palestinian residents, makes our situation even more complex. We need to create good neighborly relations which are essential between the two states and the two societies. If there is a two-state solution one day, then we will have a vested interest in creating good neighborly relations with the Palestinians, even beyond that of governments. We need the relationship to extend to the level of civil society, to the level of people, to the level of individuals, to the level of communities. This is what will eventually create the fabric and the tissue of the relationship between the two sides.

We now have two options: (1) To wait until this happens; and in the meanwhile to continue to fight and to harbor and nourish hatred and animosity between us, or (2) the option that we and our good Palestinian friends believe in; despite accepting the fact that there is still occupation and that we have still not reached an ideal situation, it is our duty as community leaders, as civil society leaders, as players and as individuals, to start working from this day, up until we reach a peace agreement and even beyond that – to initiate and to maintain good relations, cross-border, between the two states and the two communities.

There are steps that can be taken from the top down, but in order to create real relationships between people, the best way to change realities is through grassroots, through civil society, or what is known as the bottom-up approach. There is no better vehicle for this approach than the communities themselves, specifically the leaders of these communities, civil society and organized municipalities.

Currently it is not particularly easy to create good relations, because of the security situation, the fence and the wall which is being set up between the two societies. Nevertheless, in spite of these obstacles and against all the odds, we have found that it is possible to maintain dialogue and initiate real relationships between the two sides for the benefit of both parties. It is no secret that there is a huge gap between the conditions that we Israelis enjoy in our communities and

those in which the Palestinians must live. This gap is a hindrance, and if we are interested in creating good relations, we need to narrow it as much as possible.

Whereas Israel's GNP per capita is reaching \$17-18,000 per year, the Palestinian's GNP has now reverted to maybe \$1,000 (from \$15,000 in the past). It is our duty to do everything we can to help the Palestinians raise their GNP. Whereas the infrastructure on the Palestinian side is terrible, on our side it is very well established and sophisticated. Thus, it is our duty as Israelis to assist the Palestinians as much as possible and to bring to the Palestinian side as much global investment as possible in order to create a balance.

We are the neighbors of the Palestinians, not the Americans, not the British, not the Swiss and not the French. We are the neighbors of the Palestinians and wherever there is a possibility for us as Israelis, as communities and as cities, to give a hand to our neighbors and to assist them without trying to either manipulate or to dominate them, we should do it. We should do it without looking down on them from above, but rather eye to eye. We have to tell them that we are here to help. This is not only an investment for the here and now, it is also an investment in the future.

Within the framework of the Peres Center for Peace, we are trying to sponsor as many activities as possible to bring the two communities together; to create cross-border cooperation but at the same time to empower the Palestinian side. A good example of this is the cooperation between Jenin (a Palestinian city in the northern West Bank) and Afula (an Israeli city fifteen minutes' drive away). For years we have been working on creating a relationship between hospitals in Jenin and Afula, for example. In the past we even exchanged doctors and nurses between the two hospitals.

Bringing the two sides together shows each side that, at the end of the day, we are talking about people and individuals who have only one thing in mind, and that is to live a better life and to have a better education. There is a university in Jenin, and there is a university in Haifa; the idea is to connect them and through this, to create bonds between neighbors. We have similarly initiated an agreement between Haifa and Maaleh Gilboa which are both very close to the Jenin area. This agreement attempts to galvanize relations between the two sides of the border.

The activities I have mentioned took place up until the Intifada began; and had steadily grown step by step. Unfortunately these activities suffered immensely at the start of the Intifada. After a year, however, most of the relations between the communities on the both sides started to be formed anew. Those who actually met with their Israeli or Palestinian counterparts, who knew their faces and knew something about the other side, understood the real motives of the other side. They were thus able to quickly renew some of the former good relations. Now that

the situation on the ground is a little better, and more Palestinians are able to cross the border, we are re-creating these contacts and discovering that the contacts which were established in the past are in fact very strong.

Another example of good relations are youth activities. Over the past four years, we have initiated many activities among the youth of the two sides through sport. We twinned the towns of Tulkarem and Kiryat Gat; Jericho and Kiriath Shomona; Issawia and Sderot. The idea of twinning communities, linking students, children and parents, eventually creates the kind of civil society bond that we are seeking. It goes beyond politics; it strengthens politics; it goes straight to the level of people.

In conclusion I want to say that these kinds of relationships between communities and societies show us that cooperation is possible; it is possible at the level of people; it is possible at the level of communities and this being the case, it is also possible at the level of nations. Thank you.



Dr. Hussein Al-Araj:

Thank you Mr. Chairman. Ladies and gentlemen, I am glad to be here; this is my first visit to Tel Aviv University and this is also my first visit to Tel Aviv in the last five years. I used to drive through Tel Aviv on my way to Gaza, stopping on the way to visit family and friends. Unfortunately, due to the situation, it is a journey I have not made in some time. It is my sincere hope that sometime soon I will be able to renew my more frequent visits. It is also my wish that in the near future we, Palestinians and Israelis, will be able to relate to each other as cousins, friends, and good neighbors.

In Palestine, I used to be a professor of public administration at Al-Najah University. I had a profound desire to develop the local government system in Palestine. I wanted to start by learning from our friends, from our cousins, from our neighbors [the Israelis]. I wanted to build municipalities, village councils, joint service councils and regional councils. Unfortunately, in 1994, we discovered that 95 per cent of our localities were without even a sewage system. Over 70 per cent of our localities, (about 648 of them), were without a water system, or electrical systems and had unpaved roads. This was an unbelievable situation. We had a completely deficient infrastructure. After identifying the problems and with the help of donors, we started to make many improvements. This, of course, was before the Intifada began. Unfortunately, once it started, we lost most of the infrastructure which we had just begun to put into place. Again and again we had to start building from scratch.

I believe that progress in this field should come from the grassroots and from within the communities themselves. It is a process which will involve building trust and confidence. Building walls will be of no use to either Israelis or Palestinians. The only way forward is through cooperation. You Israelis are most welcome to visit Nablus, Jericho and Ramallah, but not as a soldiers. My Israeli cousins, I would rather host you as my guests, whether in Nablus or in Ramallah, but as guests in Palestine. I do not like seeing you as settlers; I would prefer to host you as Israeli citizens, in which capacity you would be most welcome to visit my home. This is the only way we will be able to build peace and to create friendship between us.

Peace to the Israelis and to the Palestinians is so crucial and so important due to our close proximity to each other. It is unlike any other peace treaty Israel may pursue. Peace treaties with the Jordanians, or with the Syrians, Egyptians or indeed with any Arab country are unlike pursuing a peace treaty with the Palestinians because there is little distance between us. An hour ago I was in Ramallah, and now I am in Tel Aviv. A professor from Cairo University or Damascus University would take at least a day to arrive here.

I am calling for peace for the sake of my children and your children. Regional cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis is so important. There are one million Palestinians currently

living in Israel and three million in Jordan, Syria and the neighboring Arab countries. This makes regional cooperation through local government essential. We have to work on the local level just as we are currently working with the local authority of Rishon le-Zion and with those of other cities. We are happy and proud of the cooperation between Rishon-le-Zion and the city of Nablus. We sent kids from Nablus and from Rishon le-Zion to Venice together; they lived together as cousins, as neighbors, as friends. They discussed their situation together. We have plans for many other such projects and programs.

I personally would like to see my 'neighbors' in good health and with a strong economy. I don't want to see my neighbor poor because it creates a dangerous environment. We, as Palestinians, are committed to peace, and I believe that the majority of Israelis are also committed to peace. Those who are not are a minority. Let us not allow those few in our midst to take decisions for us. We should stop them together.

This morning I had a meeting with donors from Belgium and France and we assessed the situation in Palestine today. There are 42 towns without electricity and around twenty-five villages and towns without a water system – imagine a community with 5,000 to 10,000 people that don't have a water or electricity system and who still have to depend on a generators to produce their electricity. I think we should all work together to stop this, through the efforts of our local communities. I know that we find ourselves in a very complex political situation, but we should start working very hard to solve things, and to cope with these problems. We should work very hard to build a solid peace for our children, and to make sure that they live better lives than we are living now.

We, at the ministry of local government in Palestine, encourage all cooperation between Palestinian cities and Israeli cities. Two months ago, we managed to bring fifteen Israeli mayors to Jericho to meet with some fifteen Palestinian mayors and it was a very successful meeting. Both sides want this; but it is not enough to want it; you have to work, to do whatever you can do to bring peace. Peace is not only a word. There are many things to work for, political, social, and cultural issues we should work on to empower people and to encourage peace.

If we just sign a peace treaty between the Palestinians and the Israelis, without making any progress on the economic, social and cultural aspects of the problems, I think that we would not really have a true peace. Thus, I am here to convey a message to the Israeli people: we Palestinians and Israelis must live in this area and in this region together, we should respect each other and recognize each other. There should be two independent states living side by side in peace in this region. Thank you very much.

Mayor Meir Nitzan:

Thank you Dr. Hussein al-Araj for your encouraging words and determination to bring peace to our holy land.

I fully believe that the aspiration for peace dwells in the souls of the majority of both Arabs and Jews, Palestinians and Israelis. If there is a difference in the aspiration for peace, in the strong will and the readiness to sacrifice for the sake of peace, it lies only between the elders and youngsters of both nations. While we, the elders, know the blood and suffering caused us and the pain we have caused others, the younger generation, tired of the trials to reach peace, have turned to force and terror, believing that power can solve the conflict by determining who will be the sole ruler of this land. We, the elders of both nations, know very well that no side will win over the other and that there is only one solution – a peace that is reached through the agreement of both sides. It is the only possible solution. In contrast to us elders, there are those among the youth of both nations who might, God forbid, ignite a fire, a blaze which will run beyond our beloved country and both nations as well. Our duty, as the elders of our nations, and as mayors who are responsible for our citizens, is to make every effort to initiate negotiations between the young people of both sides and make them learn from our long past bitter experiences. We should help them to meet, to talk, to know each other, to spend quality time together, to negotiate and eventually to find a way for peace.

We should learn from the wisdom of our forefathers. An ancient Arab proverb says 'Better peace with loss than profit with conflict' and for the Jewish savant, 'Derech Eretz Zoota' Chapter VII says; "Love peace and hate dispute". We the elders of the Palestinian and the Israeli nations, shall make the youngsters change their ideas, encourage them to consider new concepts, and to initiate sincere cooperation for the benefit of both sides. We must set the example for our youth. It is evident that no side in the conflict will achieve all its aims or fulfill all its dreams, but the reward is precious and invaluable – and that reward is peace.

We should approach the negotiations as equals and as brothers. I quote from Jabotinski: "To an alliance between nations, I shall approach mighty as the approaching of a lion to the lions: my brothers, not my winners". I suggest that we open a channel of communication through which each mayor can choose a counterpart from the other side and meet with him at least once a month, alternately once in Palestine and once in Israel. These meetings will serve to discuss both side's problems and will attempt to find solutions to them; we shall lend each other a hand and together we shall approach our European counterparts and ask them for financial help for the rehabilitation of cities and villages in Palestine. Each Palestinian mayor will be accompanied by an Israeli mayor who will support him. The prosperity of Palestine is vital for the establishment of peace in our region. European financial help is obligatory for the elimination of unemployment in Palestine.

As a believing Jew myself, I base my hope for peace on the sayings of the prophet Micha, as written in the book of Micha Chapter 4: "And they shall beat their swords into plough-shares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the Lord of Hosts has spoken. For let all people walk every one in the name of his God, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever." Amen, Inch'alla.



Mayor Jacques Wallage:

I comment on the situation here with some hesitation because I feel that nothing can really compare in Europe to what is happening today in the Middle East. You are unique in so many ways. I believe that it is vitally important, despite all the practical problems and considerations, that people on both sides start asking themselves: "What can we do to cooperate?" "What can we organize?". Thus, it is with great pleasure that I participate in this discussion.

I would like to give you two examples from Europe and the Netherlands which, although they cannot really compare, may perhaps be useful in your own discussions. The first is from just after the second world war, when the situation between the Netherlands and Germany had to be normalized one way or the other. If we look back on the situation after the war, it is very interesting to see that political parties and even national governments were not very well able to cope with relationships between former enemies for a very long time after. Some parties did not even want normalization between the two countries. The consequences of the war had been so severe that they were not willing to see the other country as a neighbor. The debate went on for a long time and only subsided when the cities and villages close to the German border started to cooperate with each other on a practical level. Even when the national government and national parties were still talking about Germany as the enemy, on ground level people were identifying with each others' practical problems. The political situation only really changed because on the local level, and on both sides of the border, people were cooperating in a practical way.

Another example of the importance of cooperation and activities on the local level is in South Africa. When the Apartheid regime was still powerful, there were not many governments in the world that were willing to support the anti-apartheid struggle. In the Netherlands, successive governments refused to boycott the Apartheid government. At the grassroots level, however, there was a very strong social movement advocating support for the people in South Africa suffering under apartheid. Support from abroad did not come from governments but from cities, local communities, private organizations, and NGO's who were all very active. If I look back on that time, (I was the Labor party spokesman for Southern Africa), it is amazing to see how influential in the long run those local activities really were.

As a final example I cite the troublesome situation which the Netherlands finds itself in at the moment. In the Netherlands we have always been very proud of our reputation for tolerance towards migrants and people of different religions and political backgrounds. Over the past five years, however, we have had some especially nasty public debates on the subject of Muslims in the Netherlands. These clashes with their xenophobic undertones, have created an atmosphere in which everything has become politicized. Political parties have used this debate on migrants to show themselves on the one hand as either being very tolerant, and

being all for a multi-cultural society, or to show on the other hand that they are tough on immigrants and immigration citing themselves as pro law and order.

Over the last two years only a handful of mayors, a few local groups, some churches, trade unions, and NGO's, were able to bridge the differences between the different groups involved in this debate. Even today, no minister in the Netherlands is able to conduct a real debate between the different groups because the moment he or she attempts to do so, it gets politicized like oil to a flame, and the entire debate takes the wrong direction once again.

On the ground, however, in the cities, many mayors are now bringing together people from different communities, for example, the Jewish community and the Moroccan community in Amsterdam are having discussions which could not possibly be organized on the level of national governments or national political parties. This is perhaps helpful for what you are advocating here; that the army, the government and national parties are in a weaker position to create a new reality than the people in their own local communities are. It is not for the national government or for national entities to begin to solve these problems, it is for local initiatives – mayors, local communities, seeking out their counterparts. On Wednesday in the Hague, we are hosting a conference for Israeli and Palestinian mayors as well as for people from local authorities in other parts of the world to continue this self same debate and to help you to resolve your differences. I absolutely agree with the suggestion by the Mayor of Rishon-le-Zion: That the mayor of an Israeli city should choose as a partner the mayor of a Palestinian city, and together work through their problems. There are so many practical problems to solve that I am quite sure that everyone in the West Bank and Gaza would be able to make the best use of such support.

It is absolutely necessary for a real change. People should know what is really happening on the other side, and you should be proud of the fact that you are both starting to look in this direction together.

Mayor Gearóid Ó'hEára:

Greetings from Ireland. It is very hard to summarize eight hundred years of hostility and conflict in ten minutes. I think I should get a little longer – we've had a longer struggle than you. In Ireland we have five million people. We are a very small community, and for eight hundred years we have been in conflict with the island to our east, which is Britain. I say this with all deference to colleagues here from Britain because it's almost as much an accident of history as me being born in the community that I was born into. It could have been anybody, and it isn't even material at this point.

The conflict led to the division of the Island in 1922 and a new state being set up in the North. I live in the north-west corner of Ireland in that new state. I did not ask to live as a British citizen; I am Irish to my bones. I don't hate the British, they are a great people, but I am Irish and to live in a state where somebody says 'You are British', and where I was not allowed to talk the Gaelic language for many years, or put up a sign in Gaelic – that is the Ireland I was born into. I grew up on a border road and the partition of Ireland actually meant that where my grandparents lived became a different state. I grew up on a road that had been dynamited. It is always an accident of history where you were born and the situation that you grow up in. I have to say that I was a very angry young man. I am a lot wiser now, a lot older, I have survived.

The situation in Ireland is a lot more similar to what you have here than most of you would think: when the two states were set up, the Northern state comprised one and a half million people, unsustainable as a community. The Unionist community predominated that state and it was drawn up so that they would have a majority. They (the protestants) were a million people and we (the Catholics) were half-a-million people, and they have lived in fear since 1922 that at some stage we would outnumber them, or that at some point, the southern part of the island would come across the border and attack them. Thus, they lived in fear and total insecurity since 1922; seventy-six years of conflict.

In 1920 there was an armed rebellion in the North; also in 1930 and 1940. During the Second World War, there was an insurrection in the North of Ireland; in the fifties, we had a six-year military campaign against the British and at the end of the sixties, in 1969-70, there began thirty years of vicious armed conflict of which we are only now coming to the end. The fear in the Unionist community was that, if we Catholics gained control, if we gained power, we would treat them in the same way they had treated us. They suspected that the southern state was a base for activists who would come across the border to attack them. Some of that was actually true. They are a community who came to our country in the seventeenth century as settlers. The British used them to be settlers, to secure the area and the territory for themselves and now the British don't need them. The military tactics of the seventeenth century are gone

and these people know it. Britain has said it – that they have no selfish, strategic, military or economic interest in being in Ireland. The days of colonies are over. The British will leave and the Protestant community, the Unionist community, know it. So they live in massive fear and insecurity. How do they express that fear and insecurity? With repression. Total repression, military repression, legal repression, discrimination in employment, discrimination in housing, discrimination in every right that a human being could have.

The more layers of repression they put on top of our community, the more angry it made us. It was like a pot boiling over and they kept trying to put the lid on tighter. It did not work and it does not work. Repression actually fueled the conflict and I don't actually believe you can keep people's rights from them and succeed.

Let me tell you about the situation now. A very significant thing happened in 1998 at the signing of the Peace Agreement: the nationalists recognized the state in the north, recognized and acknowledged its existence, which is something they had never done before; the southern state recognized and acknowledged the northern state and took out of its constitution territorial claims which had been there since the se .ing-up of that state. In the North-west we have a Derry city council area which is made up of 110,000 people; between us and the North-west on the other side of the border, there are probably 350,000 people. What we are doing is working very hard, within the North, to create a political coalition between ourselves and the Unionists, to convince them that we want nothing more than to live in equality and with respect.

We are working with the Southern state to harmonize services, and this is just common practical good sense: on an island of five million people, we have two education systems, two health systems, two road systems, two economies, two of everything, and they meet at a line and they go back again. It is extremely unsustainable. The economies of scale that we get in Derry by going to Donegal and saying "Let's do our waste management together, let's build a landfill site, let's work towards cross-border education so that children can be educated on either side and go to university on either side. Let's use the two hospital services because we've a good hospital which specializes in cancer and you have a hospital that is general, and we could share the services. Let's look at all of the issues where we could harmonize services with mutual respect and trust, and do it in a way that is totally respectful."

We live with the legacy of all of those centuries of killing and hatred and now we have to actually make friends with the community that inflicted suffering on us, and that we inflicted suffering on. That is hard work; it is really hard work. It requires compromise and it requires that we come at it with an open heart. It really is not easy even though we are ten years into the peace process; we keep making two steps forward and then taking one step back. The commitment is that we will do nothing else. It used to be the motto that violence was the last option, and I think that violence, the use of armed force, has to be the very last option, and that

is not usually the case in the world. I would prefer to live in a world where violence was not even the final option, where it was not an option at all, but we live in a world where people have understood, through the suffering and the conflict, that it has to be an option that is almost beyond every other opportunity and chance and I think we are getting there.

It's about mellowing relationships between people who regard me as a subversive, as a terrorist, and people whom I would regard as oppressors. I spoke in Ireland last year at a Holocaust memorial and if there is one lesson we should all learn from the Holocaust it is that the first step on the road to repression and killing, is to demonize the human being – when you give someone a label, and you call him a black or a Protestant or a Catholic or a gay person or a Jew or whatever, you demonize the human being and once you demonize the human being on a widespread basis within your own community, then it is not hard to kill those people. So when I hear people talk about terrorists, freedom fighters, patriots and state soldiers they demonize an entire community and that's how holocausts happen. To me the Holocaust is a tragedy on a scale that we pray never to see again, but if there is a lesson to be learned from it, the lesson is that when you de-humanize people then you pave the way for the annihilation of that community.

What we are doing in Derry, what we are doing in the North of Ireland, what we are doing on the island of Ireland, is that we are building bridges. We talk all the time about building bridges between two communities, cross-community within our community and cross-border with the community in the South. We are trying to reach out the hand of friendship to the Protestant community, the Unionist community, and we are saying "Trust us, let us build in the legislation that guarantees your cultural rights, your religious rights, your civil rights, your economic rights – let's make legislation work here". We have done that under the Good Friday Agreement in what we call Section 75 – equality legislation. It is now almost impossible to abuse power and our council has lost a lot of power, as have most councils, because people abused power. I look forward to living in an Ireland that is one, where the politics are based on Left, Right and Center, not on whether you support the link with Britain or you oppose the link with Britain.

To conclude – I was in Jerusalem yesterday and I saw the wall – some people call it the separation wall, others call it the security fence, and we have the same terminology back home. Once you say the word, people know who you are. We have walls but we are working very hard to take down those walls; we have gates in our walls which are open and haven't been closed, some of them, for ten years. We need to take the walls down, we need to take the security fences down, we need to take the barbed wire down. We are working very hard to do that. My life-time experience is this: building bridges is the way forward, not building walls. Thank you.



The panel's overseas participants (l-r), Mayor Jacques Wallage, Ms. Katalin Pallai and Mayor Gerry Ó hEára.



Our panelists, from left to right - Mr. Meir Nitzan, Dr Hussein Al-Araj, Dr Ron Pundak, Professor Shimon Shamir, Mr. Efi Stenzler, Mr. Jaques Wallage, Ms. Katalin Pallai, and Councillor Gearoid OhEara”



Dr. Hussein Al-Araj and Dov Kehat, Director General of the Union of Local Authorities, warmly shake hands. Also seen, Mayor Meir Nitzan (-l) and Dr. Ron Pundak (-r).



Dr. Hussein Al-Araj delivers his address.

Ms. Katalin Pallai:

Thank you. I worked a lot in the post-communist region of the Balkans and I feel that a story from former Yugoslavia, might be relevant here.

Everybody knows about the Balkan war and that the former Yugoslavia used to be a multi-ethnic country with very serious difficulties between its multi-ethnic communities. It was easier during the communist era: Tito could keep the various ethnic groups together. He established local governments already after the second world war. To improve the capacities of these local governments, a long process of consolidation was needed. In the 1980s an average of 40,000 people belonged to local governments, in municipalities in former Yugoslavia. These municipalities were very mixed, however. Most of the municipalities had some urban and rural parts and a relatively dispersed settlement pattern. It was good that the municipalities commanded the work of 40,000 people because it was easier to organize services efficiently, but at the same time the link to some of the population groups, especially to the rural population groups, was not really good or close. So, Tito created Positive Processes.

This was the establishing of little local communities, which were not local governments. These local entities tried to organize people in the rural areas. They were legal entities which aimed to communicate with the people, to help people make decisions and to leverage community resources to certain minimal community projects.

Yugoslavia in the 1980s had the best-quality of life in the socialist bloc, but at the same time, it had very weak rural communities. There were huge disparities within Yugoslavia.

During the war, the fabric of the population was very much destroyed.

Last year I was working in Bosnia; I was the team leader for the human development report on local governance. During the Bosnian war, there was a huge population transfer; actually the war was fought for changing the population configuration of the country, and entire local communities were destroyed. The Dayton Peace Agreement stopped the killing but did not really do a great deal more than that. It established a country that had not more than 3.6 million people with thirteen governments: thirteen ministries of education, thirteen ministries of finance; in short, a totally incredible and unworkable structure. It established a country in which there were three constituent nations: Croats, Serbs and Bosnians. These three nations did not make peace amongst themselves.

To somehow keep the peace they slowly developed a workable system of public administration. After the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement, millions of donors “invaded” Bosnia – with the best of intentions. They brought all the American and Western European patterns of

governance with them, which were quite different from local Bosnian traditions. They imported European local government laws and practices and yet somehow it did not work. Somehow this kind of 'ethnicized' big-picture politics and ideological structure totally destroyed the results which were slowly beginning to form. It was only seven years after the Dayton Peace Agreement when some of the donors realized the importance of going back to the roots. They began to work in the field – within municipalities, helping people to re-establish these little local communities, giving support –trying to re-organize the little communities.

These local communities were not legal entities but the donors still kept pouring their money in to them, adding to the municipality budget in case the municipality was willing to devolve an amount of money for the local community's decision. The idea was that if a local community could get itself organized it could then arrive at the difficult point where it could make choices; very difficult choices such as – do we want a pavement, a water line or electricity, because in some of these communities there was no more than minimal infra-structure. If they could pull together, they could make decisions and they could receive contributions from both donors and the local government. This monetary lubrication of the process, helped to re-establish dialogue and communication.

I think that in Bosnia, the most important issues were not the big ideological ones, but down-to-earth ones. This is what local government can bring into the equation. It thinks about what is most important for the lives of everyday citizens. It generates local resources and more importantly, establishes some kind of involvement, some kind of dialogue between different ethnic groups, on down-to-earth issues, on issues where decisions can be made; not on the big fundamental issues of ethnic identity or about flags and constitutions.

The human development report is the first systematic summary on the condition of local governance in Bosnia. The hope that we came away from Bosnia with was that Dayton created a system. There is very little chance that the public administration system of Bosnia-Herzegovina will be safely improved and that a rational system can be formed at state level any time soon. There might be a chance, however, that a government reaching out to the population can have a positive impact on the quality of governance.

There is a chance that somehow, from a local level, through community organization, from issue-based, down-to-earth dialogue, positive impacts on government could be made. I don't think that local government in Bosnia will develop a high level of efficiency in the next few years, but at least a small change has begun. People have begun to develop some trust towards the public administration and maybe a local leader will appear who, instead of only seeing the big picture issues, will raise some relevant local issues and establish communication within society.

Obviously this is a process which is only just starting. In Montenegro, which is another country now, I can see the same seeds being planted by local communities through the encouragement of these local communities, with resources which are giving people hope for the establishment of such projects. By projects I don't mean anything huge, rather the reconstruction of a school building or a little access road or other such minimal projects. I really think the importance of local government lies in the small steps which somehow become big steps, and may eventually lead us all the way up. Thank you.

