

Making road maps to Peace

**Report of an Israeli–Palestinian
conflict resolution workshop held in Belfast**

September 2003

compiled by

Michael Hall

ISLAND (58) PAMPHLETS

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Introduction

In September 2003 a 22-strong group of young Israelis and Palestinians – brought together by the Young Israeli Forum for Cooperation and the Vision Group – came to Ireland for a five-day programme of study/training workshops and cross-cultural seminars. What was significant about the group was that its members reflected the entire spectrum of political opinion within their two societies. The purpose of the programme was to foster partnerships which might help address the conflict in the Middle East, and to draw lessons from a comparative study of the Israeli–Palestinian and Northern Irish conflicts. This programme, which also assembled an equal number of Northern and Southern Irish participants, was arranged by Margaret Geelan, Omagh.

Impressed by Dr. Joe Camplisson’s work in Northern Ireland and Moldova, Geelan contacted him for guidance on the Belfast part of the programme. Both felt that it would be useful to hear from community activists, representing both sides of the Northern Irish conflict, who were working collaboratively for peace. Island Pamphlet No. 57, *Reflections on Violence*, relates the Israeli–Palestinian encounter with the panel brought together by Camplisson, the primary focus of which was an exploration of lessons learned from the Northern Ireland conflict and subsequent peace process.

This pamphlet focuses on the Middle East conflict. The Israelis and Palestinians, enthused by the exchanges taking place, and encouraged by the trust – and, indeed, the friendships – which had begun to develop between their two groups since their arrival in Ireland, requested that Camplisson facilitate an exploration of their own conflict. Conditions on the ground in the Middle East, particularly restrictions imposed on movement within the Palestinian territories, made it almost impossible for Israelis and Palestinians to do this at home. They felt that the consolidation of ongoing dialogue was vital given that the new, internationally-sponsored ‘road map to peace’ was at that moment seemingly in tatters.

Camplisson accordingly facilitated a conflict resolution workshop, not only to provide the participants with an opportunity to express their innermost fears and frustrations, but to expose them to the experience of assisted analysis and what it might offer them in their search for satisfaction of their own and each other’s identity needs. One of the outcomes of the workshop was a widely-shared belief that a major cause of the failure surrounding the ‘road map to peace’ was the absence within its developmental process of the opinions, feelings and ideas of ordinary people.

This pamphlet is an edited account of that workshop, supplemented by other relevant material drawn from the remainder of the programme.

Michael Hall, *Farset Community Think Tanks Project*

Preliminary comparisons

Before the Israeli–Palestinian group began to explore the Middle East conflict they heard from a panel comprising three community activists –two of whom had been imprisoned as a result of their involvement in the Northern Ireland conflict – and one local politician. A fuller account is given elsewhere¹ but a few comments were felt to be worthy of inclusion here. First of all, the speakers described how readily their respective communities had been sucked into violence.

Tommy Gorman was to spend 14 years in jail as a result of his membership of the IRA, which he joined following the inter-communal violence of 1969:

In August 1969 I witnessed events which made my mind up to become involved in the IRA. Along with many others, I believed that the only way we were ever going to achieve real peace and civil rights was to end the Unionist/British² monolith which was in control of this country. We believed at that time that the force of argument had been tried and wasn't working, and the only alternative was the argument of force.

On the other side of the conflict, Eddie Kinner, who was to spend 13 years in jail for his involvement with a Loyalist paramilitary organisation, recounted a similar progression towards an acceptance of violence:

In 1969 I lived on the Protestant side of the interface. The tension in the area was extremely high; people were afraid of what Republicans were planning to do to our community. We knew that their aim was to overthrow the state.... And, in fact, that period was soon followed by a massive campaign of bombings and shootings by the IRA. So I chose to join a Loyalist paramilitary organisation, the Ulster Volunteer Force, for the purposes of retaliating.

Today, however, both men firmly believe that this use of violence had been totally self-defeating. Gorman felt it had accomplished little:

By the [end] of the 1980s I felt that we had reached a cul de sac with regards to political violence. I felt that it was achieving nothing, except more deaths, more suffering. I urge everyone to constantly evaluate what's happening around them, and to look hard at what they themselves, as individuals, are engaged in. Ask yourself: is what I and others around me are doing really making a change for the better? And if it's *not* making a change which you feel is for the better, if it's simply killing more people, if it's isolating communities even more, if it's pushing people apart instead of bringing them together, then you would need to think really carefully about it all.

1. Island Pamphlet No. 57, *Reflections on Violence*.

2. The Northern Irish conflict is usually depicted as one between a Protestant majority who see themselves as British/Unionist/Loyalist, and a Catholic minority who identify with Irish Nationalism/Republicanism. However, not everyone in Northern Ireland would want to be labelled in this way.

Kinner believed that violence invariably changed people in a fundamental way:

In all conflicts, combatants dehumanise their enemy. When you're in the middle of a conflict situation a lot of what you do is the result of acting emotionally to what is taking place all around you, rather than sitting down and rationalising the situation. Unfortunately, the political leaders who you normally expect to rationalise the situation for people, didn't, and in fact they exacerbated grassroots fears and concerns and exploited them.

The third speaker, Jim McCorry, with a long involvement in community politics, reiterated that assessment:

We spent so many years killing each other here without even trying to touch each other. We lived in isolated communities, we were ghettoised and we killed each other with abandon. And we did not give two fucks who we killed as long as they were not of our religion. I think we need to learn how violence affects us, not only collectively but as individuals. I have seen good human beings, who felt a need to respond to the actions of the state but who in turn became destroyed by their use of violence. I have seen caring fathers, caring sons, become people who, because they felt that their cause justified it, resorted to violence and ultimately enjoyed killing. People change through violence, and begin to mirror their oppressors.

Although committed to peace, all three men had concerns about the Northern Ireland 'peace process'. Kinner felt that expectations should not be set too high:

I don't accept that our conflict as such is over, I feel that the root of our conflict is irreconcilable, but what *is* taking place in this process is a *transformation* from violence to dialogue and political persuasion.

Gorman felt that the process itself was deeply flawed:

I don't accept that there is a peace process here. I believe that it is a temporary measure, a *pacification process*, which is something totally different. I believe that any peace process must be founded on fundamental, socio-economic change, not cosmetic, temporary, cobbled-together change.

McCorry believed that the use of violence by the state had to be confronted before there was any possibility of weaning other elements away from its use.

Unless we totally and collectively address violence by the state we cannot condemn those who use violence in response, nor can we label them simply as 'terrorists'. And people do not seem to want to hear that.

All three activists, however, were united in their desire to work for radical social change, but through peaceful means. McCorry spoke for all of them:

We need to show in our personal, social, economic and political relationships that another way is possible. I believe we need to offer a vision of what can be, we need to work towards change and an understanding of those engaged in violent conflict, for whatever reason. We need to build a groundswell of understanding and acceptance of the need for another way, so that those who espouse violence as the only way forward are confronted, exposed or changed.

That view was shared by the fourth member of the panel, Chris McGimpsey, a member of the Ulster Unionist Party, whose constituency office was in a Protestant working-class district of Belfast.

Many people spend their lives in Ireland, and I suspect in the Middle East, claiming that every violent act of their own side is a reaction to some violent act of their enemy. ‘You started it...’ The reality was that it was *the conflict between two communities* which caused the trouble – not this community, or that community, but *both* communities. Communities have first of all got to reject violence, and I think that’s what they’re doing [in Northern Ireland]; they haven’t completed that process, but they’re working on it. The political leaders have also got to take their lead from the community. But you also need to work on the building of trust between the two communities.

The similarities, and differences, between the Northern Ireland and Middle East conflicts were then discussed in a workshop facilitated by Barney McCaughey.

Note: The following initials are used to identify speakers in the remainder of this document:

Organisers: **JC** (Joe Camplisson); **BM** (Barney McCaughey)

Participants: **I** (Israeli); **P** (Palestinian); (m): male; (f): female

BM: On the panel you saw four people talk about our conflict. And while they reflected very different political backgrounds and attitudes towards that conflict, what struck me most was that, having lived through it, there is a similarity in what they are saying now about the self-defeating nature of violence, and the need to work together. And all of them *are* doing this – they are working very hard and very effectively to improve this community and take it towards peace. So – what have you learned from today, if anything? What did you feel might have been the factors which have helped us move towards peace, and what are the things which you think might have been, or still are, hindering us?

I(m): One of the speakers was against international involvement. He said: ‘just leave it to us, we will handle it, leave us alone, you’re only here for your own interests.’ That might be partly true, but I think that in Ireland and the Middle East there is no way we could have gone as far as we did without such involvement. And not only from the big countries, but also smaller countries helping us, such as with seminars like this. Maybe outside pressure is a very important thing. The ‘road map’ only begins to move when President Bush puts pressure on the leaders, on both sides. It might not be the best way but he does put a lot of pressure, and maybe this is needed to bring peace.

I(m): I think what also helps in the Irish situation is the support the peace process gets from Europe; it doesn’t just rely on the involvement of the United States. Together they can help manage the situation.

I(m): I think EU integration itself assists in the move towards peace, because it has made the differences between Northern Ireland and the Republic less of an

issue – in our case we do not have a similar framework in our region. Also, because the divisive line in the Northern Ireland conflict was to a certain degree religious, I believe that the increasing secularisation of society here was very relevant to assist moves towards peace. And I believe that it can also be an important element in our own conflict.

I(m): I also want to comment on what the [panel] speaker said about not wanting outside involvement. Mediating in negotiating processes is a well-known diplomatic method for tackling conflicts, and I believe that if it saves time and blood –which I think has been the case in many different conflicts – then it should be tried. Otherwise, what is the option? To try and work it out alone, even though there is no trust between the opposing sides? In that case I think many more people will only die along the way. I would like to know what is the alternative to mediation?

P(m): We fully support mediation, but the problem is that it has been proved that there is no *neutral* mediator intervening in our conflict, most are biased towards one side. And even when Javier Solana, the EU's foreign policy chief, visited Palestine last week he refused to meet with Arafat and the Palestinian Authority because of Israeli pressure. What kind of intervention and mediation is it if the mediators are told who they can and can't meet?

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I(m): If Solana does not want to talk to Arafat maybe part of the problem lies with Arafat and not with the Europeans?

I(m): One of the most important things we got from hearing about the Irish experience –and it was something we also got from a seminar we had with the South African ambassador in Dublin – was that, in both conflicts, the release of political prisoners helped a lot to build trust. And I think it might be useful in our case as well.

BM: Prisoner releases also angered and hurt some people here.

P(f): In the Irish conflict the mediators seemed to treat each party as equal, and did not support one side or the other. That is not what's happening in our conflict in the Middle East.

P(m): The United States is supporting Israel 100%, and a mediator should be equal and not favour any one side. I just want to give an example of how the United States are biased. Killing Palestinian civilians is classified as Israelis using 'excessive force', but killing Israeli civilians is highly condemned by the Americans – so even on this level there is a big difference. There needs to be

equality between the parties, and everybody has to recognise each other's rights –including the right to live and to exist side by side.

I(f): I think these questions about the role of the mediator are avoiding the issue – it is not the main issue. Once two peoples want to make peace and make a commitment to peace, the mediators are only a means to achieve it, they are just helpers. I am not sure what happened in Ireland during your peace process, but I believe that if there is strong leadership then they can ensure the continuation of the peace process no matter what threatens to derail it. We need people and leaders who are truly committed to achieving peace, who won't allow peace negotiations to fail just because of everyday situations. But I have a strong feeling that our leadership, and the Palestinian leadership, are trying to *avoid* peace, because they know that once there is security we are going to have to deal with other issues, ones that they are not yet ready to cope with.

P(m): Yes, one of the panel speakers talked about the poverty issue; in our case it is also things like the illegal settlements and the refugees.

I(f): What I have learned from today is that both sides always blame each other when things go wrong. We don't criticise ourselves for what *we* are doing; instead we are always trying to defend our own side and blame the other for what has

happened. Also, I don't know about the Irish situation, but in our own case civic society wasn't involved when decisions were made by politicians [during the Oslo process] and that hindered the process, because explanations were not given. And also, up until today dialogue between the two sides, our two peoples, is nowhere near enough, and that hinders the development of any real process.

I(m): Communication is a vital part of any peace process, and I believe that because the Northern Irish share the same language and can understand each other, it means they can read each other's newspapers, and read opinions expressed by the other side. I believe that such communication can assist the process of resolution. Our problem is that Israelis and Palestinians have no common language, so we do not know what is being said in each other's newspapers. It also means that we do not even know when each side is calling for peace.

I(m): We not only need to engage in more self-criticism and communication and dialogue, we need to have a far more extensive understanding of each other. We need to communicate and understand the bigger picture, the background of both sides, the mentality and the reasons behind the freedom fighters, from both sides, and why they are doing what they are doing. We don't have to accept

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what they are doing, but we need to understand ‘why’ – in order for us to break down the barriers between us, in order for us to communicate on a higher level. And the least that we can do is to understand that on both sides there are people who want peace.

I(f): It is not enough for the Palestinians to know there is a peace camp on the Israeli side, and for the Israelis to know that there is a peace camp on the Palestinian side – the two sides must *communicate more* to know more about each other and to expand that circle.

P(f): I think one very important difference in our situation is the refugee question. It will take a long time to find a solution to this problem. At the moment the number of refugees *outside* Palestine is almost the same as the number of inhabitants *inside* Palestine.

I(f): I think that education is a very important part of a peace process, because I never met a Palestinian before I was 22 years old. And that caused fears and a lot of ignorance – and I am sure it is the same on the Palestinian side. A lot of you do not get to see Israelis, other than soldiers. So I think there might be a need for education in bringing children together from younger ages.

I never met a Palestinian before I was 22 years old. And that caused fears and a lot of ignorance – and I am sure it is the same on the Palestinian side.

BM: There are similarities in Northern Ireland. Many people live in different communities, go to different schools, often don’t feel safe working in certain areas, and even engage in different sports. But there is an integrated education movement which is trying to bring Protestant and Catholic children together.

I(f): I don’t think that you will get our children going to the same schools, the way you can in Northern Ireland. But at least you can make an input into what the children are taught, especially about each other. The situation today is unsatisfactory. If you go to a kindergarten operated by Hamas I don’t think that they teach that Israel has the right to exist. We each have to recognise the other side’s right to exist, and that process can begin through the education system.

BM: What do you think you might do, either as individuals or as a group, when you go back home?

I(m): We have talked among ourselves about the need for mutual dialogue, but I think that real mutual dialogue can only come after we will have an *inner* dialogue, inside our own societies. In Israel we have a lot of self-criticism, but I am not sure that on the Palestinian side there is much self-criticism. Maybe there is inside the hearts of the people but it isn’t made public. Most Israelis that I know don’t know anything about the existence of a Palestinian ‘peace camp’. I think there is still a lot of incitement against Israelis – particularly coming from

groups like Hamas – making up untrue stories about the Israelis. And this is doing damage to those leaders who want to move forward. The leaders cannot promote peace when incitement *inside* their community is not letting them do it.

P(f): But in everyday life we Palestinians also can't see anything concrete coming out of the Israeli peace camp. The occupation just continues as before.

P(m): Could I comment on the point made that in Israel people have a chance to criticise the leadership. I agree. The Israelis have had a state for many years. But so far we Palestinians don't have a state; we have been fighting to have elections, and create new, democratic institutions. This is where we could practise our self-criticism, but with the Israeli occupation those elections have been postponed, because it is impossible to hold elections while the military are inside our territories. And concerning incitement... I don't know how you are going to talk about peace when the whole environment outside you is boiling. You cannot talk about peace in public while people are being killed, on both sides. What both of us should do is try and create a new environment, a peaceful environment, and this is how things can succeed.

I(m): At the very least I hope that when you go back to your schools and neighbourhoods and universities you will tell your friends that there are nice Israelis that can understand us, can talk with us, and even care about us.

P(m): It would help if all those checkpoints in our territories were removed so that I can actually get to my university to talk to my friends!

P(f): I am going to take all our e-mail addresses and just keep in touch with everyone and share our news. I know we have a difference of opinions but we are still neighbours and we still have to accept the fact that we have to live in one land together. And each of us in his own country can do some lobbying. When I see something wrong in the Palestinian Authority I can lobby for it to be put right. And I hope my friends on the other side will do the same. We can lobby and keep in touch with each other.

P(m): It is important that we have an inner dialogue first, in order for each of our peace camps to get more organised. I know that there will be many internal difficulties, because the political situation is so tense, and it is not easy to be that public about peace. So what I think we should do is more of this –have more contacts like we are having here –but bring in an ever-widening circle of people. I always tell people that there are Israelis who want peace, who are with the Palestinian cause just as much as we are.

P(f): Barney asked us what we might do as a group when we go home. But we have only been in Ireland a few days and haven't had a real opportunity to speak about all those things that upset us in our everyday lives. And until we do that you cannot expect us to say what we should do from now on with the process. I personally have no answer for that –it is far too early for me to know.

The conflict resolution workshop

It was comments like that last one, voiced by others, which initiated the request to Dr. Joe Camplisson to convene an additional workshop. Although it was late in the evening when it was held and most of the group had had a tiring day, there was an eagerness to engage in constructive dialogue with one another. Camplisson explained what the meeting would be about.

JC: This session tonight was not part of your original programme, but some people felt that they wanted more opportunity to express themselves. So this workshop has been put on at your request, to meet *your* needs. But before we start, I want to take a few minutes to tell you of some of the work I am involved in. And the reason I am doing this is to give you a demonstration of what is possible by people such as yourselves, in the kind of complex, difficult situation in which you are living.

There is a desire within the international community to be of help in the Middle East conflict, and current governmental support has come in the shape of the ‘quartet’ – the United Nations, European Union, United States and the Russian Federation – who have framed a ‘road map’ which they

say is the route that you should take if you want to find peace. Now, that’s the governmental side –and some people have told me they want to discuss that road map tonight –but there is another side, the *non-governmental* side, and I want to give a brief description of what that looks like and let you know that it’s there for you should you want to do something about it.

My training is in two interrelated disciplines: community development and conflict resolution. I use community development – or civil society development –to advance movement towards conflict resolution. In 1992 I was advising on community development needs in Romania, when I was asked to do the same for neighbouring Moldova, a former Soviet Republic. As it was, my arrival there coincided with the outbreak of violent conflict when a region of Moldova –Transdnistria – broke away and set itself up as a separate state. Work being facilitated by me in the towns and villages – by ordinary people like yourselves – came to the notice of President Smirnov of the breakaway region, who asked for my help in the resolution of their conflict. I later received a similar request from the president of Moldova, President Snegur. In response, I brought together an international team of specialists and that team of people have been in place

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ever since – and they are available to you also, should you feel the need for external support.

To assist in the work which was being done in Moldova and Transdnistria on the non-governmental side, a group of people got together –five people from each side – and formed a committee, calling themselves the Joint Committee for Democratisation and Conciliation, the ‘JCDC’. The JCDC members brought me to villages, towns and cities in both regions to meet people there who were experiencing the kind of problems you are experiencing back home in Israel and Palestine, and who had a desire to do something about it. I suggested that if they wanted to examine their problems and needs then they should come to a neutral venue and be assisted to identify and analyse those problems and needs.

The first conference which the JCDC and I organised took place in what was then Czechoslovakia, and it only had 44 participants – because that is all a single coach would hold, and we

couldn’t afford to bring any more! But from that initial step the JCDC have organised over a dozen highly successful and much larger conferences –in Ireland, the UK, Bulgaria, and in Moldova/Transdnistria itself. And not only have they engaged with non-governmental organisations, they have

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brought on board their respective governments –as well as the OSCE, and the Russian, Ukrainian and American ambassadors – and worked through an extensive community development/conflict resolution programme. Admittedly, at governmental level there has still been no real progress towards resolution but, nevertheless, there has been no return to violence.

Now, that is what is possible, if you have the capacity and the will to do it and the assistance of a suitably qualified external third party.

Camplisson then turned to the needs of the workshop participants.

JC: Now, tonight I have been asked to facilitate expression of your individual and your group feelings. I want you to express your concerns, your interests, your aspirations, your feelings of animosity, of anger, and also your feelings of fellowship. Then I hope we can sharpen your individual and your group focus – preferably your inter-group focus – on issues which you feel need to be addressed. Finally, I want you to explore thoughts and ideas for relationship-building, for civil society development, across your conflict interface. And you’ll do that with a view to taking it forward when you return home.

I(f): We also need to discuss the road map.

JC: Of course, that can be included when we come to discuss issues. For now,

let us examine what we are attempting to do. I would suggest that we're meeting here to generate and advance movement towards the establishment and advancement of collaborative, mutually-beneficial relationships, within, and hopefully between, your two groups. But first, I have told you who I am. Perhaps we could go round the room and hear a little about you. If I am to be of help I need to know and feel who you are, and what motivated you to be here.

For reasons of confidentiality these brief biographies have been omitted, but while they were being narrated the Palestinian side had noted one important aspect.

P(m): Our two groups have been together for three days, and yet this is the first time I see our Israeli counterparts defining themselves as 'Zionist' and 'nationalist', rather than 'I am a male/female from Israel'. Can I ask them what they mean by Zionist and nationalist?

I(f): Zionism started in the late 19th century, as a ideology of the Jewish people, who wanted to return to their historic homeland – Zion-land, Jerusalem. Jews, dispersed all over the world, have been dreaming about Jerusalem for 2000 years, and when this sense of being a nation was created they slowly began to come back to Zion –Israel. Zionism is something very deep inside us and we consider Israel as the only place on earth that is our home. It gives us our sense of security: we can go anywhere in the world now and not be afraid of persecution, because we know we have a state that will take care of us. It was not like that fifty years ago – people could do with us whatever they wanted because there was no-one to take care of us. But now, even if some tourist is lost in the middle of the South American jungle, Israel will send forces to rescue them. This is what having a state and a home means; it means that I can live wherever I want but if trouble arises I have somewhere to go back to –and it's my home. And it's small and it's full of problems, and it's not secured, but it's mine and it's the only place on earth for us. And that is why we go to the army, because every one of us must do anything they can, even die, to defend this state, their home. I also want this state to be socialist; I want all its citizens to be equal, and I'm talking about the Israeli Arabs, I'm talking about the Israeli Jews –all the citizens of my country. That's Zionism for me.

[Israel] gives us our sense of security: we can go anywhere in the world now and not be afraid of persecution, because we know we have a state that will take care of us.

I(m): Does it bother you, M_____, that we define ourselves this way?

P(m): No, it doesn't, but I live in Jerusalem and I have never met an Israeli there who defines himself as a Zionist. I just wanted to know why you all did so.

I(m): Perhaps your question was: ‘Why did we start to use this term *now*, why didn’t we say it when we first met a few days ago?’ And maybe you think it is a step backwards, perhaps you feel it means that we are more extreme. But as I see it, it’s the very opposite. I think it’s a step *forward*, because our sense of connection to you all over the last few days has been so close, and so good, that maybe we can allow ourselves to open up a little more and use terms that would have been harder to use in the beginning. We know that Palestinians unfortunately equate Zionism with Nazism; you see Zionism as the worst thing on earth. But that is not how I and many other Israelis see Zionism; it is not something that is there to hurt the Palestinians or deny them their right to have a country. And I think the only reason that people here have mentioned that they’re Zionist is because trust has now grown up between us. The Zionism of today is different from that of the 19th century; today’s Zionism –as those of us here see it – is not in conflict over a Palestinian state, and not in conflict with the human rights of the Palestinian people.

I(f): This morning, when we drove around Belfast we saw flags everywhere. Now, I too feel very proud every time I see an Israeli flag, I still put a flag on my house every Independence Day. I don’t take my country for granted, because I know it wasn’t always like this, and this is something very important to me. So, in that sense I’m a nationalist.

The Zionism of today is different from that of the 19th century; today’s Zionism –as those of us here see it – is not in conflict over a Palestinian state, and not in conflict with the human rights of the Palestinian people.

I know this word has very bad connotations, because many times throughout history people took nationalism and made it into something extreme –but that’s not what I mean. I’m nationalist because I love my country, I’m willing to do anything to defend it, but I don’t see it as something that should be hurtful to other people. My country is part of how I define myself. Maybe over the past few days we defined ourselves in terms of what we do in everyday life, but now people are starting to define themselves in a much deeper sense. If we are here talking about what constitutes our identity, then this is how I see my identity – it’s more than just being an Israeli.

I(f): I would die for my country. Being Zionist has made me who I am as a person – and my country and my people are the most important thing in the world for me. But Zionism to me is not simply having a Jewish state, it is about *shaping* my country in a way that I feel reflects the people in it, because I want people to be proud of this country. It’s a very young country, it’s only fifty-five years old, and now we are at a stage where we need to shape it, mould it in a certain way, and my Zionism is exactly that, helping to shape it in a particular fashion.

I(m): I am also a Zionist. To me that means that there should be a home for the Jews in Zion, and that is something I believe in. What I didn't hear the other Israelis mention, however – and I'm surprised that none of you on the Palestinian side was raising your hand – was the injustice that was done in the name of Zionism in the past. The first ideologists of Zionism described Palestine Zion as an 'empty place' and said that the Jews should come back to this empty place – which they had left – and settle there. The problem is that it *wasn't* empty. I still believe that the Jews should live there, but I believe that we all, as Zionists, should accept that injustice had been done in the beginning, and we should acknowledge that to the people who were there.

I(m): I would like to relate what we are saying to Palestinian society. I see Zionism as a *process*, a process which began at the beginning of the last century, but today none of us knows where it is going to end. Indeed, the question as to the direction of that process is one of the biggest conflicts within present-day Israeli society. But the Palestinians are *also* engaged in a process, a desire to establish a homeland, and you have leaders who also promote the idea of going back to a country, back to their homeland. The difference, I think, is that we have a name for that process, we call it Zionism, but there is no name given to the process going on in your society.

It the urgent need of the state of Israel to have a safe Palestinian state next to it. Without your safety, I am not safe.

I(f): I just wanted to add to what is being said here. When I started to go to visit my friends in Gaza, I told one of them that I was a Zionist and he was surprised: 'How come you can call yourself a Zionist!' I told him that, for me, the Zionism of the 19th century has changed. Having established a Jewish state, our duty now is to rectify the injustices that were done through this process to another people – our duty, in fact, is to help establish a Palestinian state. And when someone asks me what I am, I say I am a person who is willing to help establish a Palestinian state as part of my Zionist ideology.

P(m): I only wish more Zionists in Israel would have the same beliefs, would look at the Zionism from the angle which you look at it.

I(f): But more and more people *are* looking at it that way, not because it *your* need, M_____, but because it the *urgent need of the state of Israel* to have a safe Palestinian state next to it. Without your safety, I am not safe.

I(m): I would like to emphasise what is being said, because I believe that the rest of us think the same. We would accept that Zionism in the beginning did something wrong, a mistake which affected the future of Israel and the Palestinians.

P(m): I understand what you are all trying to say, but, to be honest with you, if

you talk to any Palestinian they equate Zionism with the destruction of the Palestinians.

I(f): I know, I know, that is why I had to state my point of view, and I said it in Gaza.

Before the discussion could progress any further on the topic of identity, a couple of the participants requested that the issue of the 'road map for peace' be now addressed.

JC: Clearly, there were different perspectives voiced there about the meaning of Zionism. That is one of the things we find in conflict situations –that your identity is not only defined by yourself, often it's defined by the circumstances around you and *by how other people perceive you*, so that your total identity is very often a dynamic within something which is ever-changing. But one of the things that we have to recognise in all conflict situations is that we can *never* negotiate away any aspect of our identity. Identity is a powerful and terrifying thing; it's why we go to war, and for many people it's almost a sacred thing. So keep that in mind, for that needs to be understood in order to make progress. Whenever the Israeli group stated your position as Zionist at the beginning, immediately you were seen by the Palestinians as posing a threat to them. That perception was there, and that was why it was interesting to have that exchange – it gave us all an opportunity to understand each other better.

One of the things that we have to recognise in all conflict situations is that we can never negotiate away any aspect of our identity. Identity is a powerful and terrifying thing; it's why we go to war, and for many people it's almost a sacred thing.

We'll move now onto the second point: the need to sharpen your focus, your individual focus as well as your group focus. And if the focus of the group is to be on an issue, let's take the issue that has been flagged up –this idea of the 'road map'. It's an important issue in that it's an external factor, it's not something that has been developed within your own communities –as far as I know, it hasn't been developed by the Palestinian Authority or the government of Israel –it's something that has been developed by people in the international community, obviously in consultation with others in Israel and Palestine. Now, the leader of the Palestinian group volunteered to give us a synopsis of the road map, before we go into any discussion of the central issues which might be involved within it.

P(m): I just want to give a brief outline of the main principles of the road map. As you are aware, the road map was presented by the 'quartet' for the purpose of arriving at a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli/Palestinian

conflict by 2005. It has the support of the EU, the UN, Russia and the USA. Now, it was agreed that this road map would follow a number of different phases, but the final outcome would be an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel and other neighbours. The settlement will resolve the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and end the occupation that began in 1967, based on the foundations of Madrid Conference, the principles of 'land for peace', and UN resolutions 242 and 338. Now, as I said, the implementation of the road map would be done through different phases, the first of which is to stop the violence and incitement, to normalise Palestinian life, and build Palestinian institutions. The second phase, which was supposed to begin in June 2003, talks about an international conference to be convened by the 'quartet', in consultation with the parties, immediately after the successful conclusion of Palestinian elections. This would support Palestinian recovery and launch a process leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders. The third phase would be the official acknowledgement of the end of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and this phase was supposed to be reached between 2004 and 2005. And the ending of the conflict was supposed to be marked by a second international conference. That is a brief overview of the road map, in very general terms.

P(m): If we look at Phase One: at what has been completed, and what hasn't been completed, of the significant obligations made on both sides. The most important of the Palestinian obligations was that they should declare an end to violence and terrorism, and this was completed on the 4th June in the Aqaba Summit when Prime Minister, Mahmud Abbas [Abu Mazin], said: 'our goal is clear, we will implement it firmly and without compromise, a complete end of violence and terrorism.' This was followed up by various steps of good faith, starting off with the ceasefire declaration, later on by the leaders of Hamas, Jihad and other Palestinian groups. This was recently breached, however, though I assume that discussions are ongoing to renegotiate a new truce by each side. The second step is the appointment of a Palestinian Prime Minister, and this was accomplished on the 29th of April. The Palestinians are to start preparing a third draft of a new Palestinian constitution, which will be worked on when they declare their Palestinian state. Also, the Palestinians have started working on the establishment of an independent election committee. What I'm trying to say is that the Palestinians actually accomplished most of Phase One, the only things that are not accomplished yet are elections which weren't able to be carried out because of various curfews and checkpoints throughout the West Bank and Gaza. On the Israeli side the most important actions that weren't carried out include the dismantling of at least 62 settlements and the removal of certain checkpoints within the West Bank. Israel is also obliged to help the Palestinians regain their economic stability, but currently Israel continues to prevent free movement of goods and people throughout the West Bank. 60% of all Palestinians, two million people, continue to live below a poverty level that

is less than two US dollars a day. As you can see, lots of things are not yet accomplished. I see Phase One as something very important to be carried out by both sides, but good will and good intentions haven't been shown.

P(f): And this new wall that Israel is building is yet another issue, and it's not even part of the road map.

I(m): I believe that the road map programme was implemented too early for our two societies. I think that both societies were not ready to accept the road map and the ideas behind it. Now, I don't want to get into details, but as some of the failures on the Israeli side have been mentioned, there were also failures on the Palestinian side. I think the basic failure on the Palestinian side is that there is no unitary control of the security/military forces. And because of this we are once again into a renewed cycle of violence – bomb attacks and assassinations – and the road map has been halted.

P(m): I think we have to distinguish between the road map and the question of control over Palestinian security forces and police. The Israelis, despite all their resources and weaponry, and despite having been in our territories for more than a year, were not able to achieve control over the situation, so how can you ask the Palestinian

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Authority to do this complicated task when they don't have even the basic resources, and much of what they had was destroyed by the Israeli army – I mean, police station after police station was destroyed as part of every Israeli retaliation. The road map to me is something separate from that. We were talking together yesterday, and you all agreed, that there had been seven weeks of quiet, and you are also aware how things escalated to where we are today. So I believe we shouldn't link the road map to the question of control of the police. That will come as the road map is implemented.

I(m): I believe that both sides should have done something that they didn't do and because of that the road map failed. I believe that the Palestinians could have done more than what they did... but I prefer again not to get into those details, we can do that another time. In general, I believe that the idea behind the road map was good, but the timing was bad and the leadership in both sides is not able to implement its programme.

P(m): But if we don't want to go into details, then what are we here for? We need to look at what are the good things, and what are the bad things, for both Israelis and Palestinians. Surely the purpose of us coming here is not to just take general topics only, but to go into details –and go deep inside those details –so that we can begin to sort out some of the problems, at least on our level.

I(f): I feel I can represent both sides, and I can also criticize both sides. And you have to be able to criticise your own people. Indeed, I criticise the Israeli side all the time. First of all, Israel didn't accomplish several things that were mandatory, such as the dismantling of road blocks and the illegal settlements. But on the Palestinian side there was also a major deficiency, and that major deficiency was that Arafat didn't allow Abu Mazin the real opportunity to lead the country. Whenever Abu Mazin was doing something, even when he was nominating people to a civil authority position, Arafat would interfere and say: 'No, you're not doing that, because I'm the one who decides.' As for the security apparatus, you cannot control a country when sections of the security apparatus are controlled by someone else, and Abu Mazin, as Prime Minister, did not have a unified military/security apparatus. I believe that it is only when those forces are under one unified authority, with one overall commander, that the road map will be implemented. The government of Israel is using every possible excuse so as not to implement their side of the road map, and the Palestinians are giving them all the excuses in the world, with Arafat still in control. But remove all the excuses and I think President Bush will be able to put pressure on Sharon to implement his side of the deal. When Israel was founded we had different groups of armed extremists. But the then prime minister said he would not tolerate several armies acting under different jurisdictions, and force was used against the extremists. Jews shot Jews, and even today it's a part of our history which hurts people –but it was necessary in order to build one state, to have one military apparatus without dissidents.

The government of Israel is using every possible excuse so as not to implement their side of the road map, and the Palestinians are giving them all the excuses in the world.

I(f): It is all nice and good to say that this road map is a beautiful agreement and obviously it's an effort to achieve peace, but the most important thing of all is trust. And the reality is that Israelis don't trust the Palestinian side, and you don't trust our side. When the ceasefire was declared everybody knew it was only temporary and that something would happen again. For me, when there were no terror attacks, I felt it was like... the saying in English is: 'the quiet before the storm'... When there's quiet, to me it's even more scary, because I know that all the terror organisations are just rebuilding themselves and purchasing more weapons and trying to make themselves stronger for the next round of violence. This is what I feel: I don't trust your side, I don't trust the Palestinian leadership, I don't trust Arafat. This is why Oslo didn't work and this is why all the other agreements didn't work, because we don't trust each other.

P(m): My hope today is that the road map *will* be fulfilled by two sides, but I don't believe that will happen because I don't see the road map as being a

realistic map, Firstly, because it is only a list of general points and it does not discuss the details, the realities on the ground. Secondly, the mediators we have are not neutral, and, furthermore, it relies on what the American president thinks and does, and every four years there is a new president and so the peace process will change accordingly.

P(f): As H_____ said, every four years there is a new president of the USA, so we have new changes in the peace process, and this can create problems. But, on the other hand, having a limited period for the process, with deadlines about achieving goals, might be better. Despite seven years of Oslo there were big failures on both sides, we were not committed to the deadlines, we didn't do what was necessary. There was not enough trust between our two sides.

P(m): I want to try and give the perspective of ordinary Palestinians –a grassroots view –about how they see the road map. First of all, I want to comment on the Oslo failure. I believe that there *was* trust, at least at the beginning of Oslo. Oslo failed, and I believe the road map will also fail, because they failed to discuss the major issues: the refugees, the

Oslo failed, and I believe the road map will also fail, because they failed to discuss the major issues: the refugees, the illegal settlements... They failed to discuss those issues which affect our everyday lives: water, agriculture, trade, borders...

illegal settlements... They failed to discuss those issues which affect our everyday lives: water, agriculture, trade, borders... All of these issues were put off to a later phase, and that is why there has been failure. As for my own perspective on the road map, as a Palestinian, I accept that our government is failing to accomplish many steps, but I believe that we have tried to show good will and good faith in order to rebuild trust with the Israelis. But the Israelis, as was mentioned earlier, have no trust for the Palestinians, and whenever there's calmness in the situation they feel that there's a bomb coming up next. On the other hand, as Palestinians, we *also* fail to see progress on the ground. The Israeli Defence Force still carries out operations, on a daily basis, in Jenin, Hebron, Gaza and elsewhere; there is systematic demolition of Palestinian houses, the continuation of blockades, the continuation of land confiscation... When they see these things the Palestinian people view the road map as not only something that will not work, but as a betrayal by their own government.

P(m): Two comments. First, if we keep saying we don't trust you, and you keep saying you don't trust us, we will *never* go towards trust. Secondly, the Israelis and half the world are always going on about 'Arafat, Arafat!' You prefer Abu Mazin, yet he doesn't have a good standing among Palestinians. But it's not up to Israelis to pick a prime minister for us who *they* like. Arafat has dedicated his life for his country, for his people. Israelis can go round in circles about it, but ultimately the only one who is going to make peace with you is Arafat.

JC: This discussion has certainly been very illuminating and the level of participation has been very encouraging. One of the most significant comments made during your discussion was that ‘the people were not ready’. So, who *are* the people? *You* are the people, and you have the ability to influence even more people. That is why it is important that you come to a neutral venue such as this, and through third party external facilitation, give yourselves a chance to think, and to analyse your problems and your needs. Governments do not get into a real analysis of needs, but you’ve all got a chance to do that here, to gain a deeper understanding of where you’re coming from, where your ‘enemy’ is coming from, and how you move together. Now, it doesn’t necessarily follow that because people understand one another better that they stop being enemies. Because the reality of the Middle East conflict – and of most conflicts – is that both sets of protagonists see each other as a threat to their state, their whole way of life, their very existence. The question is how you approach that threat: either you attempt to blow your enemy away or you begin to recognise that if you don’t satisfy the needs of your enemy then you’re not going to satisfy your own. If you move in a direction which recognises that your enemy has needs, and that if those needs are not met your enemy will be violent, you will see that it’s in your *own* interest to have some sort of sympathetic understanding of his needs and, furthermore, you should help him to address those needs. How do you do that? This is a big question, we’re not going to deal with it now, but the principle is there and I want you to take that away and think about it.

***You begin to recognise
that if you don’t satisfy
the needs of your enemy
then you’re not going to
satisfy your own.***

Camplisson then brought the workshop to its final phase.

JC: I suggest we now review any thoughts and ideas which you have which might meaningfully address your needs when you return home. What is the best way to share what you might have gained here with others within and between your communities?

I(f): The reality is that we here are not going to solve the big problems. I’m not even sure that we can influence our leaders that much. But what we can gain is the personal point of view. I’m less interested, for example, in what J___ thinks of the road map or the Jerusalem issue, I’m more interested in what she’s going through in her everyday life, how the last three years have affected her and her family. I think that this is the most important thing we can gain here, a deeper understanding of the personal side of things. I think that the biggest problem with Oslo was that it wasn’t an agreement between the people, it was an agreement between leaders. And with the road map it’s not even our leaders, it’s people from outside. That’s always been the problem: that both Palestinians and Israelis never set the agenda, we only respond. We respond to bomb attacks

and respond to *intifadas* and we respond to some plan that outsiders come up with, but I'm not sure that they're the ones who can make solutions. I think the most important thing we can do is sit down people-to-people and talk about the situation. Now, when I go home I want to start a discussion in the political party to which I belong, I want them to start meeting with Palestinians. I'm not sure that I can do it at the level of the leaders, but I think I can do it at youth level, I want the youth from my party to start meeting with Palestinian youth. And if the young people sit down and discuss issues together and come up with positive ideas, then I believe I can bring these ideas to members of parliament, to ministers, even to the prime minister. And these would be ideas coming from ordinary people discussing their everyday lives: coming from Israelis living in terror of the bombers, and from Palestinians living under all their daily restrictions. I believe that the best solutions will come from the ordinary people and not from the leaders. The leaders can write agreements, they can sign pieces of paper, but that doesn't guarantee that there will be peace. I don't think we should be in a hurry to sign bits of paper, I think we should start talking and working with each

I think we should start talking and working with each other on an everyday level, and try to implement understanding and peace in our everyday life. Then, when we feel ready to, and if we feel the need to, we can sign agreements.

other on an everyday level, and try to implement understanding and peace in our everyday life. Then, when we feel ready to, and if we feel the need to, we can sign agreements.

P(f): I'm with H_____ about what she has just said. I think what's going on here is that we are putting ourselves in place of the politicians and trying to make a new agreement between Palestinians and Israelis, and we're going to sign it tonight and tomorrow we will start implementing it! We are only a group of individuals, we have no authority to make agreements. So we should concentrate on working at an individual level, and forget the politicians for the moment. When we have built strong individuals then we can perhaps start lobbying those politicians... Look at how successful those soldiers' mothers were in southern Lebanon – they lobbied their government, and they achieved something. That's what we want to do. We are not politicians, we are normal people, we are students, we are workers and it's at that level we must work. Most discussions on the 'details' usually end up with either side trying to justify Israeli mistakes or Palestinian mistakes. Our conflict is a very emotional one, because as Palestinians and as Israelis we can't talk about it without emotions, and we start blaming each other. I think we want to do something practical.

JC: You are moving now into some very positive thinking. We have things developing which could present a challenge to your respective leaderships. So,

how do you implement these things, what kind of support do you need to do the things you're talking about?

I(m): I agree that we've had a good discussion, but there are some topics that we didn't even touch on. We had, I believe, a very interesting discussion about Zionism, but we didn't have a chance to hear the Palestinian point of view. I think we should try to make use of the rest of the time we have in Ireland to continue and deepen this discussion. Even on an individual level: just speak to someone, ask him or her what they think about issues, what they feel about them. Because it will be very difficult to have such a discussion when we return home, because it is so very difficult for us to meet up.

JC: There are many topics which it will be necessary for you to explore which we hadn't time to discuss tonight – but you have the rest of the week to work

through different things, and hopefully you will now feel better prepared to examine those things and analyse them. I think that I will now bring proceedings to a close. Hopefully you will take away from here some of the more positive things that have been aired this evening. To me, one of the most important things was the idea about moving *yourselves*, independent of your political leadership, in a way that is not self-defeating but productive. One of the things which you have, as non-political leaders, is the ability to dream and create a vision.

One of the things which you have, as non-political leaders, is the ability to dream, and create a vision... You can think about what a better world looks like and work towards it if you think it's going to be something that not only makes both sides more aware of each other's needs but begins to satisfy those needs. Perhaps then you can finally move forward in a way that will bring about the kind of security that you all so desperately need.

Politicians can't do that, but you can do it here. You can think about what a better world looks like and work towards it if you think it's going to be something that not only makes both sides more aware of each other's needs but begins to satisfy those needs. Perhaps then you can finally move forward in a way that will bring about the kind of security that you all so desperately need. I want to thank you very much for the courtesy you have given to me as your facilitator. It's not the end of the venture as far as I'm concerned, my colleagues and I are here for you – and if you feel there is some need for this kind of external assistance we will be happy to provide it for you. Because we see that you *are* an important factor, you're not just ordinary individuals, you do have the power to make a difference, and I wish you all well in that task. Thank you.

The Middle East group organiser then thanked Dr. Camplisson and complimented him on the quality of, and outcomes from, his facilitation.

Conference asides

A wealth of one-to-one conversations were recorded during the group's time in Ireland. A few have been appended here to give an insight not only into the deep wounds and suspicions which participants carried within them, but as evidence of the distance they were still prepared to move towards one another.

P(m): It takes me up to four hours to get to work each morning when it should only take me 20 minutes. I work with the many children who have been traumatised by the conflict. Although I am a passivist I feel an intense anger and rage about the situation. Three months ago my uncle, who I was very close to, started to complain of severe chest pains. When they got progressively worse, my younger brother and I decided to drive him to hospital. We knew that to get to the nearest hospital we would have to pass through a major Israeli checkpoint, but we felt sure that when we explained the severity of the situation the soldiers would let us through. We were badly mistaken. Even though the soldiers could see my uncle's distress they refused to let us pass. We had no other choice but to set out for another hospital which would take us up to four hours to get to, mostly over very bad and rough roads which would only aggravate his condition. My brother drove for over three hours and I held my uncle in my arms. He died in my arms before we reached the hospital. This is the reality that many of the Palestinian population are facing on a daily basis.

I(f) Life is very scary for us, you never know when another suicide bomber is going to strike. You're always apprehensive whenever you go out. You cannot even travel by bus without that fear always being there. My parents don't like us going out to restaurants or anywhere; they would rather we stayed at home.

P(f): When I look at the members of the Israeli group I can't forget that all Israeli citizens have to do military service. I realise that one minute you could be talking to them in a friendly way, like here, but the next time you meet they might be facing you at a checkpoint. We talked the other day about exchanging e-mail addresses, but I don't trust them enough yet.† The Israelis want all our land, they want all our water, they want to leave us with nothing. They want us to have a so-called state from which we cannot go anywhere –it will be surrounded by walls and their army. We cannot even move between different parts of Palestinian land without their permission. They destroy our homes. They have all the power, and we fight back the only way we can.

One minute you could be talking to them in a friendly way...but the next time you meet they might be facing you at a checkpoint.

† At the end of the five days this participant *was* willing to share her e-mail address.

P(f): If I saw any of the Israeli group wearing the uniform of the Israeli army and blockading my town, I feel my people would have the right to kill him. To be honest, I feel so angry at times at what my people have been subjected to that I would actually feel like doing it myself.

A few days after the group returned home, amid a situation of escalating violence, one of the Israelis sent the following e-mail to her co-participants:

I(f): It's the first time I'm writing to you all, and I'm sorry it has to be on such a sad occasion. Two hours ago 18 people, who were just having an ordinary lunch in a restaurant in Haifa, were murdered. In the first year of the *intifada*, I used to watch the news for hours after each bomb attack and it was relatively easy, because these were people I didn't know. But two years ago my aunt was murdered by a terrorist, and it changed everything. I can't sit and watch TV now, because it's just too much for me. These are not 18 anonymous names any more –these are 18 families who are going to go through the same hell that my family has been through for the last two years. It brings everything back to me – the moment my mother told me my aunt was murdered, the funeral, the talks with her children who lost a mother, with her husband who lost a wife, seeing the strongest people in my life breaking down, the sleepless nights, the huge amount of tears... everything. Everything that another 18 families are going to experience. So many lives ruined. Just like that. And for why? Not for a noble cause, but because of pure hate. I feel really bad saying this, but at moments like this you don't care about what the other side feels, what they're going through. Because there is no excuse for murder. At moments like these you just want your country to be safe, you don't have the energy or the mental strength to think

At moments like these you just want your country to be safe, you don't have the energy or the mental strength to think about anything else.

about anything else. Tomorrow is Yom Kippur and that is a day we fast, pray and reflect on our passing year, on our sins and on the good things we've done. I hope each of us, even those not related to the Jewish religion, will take this day to reflect on what we did until now and what we intend to do to make this a better, more peaceful and hopeful area for us and our children to live in.

That same desire to overcome these tragic circumstances and build a peaceful future had been voiced during the five days in Ireland:

P(f): We have to find a solution, we have to end it. I am trying to understand their point of view because in Palestine it is not easy to talk with Israelis, so I think it is a good chance to meet them. They are human, I discovered that. This was the first time I have met Israelis, and it has been useful. You see how they think and how they react, and how they find reasons for all these things they are doing. And how they are thinking about the whole situation, and how we are

going to fix it. To be honest there is still an ice bridge between us: they feel we are terrorists and we feel the same about them. The Israelis use the Holocaust as a justification to take our land and create their own state. Nevertheless, I will keep contact with some of them, if I feel I can trust them. Palestine is a lovely green land with lovely people. People from across the world tell me that the Palestinians have a wide heart. They don't pick 'suitable' words: when they talk to you what they have in their hearts comes out.

I(m): Every time there is another suicide bombing, rather than put me off this task it makes me desire peace even more and want to work for peace even more.

I(f): One of the most important things that needs to happen in a peace process is for people to understand the culture of the other side. For example, yesterday was the first time we touched on the Zionism issue and I believe that A_____ didn't know what Zionism meant from my point of view, and I am sure there are a lot of things I think I know about the Palestinians that I am scared of, but are not that scary. So I think we need to know more about each other's culture.

P(f): We must begin to think about our future life, of our families and their future. We must not dwell always on the past. From the ordinary people I can see hope, I can see light at the end of the tunnel. We can each influence a small number of our friends and they can do the same.

I(m): You cannot have a solution just with the people, for the solution is in the hands of the leaders. What we have to do is to connect the two things: people from both sides should try to exert pressure on their leaderships. This is why we got out of Lebanon, because we had public pressure in Israel on the prime minister, every day, to get out, until he finally left Lebanon. It won't help to change our ideas here and then go back home and live in a closet.

P(m): The past is always connected to what is happening in the present, so it is not always easy to ignore it. I have been at many conferences like this, and from time to time you get very hopeful. But what happens is that when you go back to Palestine and Israel and start to work on your friends and neighbours, the test is in the first extreme act of violence. Suddenly all of us just want to say: fuck the Israelis, fuck the Palestinians, they are my enemy! And I think the really important thing which should come out of this conference is that we should always strive to overcome even the very worst moments and begin to try again.

Perhaps one brief exchange sums up the hope that was contained in the encounter:

P(f): You will find that most Palestinian people on the street are wanting peace. You might not hear that from the people who make the speeches, but if you ask ordinary people, the innocent people who suffer –the mothers, the

If you ask ordinary people, the innocent people who suffer –the mothers, the children... they will all tell you that they want peace.

children –that is what they want. If you were to go there they will all tell you that they want peace.

I(f): You have no idea how good it is for me to know that.

At the end of their stay in Ireland Palestinian and Israeli organisers expressed the view that the entire five-day programme had contributed much to the sustainability of their group. They also remarked that the warm hospitality they had received from the Irish participants had been instrumental in creating a nurturing environment in which dialogue could take place, and a comment made by one of the Southern Irish revealed that this dialogue had been productive:

At times the discussion among the Israelis and Palestinians seemed to wander away from the main questions. But when the Irish participants were watching this going on we saw the very dialogue that we were aspiring to actually taking place. There was a mutual respect and an effort to identify with the fears and the needs of the other side. Both groups had certainly taken advantage of the safe and neutral space that coming to Ireland had provided them with.

As noted earlier, Dr. Joe Camplisson is currently co-ordinator of a multi-disciplinary team facilitating governmental attempts at conflict resolution in Moldova, which draws heavily on the grassroots efforts of the JCDC (Joint Committee for Democratisation and Reconciliation), an indigenous group similar in composition and commitment to the Israeli–Palestinian group. The JCDC’s activities have complemented, and sometimes even activated, the process of conflict resolution at governmental level. During a post-workshop assessment, Camplisson stated his belief that the Israeli–Palestinian group had within it the potential to be of similar support to governmental authorities in the Middle East, not necessarily at present, but possibly in the medium and long term:

All the participants exhibited a very high level of intelligence, knowledge gained from experience, compassion, and a desire to build a peaceful and prosperous future together. They were also well aware that the ‘politics of the latest atrocity’ greatly militates against their individual and shared attempts to build such a future. Some of them certainly demonstrated a preparedness and a capacity to work, like the JCDC, as an indigenous third party at any level of leadership across their conflict interface. I have been in touch with the JCDC and they have expressed a willingness to provide whatever assistance is being sought by the Israeli–Palestinian group. Irrespective of how realistic such a proposition may be –the restrictions on movement which prevent them from meeting one another back home is a major obstacle to any forward movement – it is encouraging to know that such leadership exists and I am confident that they will feed into their respective socio-political and cultural systems much of what they gained from their experiences in Belfast.

Prior to their visit to Ireland members of the Israeli-Palestinian group had been provided with copies of From Conflict Containment to Resolution, to stimulate thinking and debate about what could be achieved at a local leadership level.

FROM CONFLICT CONTAINMENT TO RESOLUTION

by

Michael Hall in collaboration with Joe Camplisson

Identity-related violent conflicts have caused, and continue to cause, untold suffering around the world. The strategies used by the international community to counter these conflicts – as in the Balkans and the Middle East – have been largely those of containment. History has shown, however, that such strategies invariably fail to satisfy the deep-rooted needs which lie at the core of identity-related conflicts, making a resurgence of violence inevitable. There is an increasing acceptance that perhaps only a successful conflict resolution process can hope to break this tragic cycle.

This book describes the efforts of a Belfast-based organisation, MICOM (Moldovan Initiative Committee of Management), to facilitate resolution of the conflict between Moldova and its breakaway region of Transdniestria. MICOM, acting as an ‘external third party’, has been assisted in this task by its ‘indigenous third party’ partner in Moldova/Transdniestria, the JCDC (Joint Committee for Democratisation and Conciliation).

The authors, who have personally experienced Northern Ireland’s generational deep-rooted conflict, hope that the MICOM/JCDC story will not only stimulate and inform discussion within the scholarly and policy-making community, but will encourage self-help attempts at conflict resolution among ordinary people and political leaders who find themselves at the interface of such conflict.

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