



## SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND IN JERUSALEM

### Program Update October 2006

Since 1991, Search for Common Ground has conducted a multi-track program to promote peace, cooperation, and security in the Jerusalem. We contribute to these goals through developing independent media and civil society, using the media to discuss critical issues, and convening regional dialogues and building regional cooperation.

#### I. MEDIA ACTIVITIES

*We initiate activities with regional media professionals to improve communication across borders, increase regional understanding, and encourage journalists to challenge their own biases and stereotypes while using the media as a tool for peace and public education on core issues.*

- **Partnership with Palestinian TV Stations:** Over the past 3 years, we have developed a strong partnership with the Ma'an Network of independent Palestinian TV stations, covering the West Bank and Gaza. The strengthening of independent media is crucial for stimulating open debate and creating space for alternate voices in today's political environment.
  - ⇒ We produced and will be broadcasting during Ramadan of 2006 an intended-outcome TV drama, *Shou Fi Ma Fi*, ("What's Up?") that features Palestinian student life in university dorms tackling daily social and political issues. The show provides creative tools for resolving these issues. We similarly produced and broadcast a TV drama series in 2005.
  - ⇒ Recently, we began a project that is a series of intensive, iterative, capacity-building workshops for the Chief Editors of eight local TV stations in the West Bank aimed at producing high quality local TV news programming.
- **Israeli Intended-Outcome TV Drama:** SFCG, in partnership with Shinar Communications, plan to produce a season of an Israeli hospital drama to be broadcast on one of Israel's top TV stations during prime time. In addition to its entertainment value, the show will model the paradigm which exists in Israeli hospital settings whereby professional identity and health concerns trump national identity and Arabs and Jews demonstrate a unique form of coexistence.
- **Common Ground Journalism:** The Common Ground News Service (CGNews) seeks to promote mutual understanding and offer opportunities for dialogue and constructive suggestions that facilitate peaceful resolution of conflict. We accomplish this goal through providing constructive and solution-oriented news, op-eds, features and analysis to news outlets worldwide on a broad range of issues affecting Jerusalem. Our selected weekly articles are translated into Arabic, English, and Hebrew.
  - ⇒ CGNews targets media outlets for further republications in Jerusalem regional and international press and has succeeded in securing over 2,100 republications of our articles in media outlets as key as *Al-Ahram*; *Al-Ayyam*; *Al-Hayat*; *Al-Quds*; *Arab News*; *The Christian Science Monitor*; *The Daily Star*; *Ha'aretz*; *International Herald Tribune*; *The Jakarta Post*; *The Jerusalem Post*; *The Jerusalem Report*; *The Jerusalem Times*; *The Jordan Times*; *Le Courier International*; *Middle East Times*; *United Press International*; and *The Washington Times*.
  - ⇒ Today, it has over 12,000 subscribers, and an active network of contributing authors and major media partners.

- ⇒ The annual Eliav-Sartawi Awards for Common Ground Journalism in Jerusalem honor journalists whose writing has increased understanding of the peoples of the region and the issues that divide them.
- **Public Education on the Palestinian Refugee Issue:** We are currently in the planning stages of a public education campaign for Israelis on the Palestinian refugee issue. The development of a public campaign will aim to raise awareness in the Israeli public to the components, possible solutions and implications of the Palestinian refugee issue. Such a campaign is aimed at supporting any future efforts to resolve this complex issue.

## II. REGIONAL DIALOGUES & COOPERATION

*Our regional initiatives bring together specialists and leaders to cooperatively discuss critical issue of regional cooperation.*

- **Cooperative Disease Monitoring System:** Since 2003, we have facilitated regional cooperation against the threat posed by biological attacks and natural disease outbreaks. In partnership with the NTI Global Health and Security Initiative, we formed Jerusalem Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance (MECIDS), through which the Ministries of Health of Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority are sharing data about disease outbreaks. Currently, MECIDS is assisting Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian health and veterinary issues to work together to manage the threat of avian influenza (“bird flu”).
  - ⇒ Since avian influenza was first identified in Israel on March 16, 2006, MECIDS has convened six meetings to coordinate among the Palestinian, Israeli, and Jordanian ministries of health and agriculture to battle avian influenza. The three Ministries of Health are in the process of writing a common plan of action for monitoring and preventing this deadly virus from spreading in the region.
- **Holy Sites Initiative:** To empower and mobilize Middle Eastern religious leaders as peacemakers, we are facilitating a process which will result in leaders of the three Abrahamic faiths signing a declaration that recognizes and respects the attachments of the three faiths to their respective holy sites in Jerusalem and the setting up of an inter-religious standing committee to deal with potential crises in a peaceful manner. As part of this process, we are partnering with Catholic University, Washington D.C. in a Holy Sites workshop in November whose purpose is to clarify religious laws and customs relating to graves and cemeteries within Christianity, Islam and Judaism and to offer opportunities for dialogue between religious leaders, legal experts and activists.
- **The Jerusalem Old City Initiative:** This initiative aims to build workable solutions on the future of the Old City by advancing practical cooperation and improving conditions on the ground through addressing the wide-ranging needs of stakeholders in the Old City. A second goal is to provoke rigorous discussion about future governance options for the Old City and to generate new possibilities and ways of thinking, through public education and advocacy.

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