

Jerusalem Programme Update

Search for Common Ground

April 2010

Since 1991, Search for Common Ground's (SFCG) Jerusalem office has been conducting multi-track activities to promote positive relationships amongst Palestinians, Israelis and Arabs in the Middle East through programmes and tools that advance mutual respect and reconciliation. Its vision is that the people of the Middle East region live together in equality, mutual respect and cooperation. Activities focus on:

- I. Developing an independent media capable of addressing critical issues in a constructive manner.
- II. Building regional cooperation in the fields of interfaith, health and leadership development.

UPDATE:

- *The Team* – a 26 episode original Palestinian T.V. production - will be aired in May
- We present our Code on Holy Sites project to the European Council of Religious Leaders on April 28th in Istanbul
- Our project to promote common ground journalism in the region starts uni-national journalist workshops on April 22nd.



I. MEDIA ACTIVITIES

We initiate activities with media professionals to improve communication across borders, increase regional understanding and encourage journalists to challenge their own biases and stereotypes. We believe the media can and should be used as a tool that builds peace and educates the public on core issues.

Partnership with Palestinian TV Stations

Our partnerships with Palestinian T.V. stations are strengthening and expanding, with grants from the US State Department. We are supporting the production of much needed local news for Palestinians and are also deepening our relationship with the Ma'an Network of independent Palestinian TV stations, covering the West Bank and Gaza. Strengthening independent media is crucial for stimulating open debate and creating space for alternative voices in today's political environment.

Palestinian TV Programmes

In partnership with the independent Palestinian network, Ma'an, we have co-produced 4 programmes that have been broadcast on the 8 local Ma'an TV stations around the West Bank. These include the second season of a weekly TV talk show, *The Hard Questions*, developed by Ma'an productions, which included open discussion panels, live international uplinks, and a live participating audience discussing issues that are highly relevant to Palestinian daily life. This was the first Palestinian programme to include a representative of the Israeli government as a guest. All programmes strive to provide useful day to day information that affects the lives of local Palestinians and offer opportunities for the public to air its views.

Promoting Common Ground Journalism in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza

This two year initiative's overall goal is to promote "common ground" journalism¹ and enrich Israeli and Palestinian mid-career media professionals in a process of empowerment, skill development, interaction, networking and dialogue that will shift the way media portrays the Arab-Israeli relationship and will encourage popular support amongst Israelis and Palestinians towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

An advisory board of senior media personalities from both sides are actively helping us with the project and we have recruited well known journalists for our workshops which begin un-nationally this month.

Football Series | *The Team*

As part of an SFCG project to produce TV and radio drama series in 15 countries, focusing on the theme of football and the benefits to the individual and society of being a team player, SFCG's Jerusalem office is helping to produce T.V. drama series in both the Palestinian territories and Israel

Palestinian Territories

In the presence of the Palestinian Minister of Tourism last June, Ma'an productions, Bethlehem, launched its filming of *The Team*, a 26 episode drama series. With a cast of 112, and enthusiastic voluntary extras, there has been great local and international interest in the production. This series is now ready for airing and will be screened on Palestinian T.V. in May 2010.

Israel

A script of Israel's *The Team*, an 8 episode drama series set in the Arab/Jewish city of Ramla, is ready for production. Discussions on joint production with Israeli T.V. is under way with a broadcast schedule for 2011.



Eliav-Sartawi Awards for Middle East Journalism



Issam Sartawi and Aryeh Eliav

Since 2000, the Eliav-Sartawi Awards for Middle Eastern Journalism have recognised and encouraged journalism that contributes to better understanding between people and to maintaining political dialogue in the Middle East. Our 2009 winners were:

- Aziz Abu Sarah in the Palestinian category for his article, “A Palestinian remembers the Holocaust”
- Yizhar Be’er in the Israeli category for his article, “Human tragedy as a catalyst for change”
- Mona Eltahawy in the international category for her article, “The loneliest man in the world”

They were honoured at a ceremony in Jerusalem last November in the presence of distinguished guests including the U.S. Consul General, Daniel Rubinstein .



Common Ground Journalism

The Common Ground News Service (CGNews) www.commongroundnews.org promotes mutual understanding and offers opportunities for dialogue and constructive suggestions that facilitate peaceful resolution of conflict. The Middle East edition accomplishes this goal by providing constructive and solution-oriented news, op-eds, features and analyses to hundreds of news outlets worldwide on a broad range of issues affecting the region. Our selected weekly articles of free copyrighted originals and sourced pieces are translated into Arabic, English and Hebrew. CGNews—Middle East is produced by a diverse group of Palestinian, Israeli and international editors.



* CGNews-ME has expanded its group of editors to accommodate the growing number of commissioned and unsolicited original articles it receives for publication. One main aim is to encourage and educate towards a new style of writing and reading – one that offers common ground and provides hope. Please do check out our recent completed series on how *Informal education shapes perspectives on the conflict* and *Jews and Muslims in each others’ religious narratives*. We have also received a two-year grant to develop six series on issues around *Religious Freedom and Tolerance*.

* Today, CGNews has 35,000 subscribers and an active network of contributing authors and major media partners around the world.

II. REGIONAL COOPERATION

Our regional initiatives are aimed at improving dialogue and cooperation amongst specialists and leaders in the Middle East, particularly in the fields of interfaith, health and leadership development.

Cooperative Disease Monitoring System

The Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance (MECIDS) was galvanised into immediate joint action to control impending outbreaks of swine flu in the region. This is an example of the continuing success of MECIDS - a mechanism for joint action by public health and academic experts from Israel, Jordan and Palestine. They have established national laboratory-based surveillance networks for food-borne and influenza diseases in their countries and maintain them according to a harmonised methodology which includes a common platform of communication, data sharing and analysis. With extensive financial support from the Global Health and Security Initiative, NTI, over the past five years, MECIDS has been a resounding success and we anticipate that the continuing upgrade in the methods of surveillance will play an important role in the prevention and control of occurrence and transmission of disease. Plans are afoot to use the MECIDS model to develop further health cooperation in the fields of nutrition and chronic diseases.



Interfaith Activities



*We are part of a project to develop a universal *Code on Holy Sites*, together with the Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights, One World in Dialogue, and Religions for Peace, which for the first time ever is mapping out a detailed code of conduct in relation to sacred places world-wide. The intention is to partner with governments to ensure that the code will be adopted by a world body and to set up a monitoring mechanism to assess progress in individual countries.

*Plans are progressing towards the creation of a *Jerusalem Peoples of the Book Centre*, a place dedicated to learning about Christianity, Islam and Judaism, within a framework that will be open, mutually respectful and home to the three Abrahamic faiths equally. A feasibility study is planned as a next step.

*The secretariat of the Council of Religious Institutions continues to work out of SFCG's Jerusalem office enabling close working relationships between SFCG and the Council.

Emerging Leaders Network

The *Palestinian-Israeli Young Social Entrepreneurs Programme* concluded its first year with amazing success. It provided 12 carefully selected social entrepreneurs with leadership, communication and conflict resolution skills and has resulted in profound relationships as well as the beginnings of a leadership network. This is a joint project of SFCG's Leadership Wisdom Initiative (LWI), Outward Bound, and our Jerusalem office.

We have now expanded this project to incorporate 12 Palestinian and Israeli political emerging leaders who returned this month from an amazingly successful joint overseas wilderness expedition.

Project proposals have already been submitted to expand this network to business and religious leaders.

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