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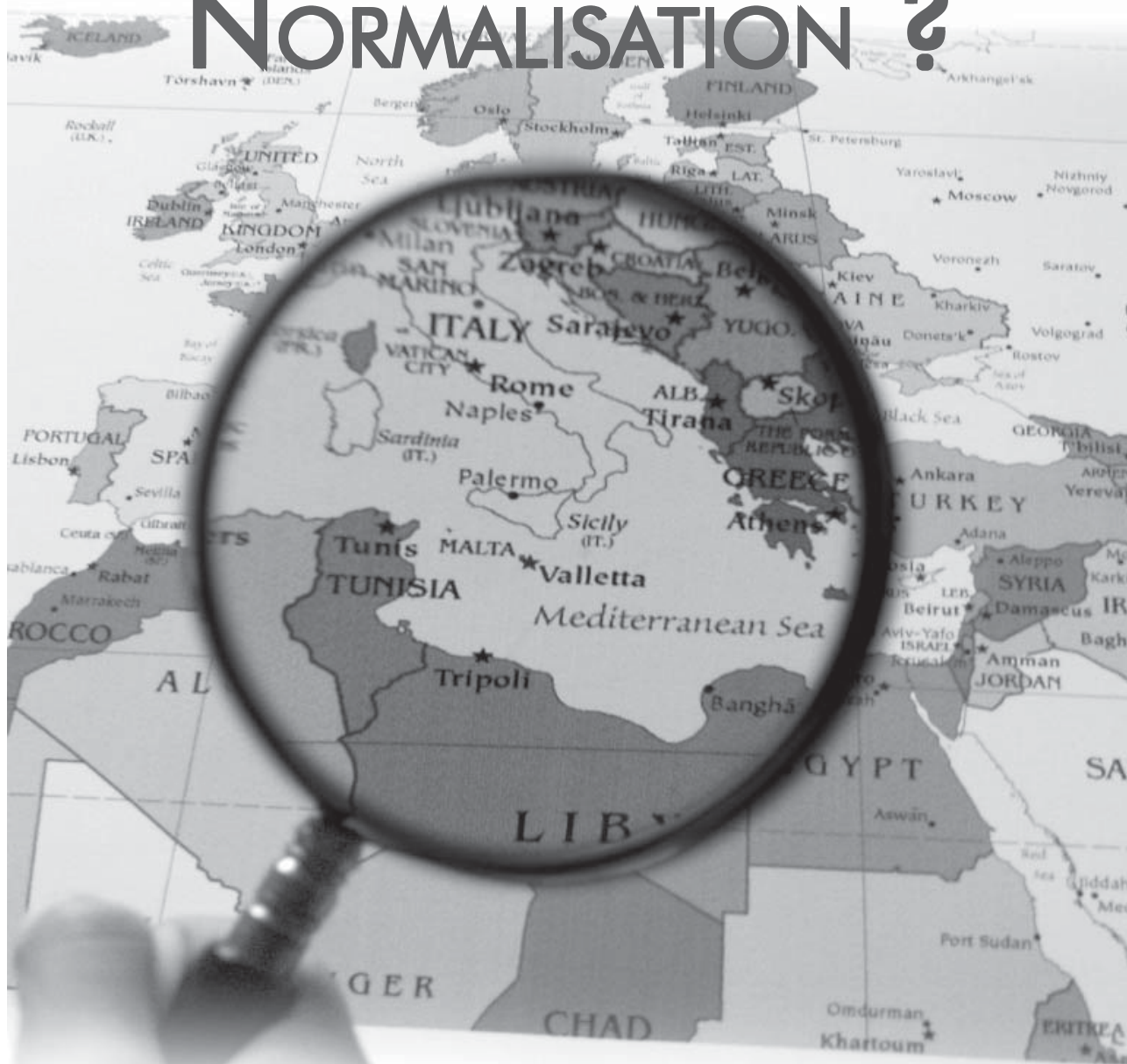
THE PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE PROGRAMMES

PEACEMAKING OR NORMALISATION ?

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Executive Summary

As controversial as the Oslo process is, the related People-to-People Programme is even more controversial. This paper is an attempt to shed some light on the pros and cons of this programme with the hope that it may prove beneficial to those interested in future intercultural programmes between Palestine and Israel.

While the People-to-People Programme could have been an important and integral part of confidence-building measures, it could not have anticipated any prospect of success so long as it was regarded as a replacement for more practical confidence-building measures. Unfortunately, through the interim peace period before Final Status negotiations, the parties failed to improve day-to-day living conditions or to address the fears within both communities, and even implemented procedures that increased hardship and intensified fear. The philosophy behind the People-to-People Programme thus failed to establish a practical basis.

The first fundamental challenge facing the People-to-People Programme was to identify the confusion between being either a part of peacemaking or an attempt for normalization. While the focus of peacemaking is on the ability to recruit and activate groups of people from both sides of the conflict in a collective effort aimed at challenging unjust conditions and attempting to replace them with more human and just conditions through proper education and challenges to oppressive and inhuman measures, the focus of normalization is to defuse the conflict and educate the public to accept injustice as a reality of life. The first is a comprehensive attempt to resolve the conflict; the second is merely a conflict management process.

Being linked to the Oslo Process was in itself a liability for the programme. Whilst the Oslo initiative was a process of crisis management stemming out of a contested political position, peace-building itself cannot in principle be limited politically or culturally. All peace-building initiatives, including People-to-People Programs are by definition grassroots initiatives and cannot be launched or supervised by governments and authorities. It follows, therefore, that in order not to be hostage to conflicting political agendas, programmes of cross-cultural relations must be independent of official authorities.

To counter the severe structural lack of parity between the two sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, considerable effort needs to be invested in capacity-building on the Palestinian side. In addition, considerable effort should be invested in creating dialogue with Palestinian civil society organizations in order to redefine the objectives and means of cross-cultural programmes.

The most effective peace-building organizations are ones that are active in times of crisis. The mechanism of choosing partners and beneficiaries should take into consideration the history of work for peace and justice. Involvement of fund-oriented, newly-established groups and organizations negatively effects popular perceptions of such programmes. In short, such a programme should avoid becoming a fund opportunity for technical and regional cooperation. This factor is crucial in order to match programmes with declared intentions and to separate the programme from normalization efforts.

Beneficiaries should be required to publish their programmes and work results through the local media. Informing the public and allowing public evaluation is important for gathering popular support and gaining influence; it will also further help to avoid fund-oriented programmes. Being open and transparent to the public is essential to fulfill the declared aims of the programme.

1. A conflict with little communication

Oppression and resistance

Since the beginning of the Middle East conflict, Palestinians have fought to achieve their legitimate national and civil rights. Facing the colonial and expansionist character of the Israeli occupation, resistance through a variety of methods has continued on many fronts. As a result of the gradual shift of resistance into the Occupied Territories towards the end of the 1980s, Palestinians introduced the Intifada (popular uprising; literally "shaking off") as a new style of rebellion. The Intifada combined the character of a civil rights movement with that of a national struggle for independence. Peaceful mass protests coincided with small-scale violence such as stone throwing, and limited, localized armed struggle. The balance between the three methods has been determined by issues of efficiency and has varied according to the level of Israeli oppression.

The conflict myths

Until the 1980s, the national liberation struggle was hampered by myths that were directly responsible for prolonging the life of the occupation. The first, which was widespread among Palestinians living inside the Occupied Territories, was the belief that, if they remained steadfast, salvation would come from outside. The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, after which the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) lost its last stronghold adjacent to Occupied Palestine, stimulated intensive debate about the effectiveness of the modern Palestinian revolution as a Diaspora movement. It forced Palestinians in the Occupied Territories to reclaim responsibility for national independence. Thus, even before the 1987 Intifada, the focal point of the conflict had moved into the Occupied Territories. The main issue on the Palestinian national agenda was now to challenge the sustainability of the Israeli occupation, with the eventual goal of ending it.

The second myth, which was widespread among Israelis, was the very sustainability of that occupation. The practice of introducing minor modifications to the system, which started with the creation in 1979 of the so-called Civil Administration after the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt, was intended to prolong occupation indefinitely while at the same time avoiding the difficult problem of how to determine what the final status of the territories and their inhabitants would be. The only two available options – annexation or Palestinian independence – were from the Israeli standpoint extremely problematic. The first was hindered by the complicated demography of the territories. Annexation – aside from the worldwide protest and diplomatic problems it would have provoked – would have brought about demographic parity between Jews and Palestinians in Israel, thus threatening the Jewish character of the state. In addition, like the first, the second option flew in the face of Zionist ideology. It would have forced a reversal of all the procedures implemented on the ground since the occupation began in 1967, not least among them the settlements. The most immediate accomplishment of the 1987 Intifada, therefore, was that it seriously challenged the sustainability of occupation. In doing so, it forced a search for an alternative.

Oslo, colliding agendas

The Oslo Process was an important manifestation of the recognition by both Israel and the PLO of two things: that occupation – at least as it was being enforced at the time – was not sustainable and needed to be replaced, and that it was necessary to move not only the conflict but also the Palestinian leadership into the Occupied Territories. Unfortunately, the two sides had different and very contradictory understandings of the Oslo Process. Israel, while accepting the need to replace the occupation with something else, was primarily interested in creating a system that addressed its demographic problem. Its goal was to quell the rebellion while maintaining overall control of the territories, and at the same time ensuring maximum separation of the Jewish and Palestinian populations. Israel also thought that, by moving the conflict into the territories, it would be easier to normalize relations with the Arab World and, at the same time, create a partner – the Palestinian Authority – that would help satisfy its security demands. The PLO envisioned the Oslo Process differently, seeing it as the gradual replacement of occupation with national independence. The PLO also thought that moving the Palestinian leadership into the Occupied Territories was a better way to continue the national struggle than the problematic Diaspora revolution. A collision between the two different agendas was inevitable.

Many Israeli politicians were convinced that by the end of this process, Palestinians would have to relinquish most of their national, religious, and human rights because of Israel's ability to dictate terms, especially with the coordinated pressure of the United States. As a result, throughout the Oslo period, successive Israeli governments shared the same political bottom line: a united Jerusalem would be the eternal capital of Israel, the Jordan Valley would be forever controlled by Israel as a security asset, most of the Jewish settlements would stay and remain under Israeli sovereignty, and Israel would accept no moral, political, or historical responsibility for the Palestinian refugees. These guidelines were repeated to the Israeli public on a daily basis and, as a result of this, most were convinced that all were legitimate Israeli rights. The 2000 Intifada brought an end to those illusions and set the region on a course towards reality with the masks ripped away.

2. The history of grassroots Israeli-Palestinian relations prior to the Oslo agreement

Paving the way for intercultural relations

Although, prior to the Intifada of 1987, there were few acknowledged attempts to initiate low profile and secret communication between Israelis and PLO members, the Intifada was a major landmark in this direction. The gradual shift of the center of the Palestinian national struggle into the Occupied Territories and the more realistic Palestinian political approach, which developed into the two-states-solution programme, paved the way for a different level of political communication between both sides. While official communication was hindered by lack of recognition, unofficial communication between activists from both sides started to emerge. Due to the long-standing opposition to normalisation on the Palestinian side, and the widespread denial on the Israeli side of the Palestinians in general and the PLO in particular, there was a wide and common basis on both sides to reject the idea of establishing a tradition of communication.

The Intifada of 1987 brought with it many elements that paved the way for a better level of grassroots political communication. First, it challenged dramatically the longstanding Israeli denial of Palestinians as a nation. Prior to the Intifada of 1987, the Israeli common perception of Palestinians was that of residents entitled to limited residential rights. The modern Palestinian revolution, as perceived by Israelis, was narrowed into being a programme of organized "terror" groups that only related to the Palestinian public through incitement. Being a massive popular movement, the Intifada of 1987 forced Israelis – at least the Zionist left – to rethink their position and created enough of a motivation to rediscover Palestinians. At the same time, through the Intifada, Palestinians gained a considerable level of pride and self-confidence, and managed to overcome their painful sense of weakness. In other words, Palestinians felt confident and powerful enough to address the other side and communicate on an equal footing.

The fairly long period of stability and prosperity in Israel prior to the Intifada of 1987 resulted in a limited liberalization of the Israeli society. This process enabled certain Israeli peace groups to escape their long-standing ideology of exclusiveness and they began paying more attention to the human and civil needs of the Palestinian population on one hand and monitoring more

carefully the oppressive ventures and measures of their government on the other. Many "peace" groups emerged or were reactivated, the most significant of which was Peace Now. The Zionist left escaped, at least theoretically, the widespread Israeli rejection of the concept of a Palestinian state. In addition, many Israeli human rights organizations, encouraged by European funding, started playing a significant role in monitoring and reporting the wrongdoings of the Israeli government in the Occupied Territories.

These transformations paved the way for a limited level of communication and cooperation between Intifada activists and the Israeli left. Yet, the crucial factor that made this communication and the concomitant limited joint work possible was that Israelis did not perceive the Intifada of 1987 as a threat to the existence of the State of Israel. The pioneers in establishing such relations were Palestinian local Intifada leaders and Israeli peace and human rights activists.

At the other end of the political spectrum, there existed factors that negatively effected the emerging intercultural relations. On the Palestinian side the major fear was playing into the hands of Israelis in their attempts to create an "alternative leadership" to the PLO. Israeli brutality was another and the worry about confusing such relations with attempts at normalisation was the third. On the Israeli side, parallel anxieties, stemming from the fear of supporting "the enemy" in its revolt against Israel, significantly limited the scale of involvement.

The Palestinian fear that their involvement would possibly diffuse the conflict without achieving any political result was limited by the emerging environment of active resistance and the focus on the practices of the Israeli occupation. While some Israeli activists were interested in diffusing or at least limiting the scale of Palestinian resistance, such relations added considerable weight to the Palestinian resistance. The well-known movement towards civil disobedience in the town of Beit Sahour with a considerable contribution from Israeli peace activists is a clear example of this process at work.

Such relations were different from those established after the signing of the Oslo Accords, for they developed from the bottom-up and addressed issues of popular concern. The phenomenon could best be described as an attempt to engage in efforts to change an existing and unjust reality towards different and less unjust conditions.

The different forms of communication and cooperation

The period of the 1987 Intifada witnessed the development of several new channels and forms of communication and cooperation among Palestinians and Israelis. Most noteworthy among them were the following:

Dialogue: A handful of dialogue groups emerged; most of them were aimed at challenging negative stereotypes, understanding one another better, and transmitting firsthand information about the situation in the Occupied Territories.

Joint work: A few joint activities in the form of peaceful protests, acts of defiance, and solidarity visits took place.

Cooperation: A good level of cooperation existed in the field of monitoring and reporting human rights abuses.

Institutional work: On a few occasions, joint institutes were established. The Alternative Information Center, the Israeli-Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI), and Defense for Children International (DCI) are examples of this.

Finally, this period witnessed an active role of the few Israeli peace organizations that were engaged in anti-occupation activities, such as '*Yesh Gvul'* (There Are Limits), '*Gush Shalom'* and Rapprochement-West Jerusalem.

Particularly successful was the experience of the Palestinian Center for Rapprochement between People in Beit Sahour. While the Center played a significant role in the Intifada activities, it also managed to mobilize numerous Israeli peace groups to participate in solidarity and joint acts of non-violent resistance and civil disobedience. The joint work of Intifada activists, backed by international solidarity groups and Israeli peace groups, created an example of a self-confident resistance that embar-

rassed the Israeli occupation and was highly appreciated by all Palestinians.

3. The People-to-People programme as an integral part of the Oslo agreement

The following article of the Oslo II Agreement (also known as Interim Agreement) signed on 25 September 1995 in Taba, represents the basic legal framework upon which the People-to-People Programme was based.

Article VIII: The People-to-People programme

- The two sides shall cooperate in enhancing the dialogue and relations between their peoples in accordance with the concept developed in co-operation with the Kingdom of Norway.
- The two sides shall cooperate in enhancing dialogue relations between their peoples, as well as in gaining a wider exposure of the two publics to the peace process, its current situation and predicted results.
- The two sides shall take steps to foster public debate and involvement, to remove barriers to interaction, and to increase the People-to-People exchange and interaction within all areas of cooperation described in this Annex and in accordance with the overall objectives and principles set out in this Annex.

The People-to-People Programme is best summarized by the following statement:

The Israeli-Palestinian People-to-People programme, supported by Norway

- Established in the Oslo II Agreement in 1995
- An official programme led and supported by the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, Norway is a facilitator.
- Funded by CRB (Israel) and Norway, implemented by NGOs (grass-root focus)
- Aim: Enhance Palestinian-Israeli dialogue and relations.
  -Foster wider public exposure to and involvement in the peace process
  -Strengthen and increase in direct people-to-people relationship and cooperation based on equality and reciprocity.

Yet, in reality, the People-to-People Programme, although well intentioned, was the outcome of a basically naïve interpretation of the Oslo Accords. The justifying argument runs as follows: as it is virtually impossible to deal with the core issues of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict within the existing environment, interim arrangements should be implemented to create an atmosphere more conducive to enabling both parties to deal with the difficult issues of Jerusalem, settlements, and refugees. In order to create a different atmosphere, practical steps should be implemented to reduce the level of enmity and create an atmosphere of cooperation.

However, although the People-to-People Programme could have been an important and integral part of confidence-building measures, it had, in practice little prospect of success because it replaced practical confidence-building measures, rather than being a supplement to them. Unfortunately, throughout the interim period covered by the Oslo Accords**,** the parties to the conflict failed to improve the day-to-day living conditions of Palestinians, as well as addressing the fears within both communities. On the contrary, they even implemented procedures that both increased hardship and intensified fear. The philosophy behind the People-to-People Programme, therefore, failed to establish a practicable basis for success.

As the People-to-People Programme was not combined with other confidence-building measures, it was inevitable that Palestinian doubts about the programme increased, as they feared it was just another attempt towards normalisation without a political horizon. Over time, furthermore, the programme appeared even more problematic es-

pecially through the many periods of conflict that followed the signing of the Oslo Accords. Nonetheless, the initiative was pushed ahead and did have real achievements to its credit, even if it could not realize its original ambitions.

4. Basic information on the programme

In its latest published report, the People-to-People Programme made the following statement:

> *Since 1995 about 575 organizations have applied to the People-to-People Programme, and 144 projects have received support. The organizations supported by the programme come from all areas of the Palestinian and Israeli societies. There are projects in all the Palestinian cities of the West Bank: from Jenin and Nablus in the North, from Jericho in the East, to Bethlehem and Hebron in the South. In Gaza, there are projects in Gaza City, Khan Younis and Rafah. The Israeli partners come from the Galilee in the North, from Tel Aviv to the West, and from the Negev in the South.*
> *The Israeli and Palestinian organizations and public institutions are bringing ordinary people together through joint projects and experiences. They increase their knowledge and understanding of each other as individuals and their two societies.*

The programme still enjoys widespread international support. While Norway continues to be the main donor for People-to-People projects, Canada, the British Council, the French Embassy, the US Embassy, the European Union Representative office in Jerusalem, and the German Embassy are also contributors in funding the People-to-People projects and activities.

Projects of the People-to-People Programme fell into the following categories:

- Peace Education:
- Dialogues
- Workshops and Seminars
- Publications
- Video and Film production

- Capacity building:
- Training for peace and reconciliation
- Funds to strengthen peace organizations

- Technical cooperation:
- Health
- Social work
- Environment
- Academic research
- Water
- Security
- Regional technical cooperation

In terms of the implementing organizations the projects were organized as follows:
- Projects implemented in partnership between a Palestinian and an Israeli organization
- Projects implemented by a joint Palestinian-Israeli organization
- Projects implemented by a Palestinian organization
- Projects implemented by an Israeli organization
- Projects implemented by a foreign organization

5. Critical analysis of the programme

Issues related to context

It is now clear that the predominantly conflictual environment that emerged in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords was a major obstacle to the philosophy behind the People-to-People Programme. The atmosphere was one of crisis and not of cooperation. Palestinians, especially, failed to find through the People-to-People Programme a mechanism that helped to achieve a just and durable peace and the initiative was usually seen, instead, as "normalisation". Furthermore, the deep political differences and divisions within both sides between supporters and opponents of the Oslo Accords ignited profound opposition and political criticisms to the People-to-People Programme which was linked to them. As a result of such political concerns, while the People-to-People Programmes were intended to be implemented by the NGO community, the major and well-established Palestinian NGOs refrained from engaging in them. Those who at a later stage joined the programme continued to be marginal beneficiaries.

Given these hesitant Palestinian attitudes, the programme shifted towards unilateral projects with bilateral elements. A detailed examination of the People-to-People projects, shows that a high percentage were implemented by one organization alone, whether Palestinian, Israeli, or international. While all the programmes had a cross-cultural element, cooperative institutional work evidently faced problems.

A few examples will demonstrate this:[1]
PROJECT A-98-051: Health Training Project.
Implementing organization: Hadassah Hospital Hebrew University.
PROJECT A-98-052: Interlink in Rehabilitation Project.
Implementing organization: International Team on Wheelchairs
PROJECT A-98-102: Network 2012.
Implementing organization: Network 2012

Issues of parity

One of the stated aims of the People-to-People Programme was to "*strengthen and increase in direct people-to-people relationship and cooperation based on equality and reciprocity*". The basic structural lack of parity between the two sides militated powerfully against this hypothesis.

While the concept behind the People-to-People Programme fitted smoothly with the wide-spread Israeli desire for reducing the level of enmity and gaining unconditional acceptance through cooperation, it stood in contradiction to the wide-spread Palestinian desire for fundamental geo-political changes prior to establishing a cooperative environment. Therefore, while Israelis were both politically and psychologically integrating into the programme, Palestinians faced it with suspicion and hesitation.

Equality and reciprocity are difficult to fulfill between a community with an annual per-capita-income of US $16,000 and another with an annual per-capita-income of US $500-700! In such cases, cooperation is easily confused with dependency. In addition, as was evident in most of the projects, the well-established, highly experienced, and technically advanced Israeli NGO community, dominated the cooperation agenda as far as the inexperienced and often newly established Palestinian NGOs were concerned.

As the most liberal and westernized sectors of Israeli society provided the majority of Israeli partners of the People-to-People Programme, they formed a community based on the principles of individualism, which ran counter to the collectively oriented Palestinian culture. The potential for cultural misunderstandings between a culture that values the right to be different and one that values more common traditions and internal unity is huge. In general, the dialogue in most of the cases was between Israeli individuals who stood outside the national Zionist consensus and Palestinian individuals, who identified with – rather than against – their collective identity.

Issues related to the structure

The fact that the programme was administrated by FAFO (a Norwegian institute) and supervised by the Israeli Foreign Ministry and the Israeli Desk in the Palestinian Authority increased the polarization of the Palestinian community. Opponents of Oslo became, more or less automatically, strong opponents of the programme.

[1] For a full review of the projects please see: http://www.people-to-people.org/.

Issues of impact

In general, the People-to-People Programmes were barely reported in the local media. Therefore, with the exception of those directly involved in the programmes, the programme failed in "spreading a culture of peace" and in "educating the public about the peace process". The current crisis will be a severe test for the impact of such programmes. The extremely high level of enmity and hostility demonstrated by both sides on both the official and popular levels indicates that the dominant culture is one of a crisis of antagonism rather than of reconciliation. It indicates as well that the programmes did not penetrate deep into the perceptions of both communities, merely floating on the surface instead.

On the other hand, given its top-down in practice, the People-to-People Programme negatively affected the continuity and reputation of the bottom-up programmes dealing with cross-cultural communication and cooperation that had been developed during the 1987 Intifada. These negative effects resulted from the following factors:

> 1. Attempts to rapidly expand highly sensitive and disputed cross-cultural relations.
> 2. Involvement of many new players with differing agendas that did not develop out of needs but out of opportunities provided by the existence of the programme.
> 3. Linkage to contested political attitudes, which caused polarization and activated opposition to the programmes of cross-cultural relations.
> 4. The plethora of new fund-oriented programmes and organizations, which increased suspicions of such programmes as being primarily oriented to personal agendas and benefits.

The most common accusation the programme faced, however, was that of being categorized as work towards normalisation – a concept worth closer examination.

6. The concept of "Normalisation"

From forced into accepted coexistence

No term amongst Arab and Palestinian intellectuals is dealt with in such a sensitive fashion as the term "normalisation." The Arab satellite TV networks are full of debates about normalisation, Committees against Normalisation are being established, and punitive measures against individuals accused of promoting normalisation are taken by some Arab civil society organizations.

The term normalisation stems from the long-standing Israeli and American demand that Israel be accepted as part of the Middle East both politically and culturally. It has to do with the basic view of Israel, as seen by its new natural environment. Indeed, there is a major dispute as to whether it should be seen merely as a temporary colonial entity or as a legitimate and integrated neighbor. In this sense, the dispute is still acute, for the issue touches not only one's image of the other side, but one's own self image as well.

For Palestinians and Arabs, the transformation from a state of forced coexistence into a state of recognized coexistence is one of the most sensitive issues facing the region. People can live with injustice imposed by force – but that is totally different from recognizing injustice as normal. What is demanded in this case is approval; a stamp of legitimacy, not through a treaty between two states but rather through consensus among people. It is something that cannot be imposed by dictation, for it is inherently a democratic process that has to be accepted at a popular level.

While most Arabs are bothered by what they perceive as the unjust historical process of replacing Palestine with Israel, it is possible to state, with a degree of confidence, that a majority in the Arab world is ready for a historical compromise that includes recognizing and accepting the geopolitical realities in the Middle East. Yet, it is evident that this readiness is not unconditional. In political terms, a historical compromise based on a total Israeli withdrawal from the areas occupied in the course of the 1967 War, combined with the creation of a Palestinian state, and a decent solution to the Palestinian refugee problem represents the main lines around which a popular Arab consensus can be established.

However, as the course of events does not even point in that direction, normalisation with Israel in the Middle East is seen instead as a complete surrender from the point of view of Arab nations, and as an ultimate triumph for Zionist ideology. Current events there not only make it impossible to create the basis for a historical compromise, but also cannot even sustain the original and long-standing formula of enforced coexistence.

Normalisation and peacemaking

If we carefully examine the different positions of all parties involved in the Israeli-Arab conflict, we can identify the following main themes: in Israel, normalisation was generally envisioned as a way to end the crisis without addressing issues of rights and justice. It was always looked at as an alternative to opening the historical file of the conflict. In effect, it was always a call to recognize and accept established realities. On the Arab side, the process of normalisation was always linked to the Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied in the 1967 War. Both Egypt and Jordan were ready to recognize Israel, establish diplomatic relations, and adopt an official position that encouraged economic and cultural normalisation after the Israeli withdrawal from their territories and the signing of a peace treaty.

Other Arab countries kept the link between normalisation and an agreed solution to the Palestinian, Lebanese, and Syrian problems. A large degree of confusion over what this would be emerged in the wake of the Madrid Conference in 1991, and after the Oslo peace talks up to August 1993. Differences also arose between those who considered a comprehensive peace as a pre-requisite for normalizing relations with Israel and those who looked at normalisation as concurrent with peace negotiations. While there have always been parties that rejected normalizing relations with Israel in all circumstances, the first two points of view represented the majority, both at official and popular levels.

Those who consider achieving a comprehensive peace as a pre-requisite to normalisation, base their position on the assumption that Israel will refrain from restituting Arab rights once normal relations are established. Furthermore, the current crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories created a popular radical movement within different Arab countries against normalisation. Such a movement forced many Arab states to reconsider, and in some cases retreat from, their formal policies in this regard.

Palestinians and normalisation

The prolonged Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and the rigid Israeli control over Palestinian life there created a strong subordinate relationship of Palestinian dependency in all walks of life. Such relationships were abnormal and needed to be "normalized." Whilst this high level of dependency is the cause of the failure of repeated calls for boycotts of Israeli products and an end to employment in Israel, anti-normalisation voices in Palestine have focused their attention on trying to encourage "free choice". In other words, working in Israel, even in Israeli settlements, consuming Israeli products, and engaging in business or commercial cooperation were looked at as part of an imposed reality which could not be altered. The dispute, therefore, was largely focused around political and cultural communication and cooperation.

Such a definition is fundamentally problematic. On one hand, it artificially separates daily life experiences from political and national issues, on the other, it ignores issues that entrench occupation and control, and at the same time, it hinders the ability of Palestinians to become engaged in political initiatives to influence Israeli domestic life, both of which would be important factors in shortening the occupation.

No one can ignore the emotional tension combined with the brutality of the crisis. The tribal dimension of the conflict creates a

high level of resentment over any cross-cultural efforts. Moreover, the ongoing call by the Palestinians on Arab nations to resist normalisation initiatives acts as a moral obligation on them to refrain from practicing what others seek to discourage. Oslo was envisioned as a process of accommodating to one another, a process that can be easily confused with normalisation. The crucial link was, and still is, whether such a process is conditional or not. In effect, the agreed basis for both the Madrid conference and the Oslo Accords – the "land-for-peace" formula – is normalisation with a territorial dimension.

The current crisis has forced the Palestinian NGO community to define the terms of its future communication and cooperation with Israeli public and civil society organizations within the context of a severe and bloody crisis. The official position of the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO) is to seek an immediate freeze of all joint projects and to be prepared to cooperate only with Israeli groups that stand for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, thereby setting political conditions to regulate cross-cultural relations. In effect, this new attitude of Palestinian civil society organizations has resulted in a total freeze of relations, with the exception of relations with some marginal radical Israeli groups.

While this new approach ignores the need for directly educating the Israeli public, and in a certain sense puts the cart before the horse, it clearly shows that addressing Palestinian rights is a prerequisite for cooperation, at least at the grassroots level. This new approach will force the People-to-People Programme to revise both its aims and means.

7. The People-to-People programme - Conflicting ideas

One can define the different Palestinian positions towards Palestinian-Israeli grassroots relations, in general, and towards the People-to-People Programme, in particular, as follows:

There exists a position that systematically opposes any form of cross-cultural grassroots relations between Palestinians and Israelis. In principle, such relations are considered to be normalisation attempts that negatively affect the Palestinian cause. From this perspective, the peace camp in Israel is seen as attempting to decorate the ugly face of the Israeli occupation, both locally and internationally. Such a stand requires that even few radical Israeli groups who join in direct acts of peaceful defiance against the Israeli occupation should limit their protests to areas inside Israel proper. In the heat of a crisis like the present one, such a stand gains considerable popular support. Furthermore, given their consistent opposition to the Oslo Process, such groups were and still are powerful opponents to the People-to-People Programme. These groups evidently belong to the camp that considers recovering Palestinian national and historical rights as a prerequisite for peace-building and normalisation.

On the other side, stand the "moderate" Palestinians who not only supported the People-to-People Programme but also were among its most active participants. Their vision was that of a concurrent political and grassroots engagement. However, as the crisis broke, opposition to People-to-People Programmes gained ground even within such groups. However, whilst the dispute amongst Palestinians over cross-cultural relations and normalisation has been a heated one, the issue has never been subject to thorough examination or discussion being limited instead to an exchange of accusations.

On the Israeli side, with the exception of extreme racist right-wing groups, inter-cultural relations and cooperation were welcomed. While the work of Israeli peace groups through the 1987 Intifada period created heated disputes inside Israel, the People-to-People Programme passed almost unnoticed. Beneficiaries of the programme ranged from peace activists, mainstream Zionists, apolitical professionals, to right-wing Zionists, including settlers living in the occupied territories. Whether motivated by peacemaking, influencing the other side, the colonial attitude of civilizing the occupied, or the direct financial benefits, most Israelis found no problem in identifying with the People-to-People Programme.

8. Lessons and conclusions

· A fundamental challenge is to clarify the confusion between People-to-People Programmes as playing a role in peacemaking or being an attempt for normalisation. The first would be a comprehensive effort towards resolving the conflict, whilst the second is merely a conflict management process.

While the focus of peacemaking is the ability to recruit and activate groups of people from both sides of the conflict in a collective effort aimed at challenging unjust conditions and attempting to replace them with more human and just conditions through proper education and acts of defiance against oppressive and inhuman regulations, the focus of normalisation is to defuse the conflict and educate the public into accepting injustice as a reality of life.

· In order not to be held hostage to conflicting political agendas, programmes of cross-cultural relations should be independent of official authorities.

The linkage to the Oslo Process did not make it easier for People-to-People Programmes to be accepted. On the one hand, Oslo is a process of crisis management stemming out of a contested political position. On the other hand, peace-building cannot be limited politically or culturally. Therefore, all peace-building initiatives, including People-to-People Programmes, are by definition grassroots in nature and cannot be launched or supervised by governments and public authorities.

· To counter the severe structural imbalance between both sides, considerable efforts should be invested in capacity-building on the Palestinian side. In addition, considerable efforts should be invested in creating dialogue within Palestinian civil society organizations to redefine the objectives and means of cross-cultural programmes

· The most effective peace-building organizations are the ones most active in times of crisis. The mechanism of choosing partners and beneficiaries should take into consideration the history of a particular organization's work for peace and justice. Newly established, fund-oriented groups and organizations negatively effect the popular perception of such programmes.

· The programme should avoid becoming a fund opportunity for technical and regional cooperation. This factor is crucial if programmes are to be matched with declared intentions and to separate the programme from normalisation efforts.

· Public openness and transparency are important if the declared aims of the programme are to be achieved.

Beneficiaries should be required to publish their programmes and results through the local media. Informing the public and being open to popular evaluation is important for gathering popular support and gaining influence. Such an approach will also help to avoid fund-oriented programmes.