

*The PACIS Project in Faith-Based Diplomacy
of
The Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution of
Pepperdine University School of Law
and
The International Center for Religion and Diplomacy*

**MIDDLE EAST MISSION #4
TRIP REPORT
MAY 12 -31, 2010**

Introduction

Brian Cox, Tim Pownall and Michael Zacharia conducted a mission to the Middle East May 12 – 31, 2010 to further the development of the Middle East Faith-Based Reconciliation Project.

The PACIS Project in Faith-Based Diplomacy of the International Center For Religion and Diplomacy of Washington DC and the Straus Institute of Pepperdine University Law School of Malibu, California has undertaken a track two faith-based diplomatic initiative to harness the transcendent power of religion to contribute to the peace process in the Middle East specifically as it relates to Israel/Palestine. In essence, we are bringing an innovative model of faith-based reconciliation as a religious framework for peacemaking that has borne tangible fruit in other intractable identity-based conflicts.

Trip Objectives and Results

Objective #1: People Movements

In 2005 ICRD entered into a partner relationship with Musalaha, a Jerusalem-based NGO with an established track record of working for reconciliation in Israel/Palestine. The focus of the project was to combine the methodologies developed by Salim Munayer (Desert Encounter) and Brian Cox (Faith-Based Reconciliation) to create a three stage process as a religious framework for peacemaking and conflict resolution that focused on changing hearts as a prelude to joint problem solving. The first stage of the project would focus on Palestinian Christians and Muslims. The second stage would include Israelis. The purpose of the project was to create genuine grass roots people movements in both Israel and Palestine among young emerging leaders as a means of socializing the Abrahamic values of Faith-Based Reconciliation in both societies as a new but ancient paradigm for the Middle East.

We met twice with Salim Munayer (Executive Director of Musalaha) and once with Sami Awad to strengthen the relationships and lines of communication on this strategic and

sensitive work. We scheduled a two day strategic planning meeting for September 27 – 28, 2010 that will involve the principals from both the PACIS Project and Musalaha. We also agreed that there will be a monthly conference call of all the principals for purposes of updates and planning.

We scheduled a Faith-Based Reconciliation Seminar with Group Three for September 24 – 26, 2010 in either Antalya, Turkey or Limassol, Cyprus. They completed the Desert Encounter April 29 to May 4 in Wadi Rum.

Group One is now being deployed in schools in Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour to teach the core values of Abrahamic Reconciliation as a form of intervention to ease tension between Christian and Muslim pupils.

Group Two has spent the last sixteen weeks reviewing and discussing the eight core values of faith-based reconciliation. One of the challenges identified by Sami Awad in our meeting at Holy Land Trust is the need for greater spiritual formation in the young Palestinian leaders so as to enable the core values to move deeply into their hearts.

We also set aside another “Day in the life of a Palestinian” to be exposed first hand to the experience of check points and other on-the-ground realities in the West Bank. We spent most of our day in Hebron. After visiting both sides of the Tomb of Abraham (Muslim and Jewish) we witnessed the serious tension between Arab villagers and Jewish settlers that had recently forced their way into the area near Abraham’s Tomb.

On the Israeli side we have established a very warm relationship with a City Council Member and the Deputy to the Mayor in Beit Shemesh, a growing pluralistic Israeli city with a large population of Haredim and with a Mayor who is a national leader of the Shas Party. Beit Shemesh also has large populations of Ethiopian, Russian and American Jews who have made aliyeh to Israel. We see great potential for Beit Shemesh to become a beginning point in Israel for a people movement based on the Abrahamic core values of faith-based reconciliation. This will be pursued on future visits.

We visited the Jewish settlement of Efrat near Hebron and met with the chief rabbi of the settlement who is a dynamic orthodox Jewish leader that has been a driving force behind a very vibrant Jewish community. At the same time he has a strong heart for reconciliation as is evidenced by the bridges that have been built with surrounding Arab villages. Like Beit Shemesh we see great potential for Efrat to become another beginning point in Israel for a people movement based on the Abrahamic core values of faith-based reconciliation. This will be pursued on future visits.

Objective #2: Religious Framework For Peace

For the past five years we have conducted meetings in Amman, Jordan with the top leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood. Founded in 1928 in Egypt by Hasan Al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood is one of the most important and influential Islamist networks throughout the Middle East and Arab world. The Muslim Brotherhood is not typically

associated with the idea of reconciliation. The members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan have strong views and are stakeholders in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Their relationship with Israel would be considered by both sides to be extremely hostile. In addition, they would view the secular West and, particularly the United States with suspicion and hostility. Nevertheless, there has been a reaching out on both sides to agree to engage in a faith-based reconciliation process of ten Muslim Brotherhood leaders and ten American Christian leaders to be convened by the PACIS Project and the Al Umma Group near Amman, September 29 – October 1, 2010. This is a major breakthrough in creating a religious framework for peace in the Middle East.

Objective #3: Paradigm Change

Over the past five years we have had extensive discussions with senior level track one Israeli and Palestinian negotiators from Madrid (1991), Oslo (1993), Camp David (2000) and Wye River (2002). There is general agreement on all sides that a negotiated settlement has little hope of success without a paradigm change in both Israel and the Palestinian Territories on the grassroots level that prepares people's hearts for reconciliation. This involves more than "hummus and hugs", but rather, creating a public conversation on both sides to prepare "hearts and minds" to grapple with the emotional realities of justice, forgiveness and apology. Polls taken on both sides show that, in theory, 70% of Israelis and Palestinians want peace. Nevertheless, on the heart level, the idea of apologizing or forgiving past or present injustices or acts of violence presents enormous obstacles on both sides. Our experience with both Israelis and Palestinians on the ground level have taught us this sobering reality.

We met twice with the chief Israeli negotiator at Camp David in 2000 and have informally agreed to work together in cooperation between the PACIS Project and the Blue/White Project to develop a strategy for paradigm change in Israel. We met with both the Chief Palestinian Negotiator and the Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister. The PACIS Project was invited to work with the official track one process to address the "hearts and minds" dimension on the Palestinian side. We will prepare a formal proposal that addresses the need to socialize the Abrahamic values of faith-based reconciliation on both sides.

We also met with a senior official from the Ministry of Education of the Palestinian Authority who is also a documentary film producer. We discussed translation and publication of Brian Cox's book "Faith-Based Reconciliation: A Moral Vision That Transforms People and Societies" into an Arabic edition.

Objective#4: Focus on Jerusalem

A key dimension of the PACIS Project is a focus on the city of Jerusalem. The Jewish scriptures speak of Jerusalem as "God's dwelling place on earth and the city of the great King." As a holy city it represents the heart of Jewish identity and aspirations, a place of pilgrimage for Christians and the third holiest site in Islam. Because of its unique nature among the different Abrahamic traditions and because it is one of the most intractable

core issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Jerusalem represents a strategic entry point for third party faith-based intervention.

We met with two senior officials of the Jerusalem Foundation; the former Israeli Ambassador to the United States who is Chairman of the Board and the Vice President. Established by Mayor Teddy Kolleck, The Jerusalem Foundation is a non-governmental organization that seeks to promote social, educational and cultural initiatives that contribute to the growth and vitality of Jerusalem as a strong and caring community for all its residents. There was considerable interest on both sides in exploring a partner relationship between the PACIS Project and the Jerusalem Foundation. We are awaiting a proposal from them regarding specific possibilities for cooperation

We met with Head of the Waqf Council of Jerusalem and his chief deputy. We agreed to continue exploring areas for cooperation between the PACIS Project and the Waqf Council concerning the Temple Mount/Al Aqsa Mosque. Afterwards we were taken on a private visit to the Dome of the Rock, Al Aqsa Mosque and the underground mosques.

We met with the most recent Governor or Minister of East Jerusalem and we met with a member of the Jerusalem City Council. In addition, we had a number of spontaneous meetings with residents of the Old City as we sought to build relationships and understand their hopes and concerns for the future of the Old City. At this point in time the focus of our efforts with regard to Jerusalem is to continue relationship building, establishing trust and understanding the on-the-ground realities.

We had three meetings with a Palestinian lawyer who practices before the Israeli Supreme Court and who is a leading legal expert on land issues. These sessions helped us to grapple with the historical, legal and emotional complexities of the land issues in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Objective #5: Training Faith-Based Peacemakers

One of the most important points of our concern is the diminishing Arab Christian community in the Holy Land. At present the Christian population has shrunk to 1.6% of the total population. There is a large Arab Christian diaspora in Europe, the United States and Latin America. On the one hand it represents a tragic development. On the other hand, it presents an opportunity for the Arab Christian community to serve as a reconciling bridge between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Muslims. Because of their relative numbers the Arab Christians are not a threat to anyone. Over the past five years a strong relationship has been forged with Bishop Suheil Dawani, various Anglican clergy and the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem (West Bank, Gaza, Israel, Jordan and Syria). Bishop Dawani has both a deep concern for the shrinking Christian community and a desire to see the church more actively embrace Christ's ministry of reconciliation. This represents another strategic entry point for the work of faith-based reconciliation.

We met with Bishop Suheil Dawani and Canon Shehadeh Shehadeh to explore feasible dates to conduct a two day training seminar with the clergy of the Episcopal Diocese of

Jerusalem in the work of peacemaking and faith-based reconciliation. This will be conducted later this year in Amman. This is the beginning of a larger effort to train the Palestinian Christians to be effective peacemakers in the region.

Concluding Reflections

In January 2010 we reached the five year mark of the PACIS Middle East Faith-Based Reconciliation Project. During those five years we have established many of the essential ingredients for a strategic long term approach to the Middle East peace process that offers a unique faith-based approach with three long term goals in mind:

1. To utilize the faith-based reconciliation process as a vehicle to soften hearts in a region where there is a tremendous reservoir of hostility, particularly towards Israel.
2. To develop a religious framework for peace by engaging the Middle East neighborhood.
3. To address the core issue of Jerusalem from a track two faith-based perspective.

Over the course of five years we have established a foundation of strong relationships, developed mutual trust with indigenous partners, gained on site understanding of an extremely complex, multidimensional conflict situation, identified strategic entry points for intervention and gained “on the ground” experience in both Israel and the surrounding Arab nations.

Specifically, what have we accomplished in five years?

1. We now have potential and established indigenous partners in Jordan, Israel and Palestine.
2. We have conducted five faith-based reconciliation seminars since 2006 that have resulted in softened hearts and a transformed atmosphere between those identity-based communities. We have learned that this process produces results in the Middle East conflict.
3. We have begun a nascent “people movement” in Palestine based on Abrahamic core values. Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala are the locus for this people movement among the next generation of Palestinian leaders.
4. We have weathered the inherent difficulties of bringing transformational work into the complexities of the Middle East conflict. As a result our work in these places is stronger than ever.

5. We have established a bridge to networks of political Islam in the world with an eye toward engaging them to become a constructive part of the Middle East peace process.
6. We have met and established our presence with top track one negotiators from Madrid, Oslo, Camp David, Wye River and the 2008 Turkish mediated talks.
7. We have brought the concept of a faith-based approach to the Middle East peace process to the table with a growing circle of Arab and Israeli political and religious leaders. Our hope is to stimulate a conversation in Arab, Israeli and U.S. foreign policy and national security circles that will enable closer cooperation between track one and track two faith-based efforts.

This report would not be complete without expressing profound gratitude to special friends who have made this work possible on all sides, such as Rabbi Mark Diamond, John Fischel, Marty Karp, Benny Levy, Shalom Lerner, Meir Malka, Nurit Nitzan, Dalit Stauber, Robi Damelin, Salim Munayer, Sami Awad, Gabriel Abdalla, Jamal Al-Tahat, Sharaf Aburomman, Jamal Halaby and Dale Gavlak.

PACIS Project Characteristics

The Middle East Faith-Based Reconciliation Project of the PACIS Project in Faith-Based Diplomacy comprises the following key elements:

1. The uniqueness of the faith-based reconciliation process

The faith-based reconciliation process is an innovative approach to diplomacy and peacemaking that has been developed over the past twenty years by Brian Cox who brings together a unique background in politics, theological and pastoral training, conflict resolution and international experience. This approach is defined by eight core values and by a deliberative process that focuses on creating a reconciling spirit between antagonists as a prelude to constructive joint problem solving.

As a methodology it is not a form of interfaith dialogue or a traditional conflict resolution model. It is a totally unique experience that causes participants to search the depths of their own being and to experience at the deepest level the heart of “the other” in a faith-based context. It is the reality of an ancient process reemerging in the twenty first century to address the deepest and most profound differences between communities. It is Abrahamic reconciliation!

2. The transformative impact of the faith-based reconciliation process on participants

This process leads to an actual change of hearts within and among the participants. This is a well developed and battle tested “hearts and minds” approach that has borne tangible fruit in some of the world’s roughest neighborhoods.

Based on our experience in other situations of violent conflict we found that the key to resolving intractable identity-based conflict was not gifted peacemakers or creative solutions, but changed hearts.

3. It calls God into the process

As a genuinely faith-based approach it moves beyond scholarly theological engagement or interfaith dialogue to authentic Abrahamic reconciliation that welcomes the divine presence into the process as the source of changed hearts, relationships and situations. In the past we have seen results that far exceed human skill alone. The practitioners of faith-based reconciliation exercise an intentionality of bringing God into the process through such activities as prayer and fasting. This is particularly important in gaining the confidence of the Muslim world which is suspicious of secular initiatives that feel like an imposition of Western values on an Islamic worldview that seeks to integrate faith and politics.

Based on our experiences in Sudan, Kashmir, Pakistan, India, Syria, Palestine and the American Muslim community we have discovered that the core values of faith-based reconciliation resonate deeply with pious Muslims and, for them, captures the real heart of an Islamic worldview. Many Muslim leaders have described Faith-Based Reconciliation as the alternative to political Islam because it engenders passionate commitment among young Muslims who have experienced it.

We have also discovered that the core values of faith-based reconciliation resonate deeply with pious Jews and, for them, captures the heart of the Abrahamic blessing of “tikkun olam” which was given first to the Jewish community to share with the world.

4. Paradigm change

We plan to utilize the faith-based reconciliation process with key senior level, civil society level and grassroots level leaders as a means of socializing the Abrahamic values of faith-based reconciliation in Middle East societies as a means of bringing about genuine social and paradigm change that provides a sustainable environment for peace. Primary shaping institutions in any

society are the family, the school, the faith community, the media and internet and, in Israel, the military.

Based on our experience in Kashmir we found that it was not only necessary, but possible to influence the public conversation in the direction of reconciliation even with separatists and militant leaders. Initially people in a zone of violent conflict are hostile to the idea of reconciliation. However, wise, persistent and targeted intervention at all three levels of society (senior, middle and grassroots) can profoundly influence the moral vision of a community. Within a space of eight years in Kashmir ICRD played a significant role in influencing and shaping the public conversation about reconciliation both on the Indian and Pakistani sides of the Line of Control. It can be done and it must be done in the Middle East if there is to be any future that includes a sovereign Jewish state and a sovereign Palestinian state.

5. Track II Diplomacy

We plan to work with key indigenous allies to identify and engage both track one and influential track two actors in Israel and the Arab countries in a faith-based reconciliation process designed to soften hearts of those who will participate in or influence high level negotiations. Based on our experience in Kashmir we discovered that this process was very successful with high level Kashmiri Muslim leaders from Pakistan and Kashmiri Hindu Pandit leaders from India when we brought them together in Kathmandu, Nepal.

In the U.S. and European national security and foreign policy establishments there is great skepticism about bringing religion into a sensitive process of high level negotiations in an intentional way as a means of actually enhancing the process. More often than not religion is viewed by many national security and foreign policy professionals as part of the problem either causing or contributing to the conflict. Others may welcome, albeit reluctantly, track two faith-based initiatives as bridgebuilding efforts with religious leaders or on the grassroots level. However, for a decidedly faith-based process to play a significant role at the highest levels of negotiation is a totally new concept.

This is the very idea that makes this process unique. The softening of hearts is even necessary with leaders at the highest levels of policymaking and negotiation. The faith-based process and its impact on the human heart has the potential to move the momentum of stalemated processes to a new level. Hence, we are proposing that faith-based reconciliation as a track two initiative be an intentional part of the track one process in the Middle East as a means of creating a reconciling spirit among the policymakers, negotiators and influencers so as to enhance the possibility of a successful outcome.

In the words of one high level U.S. State Department official after hearing a report of ICRD's work in Kashmir, "Well, nothing else has worked in Kashmir. We might as well give faith a chance."

6. Softening hearts of religious extremists

We plan to engage senior and middle level religious leaders from both Israel and the Arab nations in the Middle East from groups and movements who typically resist constructive problem solving and tend to undermine the peace process. Since the faith-based reconciliation methodology focuses on "changing hearts" as a prelude to joint problem solving, it was suggested that such a process is better suited to reaching such groups.

Based on our experience in Kashmir we spent a good deal of time in the beginning of our project cultivating relationships with Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist extremists. We even cultivated relationships with former militant leaders. Initially they were hostile to the whole idea of reconciliation, but curious. In time, many former militants or those influenced by militant ideology participated in the faith-based reconciliation process and their hearts were changed and their worldview and activities began to change in the direction of reconciliation.

7. Focus on Jerusalem

We plan to focus intensively on the city of Jerusalem to create a public conversation and foster a new but ancient moral vision for the city through private meetings with leaders, faith-based reconciliation seminars, civil society meetings, op ed pieces in local publications, and presentations in schools, community organizations, synagogues and mosques. We believe that making a deep impact in Jerusalem will have a rippling effect throughout the region. Because of its unique nature as the "holy city" Jerusalem represents a strategic entry point for third party faith-based intervention.

8. Engaging the Middle East Neighborhood

We plan to engage leaders from the surrounding Arab states as well as the United States and former colonial powers because all are stakeholders in a conflict that causes the most significant amount of alienation between the Arab and Muslim world and the United States and Europe.

Over the past thirty years there has been a dramatic rise of religious extremism and militancy in the region that is being driven by intense theological convictions which contribute to exclusivist visions of the future as well as intense hostility toward a sovereign Jewish state in the region. Lack of theological sophistication by many earnest and sincere peacemakers in the region has led to analyses and forms of intervention that have failed to grasp

the growing complexity of the conflict and the nature and influence of religious extremism and militancy on any possible future negotiated settlement between Israel and the Palestinians.

This approach appears to dovetail with the strategic policy of the Obama Administration and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative to create a Middle East Regional Peace Process. It recognizes that a sustainable two state solution depends upon a transformation of the heart attitudes and relationships in the entire region, not just Israel/Palestine.