

*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 #8
TRIP REPORT
MAY 23 – JUNE 8, 2011**

Introduction

Brian Cox, conducted a mission to the Middle East May 23 – June 8, 2011 to further the development of the Middle East Faith-Based Reconciliation Project. He was accompanied by Dr. Wallace Shepherd of Second Baptist Church of Santa Barbara.

The PACIS Project in Faith-Based Diplomacy of the Straus Institute of Pepperdine University Law School of Malibu, California and the International Center For Religion and Diplomacy of Washington DC 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

Track #1: Musalaha Initiative

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.

Brian Cox participated in a social gathering with 22 Palestinian Christians and Muslims at a restaurant in Beit Sahour. They expressed strong appreciation for the teaching and

formation they have received through PACIS/Musalaha. Tim Pownall and Salim Munayer will work out the next steps of the project.

Track #2: Muslim Brotherhood Initiative

For the past six 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. Nevertheless, there has been a reaching out on both sides through a faith-based reconciliation process of ten Muslim Brotherhood leaders and ten American Christian leaders convened by the PACIS Project and the Al Umma Group in Amman, January 19 – 21, 2011. This is a major breakthrough in creating a new paradigm in global human relations between the West and The Islamic World. One Muslim Brotherhood leader noted, “Faith-Based Reconciliation is to global human relations what $E=MC^2$ was to the theoretical physics. It has provided a way for the West and the Islamic world to talk to each other.” At the present time there is tentatively a second faith-based reconciliation process planned for late October in Limassal, Cyprus. However, during the two days of meetings with Muslim Brotherhood leaders in Amman there was a major breakthrough in the birth of a concept that is bold, high profile and in the fullness of time, “An Historic Muslim Brotherhood Reconciliation Mission to Washington DC.” This responds to their strong desire to take a bold initiative as a partner in the process of healing/reconciliation between the West and the Islamic world. The Arab Spring and other changes in the Middle East have made such a venture possible at this time.

Track #3: Blue White Future Initiative

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 has taught us this sobering reality.

We have met numerous times with the chief Israeli negotiator at Camp David in 2000 and have explored cooperation between the PACIS Project and the Blue White Future Project to develop a strategy for paradigm change in Israel. During this visit we met with Gilead Sher and the New CEO of the Blue White Future Project and discussed the potential for cooperation. At the present time there is strong sentiment on the Blue/White Future

board to keep this a strictly Israeli initiative. However, we will continue informal association for the near future.

Track #4: Palestinian Negotiating Authority Initiative

Since May 2010 we have met twice with the chief Palestinian negotiator and have explored the potential for a unique cooperation between track one and track two to address the need for paradigm change in the Palestinian Territories on the grassroots level that prepares people's hearts for reconciliation. The PACIS Project was not only welcomed by the chief Palestinian negotiator, but invited to work directly with him. During our meeting with him, he described our approach as unique among all the track two peace efforts because of its faith-based nature. There was no new activity on this initiative during this mission.

Track #5: Jerusalem Foundation Initiative

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.

In May 2010 we met for the first time with the Chairman of the Board and Vice President of The Jerusalem Foundation at Mishkenot in Jerusalem. 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. This time we met with the Vice President, the Director of Mishkenot and a Jerusalem-based rabbi to discuss the potential for the faith-based reconciliation process to be used with Jerusalem-based rabbinical students.

Track #6: Beit Shemesh Initiative

In October 2009 we met for the first time with officials from the Israeli city of Beit Shemesh including the Mayor. Known as a "Haredi city" the population of 28,000 is 60-70% Haredi but includes a mixture of Orthodox and non-religious Jews. In February 2010 a member of the Beit Shemesh City Council was invited to be our guest at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington D.C. In May 2010 we returned to Beit Shemesh and visited schools, yeshivas and other social institutions in the community. We have developed a strong relationship with two key community leaders associated with the Beit Shemesh Foundation.

On this visit we met twice with these two leaders and proposed the use of the faith-based reconciliation process in Beit Shemesh between young adult Haredi and Orthodox Jews.

The initial purpose is to contribute to a more cohesive social fabric in Beit Shemesh which is currently experiencing tensions between these two communities. We also explored the possibility of including the Beit Shemesh leaders in the PACIS Project's Southern California Abrahamic Initiative with the Jewish and Muslim communities so as to expose them to this unique, dynamic process. In addition, we met for the very first time with a Haredi rabbi which represented a major breakthrough.

Track #7: Episcopal Diocese Initiative

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.

A faith-based reconciliation seminar with the Anglican clergy scheduled for October 11-13 had to be cancelled when Canon Shehadeh Shehadeh (diocesan official for peace and reconciliation ministries) suffered a fall in Ramallah and broke his neck prior to our arrival. Canon Shehadeh subsequently died in the hospital. In a meeting this time with Bishop Suheil Dawani he proposed keeping the initiative going by working with Fr. Sami Barhoum.

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.

9. Next Generation Leaders

Because of our particular focus on intractable identity-based conflict, the PACIS Project is committed to raising up the next generation of leaders from the various Abrahamic faith communities as peacemakers who are motivated by a vision based on the eight core values of Abrahamic faith-based reconciliation.

The PACIS Project has launched an academic concentration in Faith-Based Diplomacy as part of the Master's in Dispute Resolution program offered by the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution at Pepperdine University Law School. We envision a growing number of Arab and Israeli young leaders entering this program once it is established either at the Malibu, California campus or developing extension programs in the Middle East in conjunction with indigenous academic institutions.