

Summary of Working Lunch with His Excellence the Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney, July 12, 2017

In the spring of 2017, the **Palestine Israel Journal** published a special issue devoted to **Lessons from The Northern Ireland Peace Process**. The issue was funded by the the **Embassy of Ireland in Tel Aviv** in cooperation with the **Irish Foreign Ministry**, which hosted the PIJ Co-Editors on a study tour of Dublin and Belfast as part of the preparations for the issue.

On July 12, 2017, the PIJ convened a launching event for the special issue on Northern Ireland with the participation of **His Excellence the Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney**.

The launching event was organized in cooperation with the **Embassy of Ireland** in the form of a working lunch with **Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney**, with the participation of 8 Israelis and 8 Palestinians who were involved in activities funded by the Irish Foreign Ministry or contributed articles to the special issue of the PIJ on Northern Ireland.

The working lunch was held at the American Colony Hotel in East Jerusalem. In consultation and cooperation with the Irish Embassy, we are publishing below an account of the presentations made by the Israeli and Palestinian participants and one private Irish participant. The Minister's opening remarks were off record.

Palestinian Participants:

- **Amb. Hind Khoury**, former Delegate General of Palestine to France and PA Minister of State for Jerusalem Affairs.
- **Ziad AbuZayyad**, Co-Editor/Founder, Palestine-Israel Journal, former Minister of State in Palestinian Authority, adviser to Palestinian negotiating teams in Washington & Cairo.
- **Fadwa Khawaja-Shaer**, General Director of the Higher Council for Youth and Sports in Palestine, former General Director of NGOs in the Palestinian Ministry of the Interior
- **Walid Salem**, Director of the Center for Democracy and Community Development in East Jerusalem, lecturer on democracy, human rights & conflict resolution, Al-Quds U.

- **Nidal Foqaha**, Director General of the Palestinian Peace Coalition-Geneva Initiative in Palestine.
- **Huda Abuarquob**, Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP) first on-the ground regional director, co-founder of Center for Transformative Education (CTE).
- **Nivine Sandouka**, Co-Director of Israel-Palestine Regional Creative Initiatives (IPCRI)
- **Amira Jabr**, Researcher at Hebrew U & the Van Leer Institute, media researcher at EQU LIM , studying MA in International and Community Development at HU.

Irish Guest Participant:

- **Carlo Aldrovandi**, Assistant Prof. in International Peace Studies, Trinity College, Dublin

Israeli Participants

- **MK Tamar Zandberg** , Member of Knesset for Meretz, Chair of Knesset Committee on Drug and Alcohol Abuse, Ph.D candidate in Politics and Government at Ben-Gurion U.
- **Hillel Schenker**, Co-Editor, Palestine-Israel Journal, a former editor of New Outlook, Israeli peace monthly in spirit of Martin Buber, a co-founder of Peace Now movement.
- **Gadi Baltiansky**, Director General of Geneva Initiative, Israel, former Spokesperson for Prime Minister Ehud Barak.
- **Dr. Alon Liel**, former Director General Israeli Foreign Ministry and Ambassador to South Africa and Turkey, Chair of Global Code LTD, lecturer at Tel Aviv U. and IDC
- **Dr. Gershon Baskin**, Founder and Co-Chair, Israel-Palestine Creative Initiatives (IPCRI) think and do tank, initiated back channel negotiations between Gov of Israel & Hamas.
- **Ofer Zalberg**, Senior Analyst, Middle East & North Africa for the International Crisis Group (ICG), consultant to several religious peace building projects for Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- **Ariel Heifetz Knobel**, Practitioner, Northern Ireland expert. Leads delegations, trainings, Jerusalem-Belfast Forum, executive program on negotiation/leadership. Former diplomat.

- **Michal Barak**, Co-Founder of Women Waging Peace, Executive Director of the Center for the Study of Multiculturalism and Diversity, Hebrew University.

Minister Coveney

Launching the edition, Minister Coveney made opening remarks about the Middle East Peace Process and Ireland's own experience, and took questions and comments from the participants. The following is a summary of the main points raised:

Ziad Abu Zayyad: Thank you Mr. Minister for giving us this opportunity and attending our launching event of the Palestine Israel Journal issue dealing with lessons that Israelis and Palestinians can learn from Northern Ireland Peace Process. You mentioned that there is no parallel between your situation and our situation. Yes there is parallel. We don't want to be where you are now, precisely with the issue of the Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian Territory. These settlements are similar to the Protestants brought by the UK to settle in Catholic Ireland to change the demographic balance. Today, after hundreds of years, they are not settlers anymore but they are an obstacle in front of unifying Ireland and creating friction with the original Catholic population. This is now the major problem in our case. We have been struggling to stop the process of building Jewish settlements on our land in order not to become as the situation is now in Northern Ireland. Evacuating Jewish settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Land is essential to facilitate the two states option: A Palestinian state living side by side in peace with Israel along the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. So for us the most important obstacle is the presence of settlements within our land. In addition to the settlements issue, there is the issue of Jerusalem. There will be no chance for any political solution to the conflict without a solution to the issue of Jerusalem. And there will be no Palestinian state without Arab Jerusalem as its capital. The Israelis will make a fatal mistake if they believe that they can have the whole of Jerusalem. Furthermore, by interfering in the Aqsa Mosque and trying to change the status quo there, and allow Jews to practice religious ceremonies in the cite, it is converting the conflict between

Palestinians and Israelis into a conflict between Muslims and Jews. That would be a major mistake. It should be clear that most of the Jews who are trying to change the status of the site and practice ceremonies in the place are religious nationalists while the Jewish Halacha and Haredi Jews are against going up to the site until the Messiah come.

Hillel Schenker: Concerning the issue of settlements, there is the Irish model, the Israeli-Palestinian model, and there is also the Algerian model. The French *Pied Noir* settlers were there for over 100 years, and they all left and returned to France. Peace activists in Israel and Palestine were very inspired by the Irish model and the Good Friday Agreement, and today we are looking at you for inspiration and for help. And we greatly appreciate the support of the Irish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Irish Embassy in Tel Aviv for their support for this project. We will now hear brief presentations from all of those present.

MK Tamar Zandberg: Thank you Mr. Foreign Minister for coming today. I am an MK for the opposition Meretz Party. We saw yesterday in the news that you met with some senior members of the opposition. This discussion is very important today. I visited Northern Ireland 3 years ago and it was one of the more inspiring visits I ever had. Despite the difficulties, there are a lot of similarities between the situations. We can take inspiration from the Northern Ireland peace process and also learn what we have to be careful about. Something that was striking for me was the fact that the Irish- British conflict was nearly 800- 1000 years long. Also, the large role that violence played and the need to stop violence and the important role of leadership and timing. For me, as a politician, I want to take responsibility for my society (the Israeli society) and we look forward for a political change, since we are very trapped because of our domestic situation.

Dr. Gershon Baskin: I've been involved in the Jewish-Arab affairs for many years... I've sat in this very room many times. In fact, we even invited IRA leader Gerry Adams to meet with us here, back in the very dark days of the Second Intifada... One of the challenges we face is the separation between Palestinian and Israelis, mentally but also through physical barriers. And I'm convinced that is one of the biggest challenges... certainly both sides want a settlement of the

conflict, but they don't see a partner for peace on the other side. Unfortunately that is the reality. Furthermore, we face boycotts which delegitimize the very work that we are trying to do on a daily basis. The walls still exist and it is something that we need to examine together. There is the need for more cooperation, rather than putting more walls and barriers. We need to be building bridges, not making fences if we want the two-state solution to work.

Amb. Hind Khoury: Thank you very much for coming here and your open and frank approach. We haven't addressed all the challenges ahead. I would like to emphasise that if we don't look at religion we will not move forward, we need to address the abuses of religion, because if religion becomes the basis of the conflict, it can't be useful. The other issue that hasn't been sufficiently dealt with is anti-Semitism in Europe. They refer to Palestinians as the non Jewish community. We feel there are issues of double standards, especially when it comes to the Palestinian side. Furthermore, Palestinians and Israelis have not been able to move towards a solution without the support of third party.

Dr Alon Liel: I left the government over ten years ago and one of my conclusions was that without international pressure on Israel nothing will work here. When I visited Belfast, I was confronted with the concept of **parity of esteem that was crucial in solving the Irish conflict.** I realized that also here we have to close this huge gap on the level of esteem. We can't close these gaps until we stop looking down on the Palestinians. We look down on Palestinians to the point that we do not even see them as enemies...they don't exist at all from the point of their right to maintain their narrative and national identity Israel is very strong, and on the contrary Palestine very weak. The gap is growing, and nothing will really happen until each party sees the other as entitled to its own narrative. During the past few years, I and my colleagues, some of them former ambassadors, were active in calling on European governments to recognize Palestine. Although around 140-countries have recognized the State of Palestine. In Western Europe the only country doing so during the last years was Sweden. It is very important that the Irish government also recognizes Palestine as a state. The world wants to see real

negotiations leading to -a just solution. Such negotiations can be launched only if Israel understands that the world is not giving up on the two-state idea.

Nivine Sandouka: I work for IPCRI, and we have a project of bringing young people from Jerusalem, both Palestinians and Israelis to visit Ireland... I worked before with development organizations, focused on economic development, gender, human rights. I worked in the most marginalized places in the West Bank and in Gaza, and every time we put a lot of money, a lot of ideas and a lot of effort, but we always reached the point where the projects can't be implemented because there is not a political solution or a peace settlement. If you really want to fulfil the human right, you need political consensus. That is why I moved from the development to the peace-building sector, trying to create linkages between development and peace-building because we (i.e. social workers, development etc) are usually excluded and we have to accommodate a solution that comes from the top. We are the voice of the people.

Amira Jabr: I had the chance to be part of the IPCRI Jerusalem-Belfast project and when in Belfast, I felt at home, unfortunately. In fact, you still see segregation, walls, segregated neighbourhoods. However, after the Good Friday Agreement, the violence stopped. So this is a very important consideration: stop violence on both sides, and continue discussing the peace settlement. Using these aspects in conflict resolution can have an impact on peace processes. I'm from East Jerusalem and I am concerned at the lack of a political solution. I am concerned about the youth in East Jerusalem and the absence of opportunities. I think there should be initiatives and programs in East Jerusalem.

Ariel Heifetz Knobel: Several years ago I accompanied a delegation of a Loyalist group to Israel, despite the ongoing problems in Northern Ireland, helping to solidify their role as peace makers. Being able to share their stories helps to affirm the journeys they've made. When bringing groups to NI, what I see in addition to the content is the importance of Israelis and Palestinians travelling together. Going there allowed these people to speak by proxy, learn about another conflict and surprise themselves with the empathy felt on both sides. Empathy for another conflict helps Israelis and Palestinians to grow nearer to each other.

Going to NI allows for the opening up of issues that are very similar, but it is important that there is not a copy and paste agenda in terms of national level and specific lessons, like how civil society can work better etc.

Nidal Fqaha: The Geneva Initiative that I'm working for is a blueprint agreement providing a solution for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict which was signed in 2003. The launch of the Geneva Initiative as an agreement model indicates clearly that a "Good Friday Agreement" is also doable within the Palestinian-Israeli context. It is a message to both the Palestinians and the Israelis that solving the conflict is possible. The fact that the Geneva Initiative continues to exist and is strongly relevant adds to the constituency for peace. It demonstrates that solving the conflict on a technical and anthropological level, is possible and viable. I believe the issue of acceptance can be attributed to the lack of knowledge, on both sides. A lack of knowledge is frequently the reason why Palestinians don't believe in a solution. As we aim to spread knowledge and education, we target women and youth because in the Palestinian society, the youth is 70% of the community, and women are nearly 50% of the Palestinian community. That is why they have priority.

Walid Salem: We as Palestinians recognized Israel on the 1948 borders over 78 percent of Palestine. But today The Jewish colonial settlement project is not recognizing our rights over the rest of the 22 percent. On the contrary, this project calls for the establishment of *Eretz Israel* over the whole land. We have today two versions of the land of Israel inside the current Israeli Government: one is practicing a de facto annexation of West Bank to Israel, and the second is looking for a de jure annexation of it to Israel. Besides that one considers *Eretz Israel* as completed by the 1967 occupation and another considers that it will not be completed till Jordan will be annexed to Israel. Both trends have three tools of work in common between them: One is displacing Palestinians and replacing them by Jewish settlers, and more importantly indigenizing these settlers. Second: Promoting Jewish immigration in order to settle them on the "new" territories". And third: They believe in expansionism and further expansionism at the expense of the other side.

As such similar to Northern Ireland we accepted Israel on 1948 borders, but at the same time different from Northern Ireland we need our independent state over the 1967 borders, Also we need Israel to recognize the right of the expelled Palestinian 1948 refugees to return to the pre 1948 territories as we recognized the right of Israel to exist there. By achieving this, the Irish model of recognition of all and not to limit the rights to one side on the expense of the other will be implemented.

Europe should not push only for the revival of negotiations between the two sides, but should build some kind of a parity of esteem and alleviate asymmetry between the sides by recognizing Palestine, and building Palestinian facts on the ground, mainly in Area C and East Jerusalem, and to help rebuilding Gaza. With such steps Europe can help creating conditions for fruitful and constructive negotiations, while the other way of calling for only negotiations between the top dog and the underdog will not work because the underdog will be left under the mercy of the top dog and the level of his willingness to give.

Huda Abuarquob: One of The primary lessons learnt from the Irish experience is the importance of the International Fund for Ireland, At ALLMEP, the Alliance for Middle East Peace, we are using that model to try to create the Palestinian/ Israeli International Fund. If there are enough resources for people to stop competing, then there is an opportunity to do much more on the ground. In addition to stopping the competition for resources; it would enable us to focus on Jerusalem and an awareness of Jerusalem's diversity; it would help us to bridge the gap between the two societies. We continue to live in a situation of trauma, and need to exploit the situation to mobilize both energy and resources. We have to bring hope into the conflict zone. For Palestinians, hope is not a luxury, it's a necessity. We celebrate on a daily basis and we take responsibility for our future and we are waiting for somebody who is strong enough to drive us to self-determination. I think that it is time to recognize the Palestinians.

Michal Barak: One of the things we are trying to do at Women Waging Peace is to change people's minds, change public consciousness. We try to transform the need for security into hope and peace and how we want to live in this country. I think learning from other experiences is very fruitful – it is not just about Palestinians and Israelis, but how people can change.

Fadwa Khawaja-Shaer: I try all the time to focus on how to build trust, and it's very difficult to see progress. The important thing is to work from the bottom up. Both the Israeli and Palestinian people are moving to the right. We as Palestinians do not see a bright future in 10, 20 years. Help both of us to bridge this gap and to make a breakthrough for the future, I tried to start by working with Israeli women, looking at Belfast, and at what was the role of the women and how they succeeded.

Ofer Zalberg: We at the International Crisis Group (ICG) have been focusing on inclusion, and what is happened in Ireland is phenomenal in that respect. I want to share a few thoughts about this. I agree with Walid that the question of settlements is crucial, and it has to do with theology. Religion is an assertive force in Israeli society today. How do you justify compromises? The key is not the Good Friday Agreement, but the St. Andrews Agreement, the devolution of power which enabled the restoration of a Northern Ireland Assembly. If we are engaging in the conflict, it is through our religious understanding and moral approach. Israel can be seen like the Republic of Ireland and North Ireland can be seen as the West Bank, Judea and Samaria. The Good Friday Agreement is open ended - there is no end of conflict clause. This was very liberating for them. Also, we have to find a way to talk with Hamas. There is a part of Israeli society that needs to see that there is a partner, and we need to make the other part of society see that there is a peace possibility.

Dr. Carlo Aldrovandi: Trinity College where I teach is committed to foster engagement between different religious faiths. One way to help develop a constituency for peace and conflict resolution would be to provide scholarships for young Palestinian students to Trinity College. This has been done in other universities, and there is no reason why it couldn't be done here as well.

Gadi Baltiansky: I want to stress the importance of public diplomacy. And we have to not be afraid to say unpleasant truths. When I told a friend that I was going to a meeting with the Irish Foreign Minister, he said, "but he's anti-Israeli, why are you meeting with him?" That's the atmosphere in the general public. There are no right-wing NGOs committed to peace because they know what an

ultimate deal will involve and they are not prepared to pay the price. Recent Israeli government attempts to delegitimize Israeli peace and human rights NGOs, in the end will destroy the efforts of these NGOs. If you are friends of Israel, and friends of Israeli democracy and these NGOs, you have to defend them. You mentioned the American initiative, from the past experience, we learnt that the negotiations are about the negotiations, trying to define the terms, and it is very hard to negotiate without having a clear end-game. It is clear now that the Palestinians are not going to pay the price of the ticket for the train without knowing where the train is taking them and the same applies to the Israelis. I think it would be very constructive to know what the end-game will be

Ziad AbuZayyad: In our case there is no chance to deal with the Jewish settlements in the OPT as a reality. These settlements are part of the infrastructure of the occupation, and have to end with the end of the occupation. In the Camp David talks in 2000, we accepted the principle of a Land Swap to facilitate a solution to settlements blocks near the 1967 lines, but all settlements inside the Palestinian Territories have to be evacuated. This doesn't mean that we are against living with Jews. If a settler asks to live in Palestine as a citizen or a resident who abides by the laws of the state of Palestine and respect them he can on an equal basis with a Palestinian who likes to live in Israel, but not as an ideological foreigner who does not recognize the state or abide by its laws.

The current Israeli government wants to control the whole land of Mandatory Palestine, Israel and the area designated for Palestine. This can't work and will not bring peace or security.

Minister Coveney thanked all the participants for their contributions to a useful discussion and for their work in promoting peace.

Hillel Schenker: We would like to thank the Foreign Minister and we would like to thank all of the Israelis and Palestinian activists who have participated in this meaningful working lunch. We look forward to future cooperation with the Irish Foreign Ministry, and the Irish Embassy and Representative Office, in the quest for a just, peaceful and sustainable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

