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The Arava Institute for Environmental Studies

Program Title:

Conflict Mitigation and Environmental Activism Program

Section I - Review of activities

October 2006 – March 2007

The Conflict Mitigation & Environmental Activism Program has two components – The Dialogue & Activist Training Program and Mitigation & Environmental Activism. This section of the report will outline the main activities undertaken in both these components since the grant period began in October 2006.

1. Dialogue & Activist Training Program

The Arava Institute recruited 27 students to join the Dialogue & Activist Training Program between October 2006 and February 2007. The group included Jews, Arabs and Christians from Israel, the United States, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. The participants were housed in the institute's dormitories, where they are able to study and socialize outside of training sessions and lectures. The participants completed a successful four day orientation period, introducing them to each other, the institute and the local region including a day-long field trip.

The content of this part of the program can be examined under the following four sections:

a) Peace-building & Environmental Leadership Sessions (PELS)

Program participants took part in 5 workshops led by professional organizations. Workshops facilitated by the 'Interfaith Encounter Association', 'Compassionate Listening' and 'The Families' Forum' enabled participants to explore their understanding and image of the conflict in the Middle East. Two other workshops entitled, 'Environmental Mediation' and 'Conflict Resolution', strengthened practical skill-building techniques associated with open dialogue and managing conflicts.

In addition, as part of the PELS framework, the participants heard three lectures specifically designed to spark discussion about environmental cooperation between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. Three sessions were also handed over to students to coordinate and lead. For these sessions, they chose to explore the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict and cultural differences in relation to food and the environment.

b) Activist Training & Expertise

Participants were introduced to a wide range of environmental issues affecting the Middle East and the effect of the conflict on the severity of the problems. As such, the participants took part in lectures, seminars and discussions exploring the use, distribution and management of water, the ecology of the region, scientific and geological aspects of the environment, application of sustainable agriculture in arid/semi-arid regions and the sustainable development of the region. In

addition, participants studied environmental policies and activism from an ethical, legal, biblical and historical viewpoint.

Throughout the grant period to date, a total of 20 hours per week has been devoted to this training. Ten experts working and researching the relevant fields comprise the main team of trainers, with specialized training relayed by guests who have joined the course curriculum for several specified sessions.

c) Field Work

The first four months of the program generated field work that explored the conflict from an environmental and/or Jewish-Arab cooperative aspect, including:

- an assessment of climate change in Israel and Jordan developed by an Israeli male and Jordanian female
- two Jewish Israeli women and a Jordanian Christian designed and implemented an ecological workshop that brought together 100 Jewish and Muslim Israeli teenagers for three days of activities
- examinations of methods for Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians to reduce their electricity and water consumption
- the feasibility of development plans in Israel and their effect on indigenous Bedouin populations.

d) Field Trips

Two field trips took place between October 2006 and February 2007. The initial trip involved a three day study tour of the Negev region of southern Israel. Program participants were guided through several Bedouin settlements where they were able to see many of the environmental problems affecting the residents. A detailed background to the problems was presented highlighting the relationship between the poor socio-economic status of the Bedouin residents, lack of governmental recognition and the severity of their environmental issues. Participants also were introduced to Djarat, where donor funding has provided this Bedouin village solar paneling servicing 20 homes with free and environmentally sustainable electricity.

Energy was the theme of the second trip which took the participants to the Haifa and Carmel region of northern Israel. The schedule included tours at the largest recycling center in Israel and at the Hadera Energy Company. The participants also stayed in a village called Clil in which residents only use alternative, sustainable forms of energy. During the trip, the group also heard from the head of the Sakhnin Environmental Unit and the Ministry of Environmental Protection in Haifa. The trip also took in the pollution of the Kishon River caused by chemical dumping and heard from the Environmental Planner at the Kishon River Authority.

2. Mitigation & Environmental Activism

Between October 2006 and March 2007, the Mitigation & Environmental Activism component of the program has supported a number of Arab-Jewish cooperative projects. The projects have been initiated or executed by Arava Institute graduates and emphasize the environment as a tool for cooperation. These include:

- Environmental education: Rina K. (Jewish Female Israeli) has been working to develop cooperative educational programs for high school children in Israel and Jordan.
- Haim F. (Jewish Male Israeli) has been working with Adam ve Hava ecological farm and Palestinian families who have been separated from their fields as a result of the Separation Wall. Since these families now have poorer quality soil for their agriculture, Haim has

helped to increase their agricultural productivity by training them in sustainable agricultural techniques.

- Ilana M. (Jewish Female Israeli) and Mazen Z. (Muslim Male Israeli) have been developing a project to implement biogas digesters in Bedouin villages in southern Israel and Jordan.
- Laithi G. (Muslim Male Israeli) has been working on an organic food project with Arab farmers, and creating a food bank for low income families in the Beit Netufa area.
- Hila A. (Jewish Female Israeli) has been mapping environmental hazards in the Negev region. Her work has involved dialogue and mediation with Bedouin villages, Jewish development towns, government offices and business enterprises in the area.

In addition to these projects, the Arava Institute arranged a conference for alumni in Aqaba, Jordan in December 2006. Almost 60 graduates came to the two-day meeting, representing 8 different years and including approximately two fifths Jordanian, two fifths Israelis and a fifth Palestinians. The conference consisted of a presentation of a number of graduate projects, working meetings to establish a network of Arava graduates and a lecture from the USAID representative in Jordan.

The staff involved in the support of the projects and conference have provided a great deal of logistical and administrative assistance to the alumni throughout this period.

Section II – Progress on performance targets and indicators with narrative explaining achievements and/or problems

To date, the Conflict Mitigation and Environmental Activism program has been successful. The number of hours assigned to each element of the Dialogue & Activist Training component have been on target and the frequency of sessions have also taken place accordingly. Projects have also been developed by graduates with our support and we are confident that our assistance has led to their current success. The full impact of the grant will be considered after participants have completed the questionnaire evaluation at the end of the program.

Current indicators of the program's achievements are:

1. Successful recruitment and participation of 27 young leaders from Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan and North America.
2. Three off-campus trips as well as several one-day field trips.
3. Over 40 experts, professionals, and academics sharing their knowledge, experience and expertise with the participants, both on a weekly basis and single occasions.
4. 27 completed studies by participants for their field study research.
5. Five alumni projects on subjects addressing environmental issues arising from lack of Israeli-Arab cooperation.
6. A two-day alumni conference bringing together almost 60 alumni of different years, ages, religions, ethnicities and nationalities.

Problems

Problems that have arisen have mainly concerned visas. The Arava Institute applied to the Supreme Court of Justice in Jerusalem to address the Israeli Defense Forces' blanket ban of Palestinian students entering Israel. Although the bid was not successful in time for the start of the program in October, the second half of the program which began in mid-February has seen an increase in the number of Palestinians allowed to join the program.

The second half of the program began in mid-February and saw the return of students as well as an increase in the number of participants. Activities since then will be described fully in the final report. However, because of the increase, in February we were forced to find extra accommodation to house five students since the total number of current students is 35 and the capacity of the Arava Institute dormitories is 30 students. As such, the five students have apartments two hundred meters from the dormitories and therefore are still able to easily join in the intimate atmosphere created by the Arava Institute living area.

Section III - Brief discussion of any external or internal issues that have affected implementation

To date, the program has gone according to plan.