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Nongovernmental peace effort after the Annapolis Conference
GENEVA INITIATIVE TACKLES DIFFICULT ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN WATER ISSUE

As Israeli and Palestinian governments struggle with the “track I” peace negotiations, nongovernmental (NGO) representatives have made great strides in a “track II” dialog on a central conflict between their people: how water resources fairly should be divided with cooperation to face drought and other environmental problems.

“I’ve participated in other meetings on these problems for 18 years and I’ve never felt we’ve been this close to a working agreement,” eminent Israeli engineer Hillel Shuvall proclaimed. Fadia Daibes-Murad, a Palestinian engineer and advisor to the Palestinian Water Authority agreed, “We are so much closer together than any time before.”

Palestinian and Israeli engineers, as well as representatives with close ties to the Israeli government and Palestinian National Authority, met for three days of intense discussions on the difficult water issues between August 18 and 21, 2008. The water dialog was arranged by the Geneva Initiative (“GI”)– a Palestinian and Israeli NGO– and by a Quaker group – Annapolis Friends Peace and Justice Center– after informal discussions outside the Bush Administration’s November 2007 Annapolis Conference.

Retired U.S. Ambassador John McDonald, who mediated the dialog, commented “When you get good engineers together to work on problems, they speak the same language no matter what countries they come from.”

GI water experts will finalize the draft within the coming three months. The draft water agreement will then be offered to official government negotiators as a possible framework for water cooperation in the "final status agreement" that would bring peace to Israelis and Palestinians.

Shaul Arlosoroff, a director of the Israeli national water company who participated in the dialog, stated, “Not much more is needed to submit [the draft] to the final negotiating team.” GI Palestinian executive director Nidal Foqaha added, “The meeting’s output is beyond our expectations.”

GI was established in 2003 by former Palestinian Authority and Israeli peace negotiators. The 2001 talks were called off with the onset of the Intifada and lack of support by the Bush Administration. But some negotiators on both sides agreed, with support of the Swiss government, to continue their work. After many months, they completed a detailed model peace treaty–“the Geneva Accord”-- which ultimately may represent the outline for an official treaty between the governments. (See www.geneva-accord.org .) Today, they still pursue various programs to support the peace effort.

Participants in the recent water dialog included:
Palestinian representatives-

Jamal Zakout, senior advisor to the Palestinian Prime Minister;
Dr. Abedel Rahman Tamimi, director of the Palestinian Hydrology Group;
Dr. Fadia Daibes-Murad, a Palestinian water law and policy expert;
Dr. Samih Abid, former Palestinian Minister of Public Works; and
Nidal Foqaha, executive director of the Geneva Initiative (Palestinian organization).

Israeli representatives-

Dr. Saul Arlosoroff, board member of the National Water Corporation of Israel;
Prof. Hillel Shuval, environmental scientist and expert in Middle East water conflicts at the
Hadassah Academic College of Jerusalem;
Shaul Arieli, former head of the Peace Administration in the Barak government;
Gadi Baltiansky, former Press Secretary in the Barak government and executive director of
the Geneva Initiative (Israeli organization); and
Yuval Benziman, Director of Research and Policy Planning for Geneva Initiative.

Advisors, mediators, dialog organizers-

John W. McDonald, (U.S. Ambassador, ret.), Chairman and CEO Institute for Multi_Track
Diplomacy (IMDT), Arlington, Virginia, mediator;
Ed Modell, state judiciary ombudsman and attorney, co-mediator;
John Bernal, former U.S. engineer-commissioner for U.S./Mexico water cooperation;
Franklin Fisher, Carlton professor of microeconomics, emeritus, of MIT and chair of Middle
East Water Economics Project;
Gabriel Eckstein, professor of international law, specializing in water rights, Texas Tech
University and visiting professor, University of Oregon;
Doug Caroom, American attorney, specializing in water litigation and interstate compacts;
Barbara Thomas, retired communications specialist for World Bank and Annapolis Peace &
Justice Center clerk;
Garrett Shields, IMDT Program Officer / Assistant, and
Phil Caroom, state trial judge and Annapolis Peace & Justice Center coordinator.

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Photos of water dialog and more information available at www.annapolis.quaker.org.

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