



YOUTH PEACE INITIATIVE

THE HAGUE • THE NETHERLANDS

Our Common Future III

Paving the Road to
Sustainable Peace

Conference February 2018

“ YOU KNOW YOU ARE NOT A POLITICIAN,
IT IS NOT YOUR JOB YET TO MAKE PEACE ON A STATE-LEVEL.
HOWEVER, YOU KNOW IT IS YOUR JOB TO AT LEAST TRY
TO MAKE PEACE ON A PERSONAL LEVEL.

“

“ WHEN WE SPEAK ABOUT PERSONAL FEELINGS IT CAN BE PAINFUL,
EVEN IF WE EXPERIENCED SOMETHING YEARS AGO.
YET, WE ARE STRONG PEOPLE.
WE CAN OVERCOME OUR FEARS.
WE CAN INITIATE THE NEXT STEP FORWARD,
EVEN IF YOU HURT ME.
IT IS ON US TO DECIDE WHAT NEW PATH WE WANT.
I AM CRAZY ENOUGH TO BELIEVE THAT PEACE IS POSSIBLE.

“

PARTICIPANTS TO THE YOUTH PEACE INITIATIVE MEPP CONFERENCE 2018

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Executive Summary

The Middle Eastern Peace Process (MEPP) Conference 2018 set out another step in the Youth Peace Initiative's (YPI) road to involve Israeli and Palestinian youth in their peace process. Five Israelis, five Palestinians, and six international participants from (post-)conflict countries gathered to find a common ground. The conference consisted of three parts. The first days of the conference laid the foundation for a safe space and allowed participants to get acquainted. The second part of the conference provided training in listening and dialogue, and educated the participants about the ways youth can get involved in peace processes. The conference concluded with a constructive discussion and deliberative dialogue regarding the agreements of the group and joint plans for activities in the region.

Introduction

There is a need for this young generation to claim their space to contribute to a sustainable peace in the region. As they represent the generation that will spend most of their lives living with the future solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, whatever that shall be, YPI believes that the time has come for a new, young and positive voice to emerge and to work its way towards a common future. YPI's objective is to facilitate reconciliation and dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian youth to ensure that these future leaders have the ability to be involved in the peace process.

This was the third conference in which Israeli and Palestinian youth delegations were invited to the Netherlands to build bridges and find common ground. Thanks to the contribution and support of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the City of Amsterdam, the delegations were able to meet each other on neutral grounds outside of the conflict. This safe environment for dialogue and reconciliation gave these future leaders the space to talk.

'Our Common Future III' sets out a bold but realistic future and highlights a shared vision of both the Israeli and Palestinian delegation. The YPI delegation of the 2018 conference - consisting of five Israelis, five Palestinians and six other international delegates - agreed to use the document 'Our Common Future III' as a base for further efforts.



Intentions of the MEPP Conference 2018

The conference was created with the following three intentions:

1. Providing a safe space for Israelis and Palestinians to get to know each other, as well as other international youth from (post-) conflict areas.
2. Training the delegates about the tools available for youth in becoming involved in peace processes and preparing them for a meaningful encounter together during and after the conference.
3. Creating a sustainable group with new future leaders for the extension of the existing delegations of previous conferences in the initiative. Establishing common ground and new plans for activities back in the region.

Creating a safe space for the delegates laid at the core of this conference. This included among others the guiding principles: “speaking with intention, listening with attention, and caring for the group”. Together the group formed a coherent set of agreements that fostered a safe debate and that gave room for personal approaches.

Conference Programme

From Sunday 4 to Friday 9 February the MEPP Conference guided the delegates through three stages: getting acquainted, training, and discussion.

During the first day the foundation of trust and empathy was built. Through establishing the safe space principles, a theatre workshop and an informal gathering the participants had the chance to get acquainted. By creating an agreement on shared principles of the safe space, a common responsibility to respect each other was determined.

On Monday and Tuesday the delegation was trained in the art of listening and learned about the different ways that youth have been and can be involved in peace processes. Workshops covered the involvement of youth in conflict transformation by the University of Amsterdam and narrative building by the Amsterdam Centre for Conflict Studies. Furthermore while visiting The Hague the delegation met with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Finally, these days also included two public events. Firstly, a lecture and panel discussion that was attended by over a hundred guests. Both experts from the Netherlands and YPI conference delegates from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Cyprus spoke about their experiences in conflict resolution. Secondly, YPI organised an a workshop with over fifty high school students from different schools of Amsterdam, to discuss trust building activities for youth in conflict.



With this newly gained knowledge, the group gathered for three days at the Amsterdam City Archive and conference center De Bazel. There, they could discuss and formulate own ideas for involvement in the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians. Guided by various professionals, the group debated the future perspectives for their generation. Through questions and deliberative dialogue in smaller groups they tackled different topics. The international delegates contributed to the discussions by sharing their experiences and posing constructive questions. In these talks the delegations, through their dedication and despite various struggles, learned about each others narratives and needs. To conclude these discussions, they formulated agreements and action plans on what positive changes they could make in the region.

Agreements

As a result of these dialogue sessions the delegates came to agree that:

- the conflict has a negative impact on all their lives and all sides suffer and that acts and steps have been taken in the past which were harmful and which have created a volatile situation;
- all sorts of violence are condemned by the delegates;
- individuals should not be judged based on the actions of their governments;
- it is important to hear the other's narrative because failing to do so limits you from seeing the bigger picture;
- children are the most vulnerable group during conflict and the group that should be shielded against the impact of hostilities;
- it is of great importance to have a place to call home;
- security and the rule of law need to be respected by civilians living in a state.

To help formulate these agreements the delegates created the Ten Commandments of Amsterdam, detailing these commonalities.

These are:

- We agree that children should not be part of the conflict;
- We agree that living peacefully together is possible;
- We agree that we will be a role model to our nation;
- We agree that we think outside of the box;
- We agree that we never generalise;
- We agree that we respect each other;
- We agree that we agree to disagree;
- We agree that we speak clear and with purpose and listen with attention;
- We agree that we learn both narratives and think about them;
- We agree that peace is our goal.



Action Plans

Based on the common ground, the delegates created concrete plans that may be implemented in the region. These include the following:

1. **Small steps that I will take when I get back (individual level):**

- Traveling to the 'other side' more often.
- Practising each other's languages together, learning Hebrew or Arabic.
- Being critical towards media and keeping an open mind on different narratives.
- Talking to friends and family about YPI and meeting the 'other'.

2. **Steps to be taken as Youth Peace Initiative (group level):**

- Keeping in contact with the group and spreading the experience of being involved with the initiative through meetings and social media.
- Creating an international network for internships and academic support to help YPI delegates to become the future leaders that they have the potential to become;
- Joining the previous existing delegations and creating a peace agreement together, in small steps.

The organisation of YPI will facilitate in the following:

- Workshops and trainings on subjects regarding language, history, international and regional law, political systems, and the narratives of collective memories;
- Development of personal skills that will support the delegates to become future leaders. Examples are training in presentation, public speaking, and negotiation skills.
- Increasing the impact and involvement in the formal peace process by supporting political involvement, and the joining in other peace initiatives and summer schools.

3. **Spreading the word in the region and inspiring communities (community level):**

The delegation expressed the importance of spreading the word regarding what they have done this week and what they will continue to do in the region. To create outreach they will first focus on universities and students in both communities.

The following actions were designed to achieve this:

- Within the delegation's communal meetings the members will bring peers to the meeting to familiarise them with the activities of YPI.
- The delegation will start spreading the word at universities by:
 - a. publishing articles in student newspapers and on social media and by,



- b. communicating with the student unions, giving lectures to students while keeping in mind anonymity and equal representation and respect for different opinions.
- The delegation will inspire critical thinking through analysing media.
- The delegation will enhance cultural exchange, trust and social capital by organising a tour in each region. These positive activities are to be shared.

Special attention will go to the needs of children. The delegates agreed that children should not be a part of the conflict and recognised the importance of hearing the other's narrative on this topic. The delegation suggested a programme where children could work together with social worker students in order to deconstruct harmful stereotypes. This with the hope to decrease hate and violence or violent feelings of, to and between children.

Conclusion

The time spent in Amsterdam during the MEPP Conference 2018 offered a unique opportunity for international youth to talk about involvement of youth in paving the road to sustainable peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. The Israeli, Palestinian, and other (post-) conflict youth that were present, seized this opportunity to reach agreements and decide on action plans. The Youth Peace Initiative would like to sincerely express its gratitude for the courage, openness, and dedication of the delegates to make this conference to a success.

The conference was a small step on the road towards peace. The Israeli and Palestinian delegates will join the current initiative in the region to cooperate, train and continue their efforts. In addition, the delegation shared their desire to spread both their insights and experience throughout their communities. The group will expand on its plans in the coming years to increase the involvement of youth in the peace process.

Together we will take new steps in the future, claiming a space for youth in peace processes, and cooperating for a better tomorrow.

"We agreed on a common ground that represents our first step towards Peace in our region. We would like to express our gratitude to all YPI board members, the coordinators and everyone else who contributed in any way to help this conference take place," - participants to the Youth Peace Initiative MEPP Conference 2018



