



**YOUTH PEACE INITIATIVE**  
THE HAGUE • THE NETHERLANDS

# Our Common Future IV

Paving the Road to  
Sustainable Peace

Conference March 2019

“ WE NEED TO CREATE UNITY BEFORE PEACE,  
IN ORDER TO REACH PEACE. ”

PARTICIPANTS TO THE YOUTH PEACE INITIATIVE MEPP CONFERENCE 2019

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# Introduction

Half of the joint population of Israelis and Palestinians is below the age of 25. Their futures are, and will remain, captive to the errors of the past unless they are involved in the present in creating a sustainable peace for the future. This leads to the belief that the Youth Peace Initiative as a bottom-up, youth-led initiative has the power to build hope among young Israelis and Palestinians. Young leaders should claim their space, but also take responsibility to discover what role they have in their communities and what they can contribute to.

## Conference

From 2 to 9 March seven Israeli and seven Palestinian young leaders were invited to gather in the Netherlands to discuss ways forward in the Israeli-Palestinian peace issue. A delegation of four other international students (Armenia, Cyprus, Rwanda and South Africa) joined the group for support and insights from other regions that experience or have experienced conflict. All together, they discovered that trust and understanding are absolute key to finding new ways for a common future.

The conference revolved around two objectives: creating a safe space for dialogue and setting the agenda. On the one hand the new participants got acquainted to each other and the initiative. On the other hand, the participants explored personal pressing issues, their role and responsibility in the search for a sustainable peace in the Middle East.

## To be continued

During the week, the participants built trust, understanding, a platform for dialogue and also gained the skills to make effective use of this platform. Together, the Israeli and Palestinian participants feel ready continue their efforts of YPI in the Middle East. As young leaders they call upon their communities to join them and collectively invest in creating a better common future.

# The road to the conference

## The establishment of the Initiative

*“We, youth of the world’s regions in conflict, have come to The Hague to put our differences behind us and pursue a better future. We remember the past, but choose not to remain captive to it. Instead, we seek to move past the mistakes of previous generations and to achieve peace together.”*

This was the opening statement of ‘Our Common Future I,’ a document paving the road for a sustainable peace between the Israelis and Palestinians and created by its very own youth. In October 2014, five young Israeli and Palestinian potential leaders came to The Hague to discuss peace.

When the Israeli and Palestinian participants met in October 2014, a belief emerged that a solution to the long-running conflict is truly possible. The ba-



sis for this was formed through the mutual understanding, trust and friendship that was created – amongst the members of the group. The participants agreed to continue the efforts of YPI and further work on the outcomes of the peace plan - ‘Our Common Future I’.

In the spirit of ‘Our Common Future’ the Israeli and Palestinian Youth Peace Initiative participants met regularly ever since they came back in their region. These meetings eventually lead to a second and third conference in the Netherlands in Spring 2016 and Winter 2018. Through meetings, dialogue sessions, workshops and debates the participants are able to express their visions and develop their ideas.

### **The movement grows larger**

In 2019, twelve new young leaders (six Palestinian and six Israeli) applied to join the Youth Peace Initiative. The team consists of young ambitious and enthusiastic leaders from various kinds of backgrounds. The new delegation is the fourth group of young peacebuilders to agree to meet together for at least one year. During this year they discuss pending issues in the Middle East conflict.

Over the first few months of 2019 the delegations met several times separately, and twice together in order to prepare themselves for the conference week in The Netherlands. In the region the groups have met to get to know each other within each delegation, to discuss their shared history and narratives, and political events that are important for them and that has formed their own identity and the ambition to take on a leadership position in their own communities and workplaces.

The effort it takes to join these meetings should not be underestimated. For some of the delegates, this was the first moment they got the chance to really speak with someone from ‘the other side’. Although the emotions sometimes ran high, the group felt that it was very useful to start the shared dialogues and getting to know each other in this way and that it created a stable foundation for further discussions during the conference and afterwards back in the region.

## Conference: day by day

### **First stage: divergence**

#### **Day 1: getting to know each other**

The goal of the first day was to set the stage for the rest of the conference. That is, to create the safe space, the safe space agreements and to get to know the group. Furthermore, expectations of both the participants and the board were set out and the rest of the programme was discussed.



## **Day 2: tools for dialogue**

On Monday 4 March the groups were introduced to the tools and strategies of dialogue by a training from expert Hans van den Berg. These tools are meant to assist the participants towards successful dialogue- and discussion sessions throughout the week and during the rest of the Young Leaders Experience.

In the afternoon, the delegation of 2019 was invited by Mr. Erik de Baedts to visit the Peace Palace and the International Court of Justice and Permanent Court of Arbitrage. He encouraged the delegation to continue with their important dialogue to discuss the future of peacebuilding in their context.

## **Second stage: emergence**

### **Day 3: personal narratives and positions**

On the third day of the conference, in the morning, the goal was to listen to another person's story and narrative, to be curious, open, and free of judgement. In the afternoon the group worked towards the identification of the pressing issues within the group. This enabled them to be tough on the content while maintaining their interest in the perspective of the other. Important were the foundations of the trustful relationships that they had built in the previous days.

### **Day 4: dialogues on pressing topics in the peace issue**

On Wednesday, the dialogues with which we finished the previous day were continued throughout the day. Some pressing issues from Tuesday were further discussed, others made room for different topics. Emergence reached a peak and challenged the participants to remember the relations and understanding they had established between each other during the first half of the conference.

### **Day 5: addressing pressing topics in the peace issue**

On Thursday, Mr. Marcel Smits from the Institute of Economics and Peace presented the Positive Peace Index to the group. He elaborated on the eight pillars of positive peace that would serve as an inspiration to the group of young leaders in thinking of future steps and action plans back in the region. As well in terms of the Young Leaders Experience as in their personal future lives. Especially the high level of human capital, translated in the development of youth, was recommended as an important theme for the YPI delegations to consider for improvement. After the workshop, the group travelled to Nieuwspoor for a lunch with Dutch politicians of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Parliament and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The rest of the day served for reflection of the morning programme and the previous days.

## **Third stage: convergence**

### **Day 6: conclusion, agenda setting**

On the last day, Friday 8 March, the goal was for the participants to reflect on their experiences and new insights they gained of each other throughout the conference. Building upon this, the group decided on specific actions and the first steps that they will be taking in the region as part of the Young Leaders Experience. How can we, as young leaders, initiate change?



# Recognitions

From 2 to 9 March the Conference programme guided the delegates through three stages: getting to know each other, gaining expertise and having extensive dialogue. The group debated the future perspectives for their generation. Through active listening and speaking with intention, in smaller groups and plenary sessions, the group was able to overcome their differences and find common ground to continue their efforts. The international delegation was a crucial factor in this, both as mediator and as experts of their own (post-)conflict situation. Through their different point of views and critical questions they have contributed to a constructive dialogue.

In these talks the delegations learned about each others narratives and needs. After these discussions they came to the realisation of certain recognitions and action plans on what positive changes they could make in the regions.

**The participants have agreed on the:  
Recognition that violence is never a solution;**

**Recognition of the responsibility to invest in finding a partner for peace;**  
If you want to make peace with your enemy, you will have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner.

**Recognition of the responsibility to take up a leadership role as youth;**  
To transfer experience to others  
To talk to existing leaders (Foreign Affairs, education/sports, environment, youth affairs)

**Recognition of the responsibility to address humanitarian needs;**

**Recognition of the responsibility to engage in democratic actions;**  
The delegations are discussing the idea of establishing a youth party/movement involving both sides, while taking advantage of existing experience and knowledge.

**Recognition of each societies' unique identities and traditions;**  
Not only is recognition an important means of valuing or respecting an other person, it is also fundamental to understanding ourselves.

**Recognition of the importance to countervail stereotypes;**

**Recognition of the responsibility to remain curious;**

**Recognition of the responsibility to inform each other;**  
Without an understanding of the factors that influence the possibility of creating and sustaining peaceful societies, it will not be possible to develop the programmes, create the policies or understand the resources required to build a peaceful and resilient Israeli and Palestinian society.



Recognition of the importance for freedom of religion;

Recognition of the sensitivity and relativity of concepts/language;

Recognition of the importance of economic development and human capital;

Recognition of the importance of transparency and youth inclusion in any peace process;

Recognition of the importance of unified governments for the prospects of any peace process;

Recognition of the importance of internal reconciliation for the prospects of creating and maintaining peace.

## Action plans and agreements

The delegation of 2019 is part of the one-year YPI programme: “The Young Leadership Experience”. Hence, the following dates are set to meet up in the region, both shared and separate. The dates for the collective meetings are March 29th, May 10th, June 21st, September 20th, November 1st, December 13th. The experiences and insights the delegation acquired from the MEPP conference served to determine the topics, needs and further content of these meetings.

Both the Israeli and Palestinian delegations agreed upon the need for the following:

- 1. A common space, where both parties feel safe and recognized, to discuss ongoing issues regarding the conflict and future perspectives from a young leadership perspective on both side.**
- 2. The creation of a joined youth party in order to activate the participation of the youth into politics.**
- 3. To present our ideas to influential people or authority officials, for example with the ministries of foreign affairs, sports, culture and agriculture from both sides**
- 4. To gain experience on the ground during field visits to meet and discuss issues at the grassroots with non-politicians such as community workers and youth leaders, for a better understanding of the societal needs.**
- 5. To improve our language skills. For the Israelis to learn Arabic and for the Palestinians to learn Hebrew and to create a mutual language/discourse to connect with each other.**
- 6. For both sides to work on environmental issues in the region**



7. To raise awareness in schools (until 18 years old) about the narrative and history of the other side.

8. To start a platform to share both sides/stories/narratives to increase exposure

9. Investments in economic development will be important for prosperity growth and an independent trade market. Investments in in tech-education and high tech industry on both sides to enhance job opportunities for youth.

10. The need to improve the sport culture for youth in both societies

11. The delegates offer each other to act as ambassadors for each other in our own communities, to transfer the knowledge/experience about what we have learned.

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