

REBUILDING SOCIETIES EMERGING FROM CONFLICT
A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

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The Middle East Children Association –MECA- experience

A Palestinian Perspective

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Within the very limited time, I'll do my best to be very precise and informative as much as I can , in order to comply to the plenary session procedures

First of all I want to thank the organizers of this qualitative event for offering me the opportunity to meet and exchange experiences with committed participants like you , besides making it possible for me to meet my partner Ms. Adina here in New yourk , as it is impossible till this moment to meet at home , and to convey to you all , warm regards and high respect from our teachers and students who appreciate people who are paying attention to the sincere and intensive efforts they are doing in order to minimize their daily sufferings if not to put an end for the terrible un human and daily humiliation being practiced against them since decades

Let me be top honest with you by saying that it is very difficult to talk about MECA's experience with out getting into politics , but I'll do my best to leave this issue for my colleague

Despite the most difficult and deteriorating situation , the killing , injuring , demolishing of houses , restricting movement and the daily different forms of humiliation , despite all that , and because of the deep believes in the role of education in promoting understanding and accepting the other on mutual respect , our teachers did not give up and they are still going on ,The question is why?

Simply saying , besides the fact that education has more to do mainly in areas of conflict and bloodshed , The cultural background , the daily sufferings and the spread of violence and terror have motivated our teachers to create the alternative . Unfortunately , the Palestinians and the Israelis have missed the train for decades . Both of them dared not to face the fact : who is the other side? Sterotyping was and still is the dominant aspect in Palestinian – Israeli communications . For the Palestinians , the Israelis are all occupiers , killers , they are the ones who demolish houses

arrest, deport people , and the source of humiliation . For the Israelis , the Palestinians are no more than killers , cleaners of streets . They did not do enough to find the other face of the coin . What makes this more catastrophic is that not only the governments and formal political bodies did not pay attention to the positive efficient role of education to help people , but also built up school text books full of all aspects of hatred , enmity and widening the gap between people .

Because of our serious belief in the role of education and our commitment to help teachers and students to find the other face of the coin , MECA was established in 1996 for the sake of promoting understanding , cooperation and accepting the other on mutual levels, each has the right to live peacefully .MECA decided to continue working in these difficult times , because our aim is not to convince the convinced We are working with , by and for teachers and students coming from different geographical areas , different educational levels and different educational institutions , making it clear for every one that we are different but we are equal

Briefly saying , MECA's vision is that there are five distinct types of peace education – human rights education , Conflict Resolution education , International education and environmental education . This workable vision can not be achieved if our peace educators do not look seriously and critically at sources of conflict between the two communities and to work hard jointly in order to find and build things in common , to make intensive efforts to build understanding between people.

MECA did not ignore the psychological aspects of the conflict in relation to the bitter national dispute , negative image of the rival , enlightened occupation , self image of victimization , resource to military actions as a necessary means of survival and patriotism. These ethos revealed many challenges for MECA's work , such as :-

- * The theme of yearning for peace is undermined by themes of enlightened occupation accompanied by armed actions

- * The ethos of conflict legitimizes "our" violence while condemning the violence of the rival . Each group perceives itself as the victim of the other group

- * the gap between the text books and the study of history in schools. What is written in the text books and what the students learn from the daily life is totally different things . Palestinian text books stresses a combination of national identity ,cultural pluralism, pan-Arabism and Islamic studies . It is important to point here that more pluralistic elements are beginning to appear in the new Palestinian text books , for example the insertion of images that show Islamic and Jewish religious leaders together .

- * The right of movement is completely restricted for Palestinian participants (Adina will talk more about this issue)

* The deteriorating economical and psychological conditions of the Palestinian community in general and the teachers and students in particular . Two recent studies were published warning from the possible terrible outcomes of such conditions . One was conducted by the UN delegate headed by Ms.Catherine bretini (former head of World Food Perogram at the UN) and the second was published at Haarets Israeli paper (5/9/2002) by Nehmya shinerslir , urging the Jewish people to put an end for humiliating the Palestinians

MECA puts teachers and principals into fifteen groups. Each group is made of 10-15 teachers from each side , facilitated by two facilitators , a Palestinian and an Israeli , The groups meet uni and bi-nationally twice a month , after they build their action plan jointly

MECA has its : equal number of board members, coordinators and consultant committee . Just recently , we started to have two supervisors to follow up the work of the facilitators .

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Before I stop , to respond to your questions , I'd like by you all to join MECA in its pray that our leaders will not waste more time to reach peace and let us pray that till they make it , if they are serious in their efforts , there will be no losses among innocent people and mainly children and mothers