

## Summary Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI) 21st-25th August 2006



*Conference Sessions*



*Haifa Katyusha Damaged House*



*Meeting Dr Yossi Beilin MK*

The arrival day included a meeting with Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal, the Bishop of Jerusalem. On the 22nd of August we went to have a series of meetings in Tel Aviv. The first over lunch and for discussions afterwards our group included Akiva Eldar, editor of Haaretz newspaper, Gen. (Ret.) Freddie Zach, Prof. Sammy Smooha of the University of Haifa, Walid Sadik (former MK and former Deputy Minister of Agriculture) Bruno Landesberg, Dr. Pietre Beelarts Von Blokland a former Government Minister in Holland, Drora Bendov, an International Relations Consultant, Terry Newman who works with Coexistence Trust, David Sasson, Susan Younger-Ross and Richard Younger-Ross MP from the UK on the Foreign Affairs Select Committee. We also met Gen. (Ret.) Danny Yatom Labour Knesset Member who has been centrally involved in previous negotiations.

During the visit several hopeful themes emerged among the post-war turmoil. Firstly, the 15 year reunion of the Madrid talks was discussed as a way to launch a Madrid 2. Secondly, the idea of a new quartet of Israel, Palestine, Egypt and Jordan as a grouping to promote successful negotiations was raised. Dr Yossi Beilin MK (Member of the Knesset), Chair of Meretz party, told us of another hopeful initiative of European Foreign Policy leaders H.R. Javier Solana (High Representative for the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy), and the Foreign Minister of Finland, Mr Erkki Tuomioja. They invited him to Brussels to discuss an international force on the Gaza border if the force in southern Lebanon is effective.

The film maker Gary Cohen told us about his recent documentary 'Judea and Mohammed' that had appeared on UK ITV Channel Four in mid-August. Professor Alean Al-Krenawi of Ben Gurion University told us about his project for reconciliation among students from Israeli and Palestinian backgrounds.



*Briefing at the Knesset*



*Meeting Mr. Ehud Barak MK*



*Visiting Daehashe Refugee Camp*

On the Wednesday the 23rd we were joined by Daniel Seidemann (legal Advisor to Ir Amin – an organisation dealing with Israeli-Palestinian relations within Jerusalem) and Gershon Baskin, (Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information) that covers the gamut of the issues that need to be negotiated for a resolution of the Israeli Palestinian conflict. Ran Cohen MK discussed the political situation during and after the war. There were a range of views expressed by Baruch Shalev (Service for Peace), Shelley Elkayem (Truman Institute), David Sasson, Aurore Andre (NGO-Monitor) as well as our guests from Europe.

At midday we met Dr Hadi Abdul Mahdi (Chairman of PASSIA – Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs) who gave an insightful analysis into the Palestinian perspective of the conflict. He was joined by Dr. Emil Jarjoui, a Fatah Palestinian Legislative Council member, who remained with us for the rest of the day. We toured the Dehaeshi refugee camp where there are 12000 people living just outside Bethlehem; many since the 1950s. One man who has lived there all his life spoke to us and guided us around the camp. He told us that, 'Most Palestinians have experienced Israeli jails.' We also met the Deputy Mayor of Bethlehem, George Sa'adeh and the Mayor of Beit Sahour, Mr. Hani Al-Hayek who explained the situation of their towns under the financial crisis. We met members of the Bereaved Family Forum who promote reconciliation rather than revenge. Moses Erez, a former Knesset Member, shared with us about the All For Peace radio.

On Thursday the 24th the group visited Haifa where 12 people had died and 450 had been injured by Katyusha rockets. We saw the spray of ball bearings lodged around the surrounding walls. We visited Bnai Zion hospital where civilian casualties were taken. Dr. Michael Kafka, a surgeon at the hospital, explained that the hospital was hit by the blast of one rocket during the war.

Along with the political discussions the participants viewed the holy sights of the Old City, Nazareth and Bethlehem. Sadly each was so empty we had these precious holy places largely to ourselves.