

Summary report of the first annual conference “Jerusalem: The Global Challenge”

14-15 October, 2010

Subject: Evaluation session for the annual conference “Jerusalem: the Global Challenge” in 2010.

Summary of content and discussion:

Jerusalem has been used as a symbol and a label for conflict and confrontation, and was never used as a symbol for peace and coexistence, and this is our focus and our strength. Jerusalem should be transformed from a city of conflict into one of peace and prosperity, an open city for all. It is no longer possible to wait, and Jerusalem should receive major local and international attention as one of the most urgent issues to deal with.

Today, there is an absence of cooperation on Jerusalem which transformed it into a neglected issue. The outburst of conflict and confrontation that the city is witnessing today, has been resulting in the degradation of the daily lives of Jerusalemites, and is a direct result of Israel’s politics and the delay of research into Jerusalem and its future.

There is an urgent need for intensifying international efforts to find a political solution to the issue of Jerusalem building on the view of two states, with their two capitals in Jerusalem; which should be developed as a capital and an open city, on the basis of the political division of Jerusalem into the East, as a Palestinian capital, and the West, as an Israeli capital, while maintaining the city open and physically united. This idea of an open city is one that has to exist side by side with the macro political arrangements between the Palestinian and Israeli governments, especially that the solution of the political conflict will not take place without the division of the city politically into two domains and two capitals, and the establishment of administrative conditions that differ in levels of the relationship and overlap between them.

In order for the vision of Open Jerusalem to be realistic on a functional level, serious work has to be accomplished on many layers and levels. And while complete separation will be necessary on the national-political, educational and cultural administration, it is essential that cooperation and unity take place on the infrastructure as well as economic and environmental levels.

This concept of Jerusalem, while politically divided as a capital and centre must be supported by an international administrative organization which is in keeping with the international importance of Jerusalem, and its prominence as an administrative framework for the political solution.

In this conference, the basis and guidelines were set down for the transformation of Jerusalem from a marginalized and fragmented city of conflict into a capital and political centre, and an important city which can be included on the globalized network which presents important international jobs in education, culture, tourism, and services.

The conference also discussed the concept of Jerusalem as an international city in terms of urban and developmental functions and the broadening of the scope of the city based on cultural and urban pluralism in a way that supports its political centrality as a capital and centre.

Summary of conclusions:

The conference “Jerusalem: the Global Challenge” was a great success and an outstanding accomplishment in taking a first step towards our vision of an Open Jerusalem. We feel that Jerusalem as an open city is no longer a myth and we will go forwards in trying to realize this vision on the ground through translating it into concrete projects and programs.

The point of the conference is to focus on interest of the city. Both sides were represented, and the neglect of functionality of the city had to be tackled. The idea of the conference is to also understand the obstacles –the roots of the problem- with regards to the city functions for all sides: the Palestinians, Israelis and international, in order to be able to move on in dealing with them.

An important conclusion that has been discussed and can be concluded from the conference is to work on how we can use urban planning to promote more positive encounter and interaction between both sides, and the importance of this issue to create hope on the Palestinian side and promote its trust in the possibility of peace-building.

Another concept the conference has also demonstrated is that we should work together as Palestinians and Israelis in order to come up with a new model that would help shift the attitudes towards each other, to create the venue and space of interaction, and which proved possible through the cooperation of both teams in the content of the scenarios and vision for the future of Jerusalem and in the organization and accomplishments of the conference itself.

Based on the feedback of most participants and organizers, organizational aspects as well as contents of the panels and discussions were interesting and informative, as well as instructive and constructive. The commitment of the international audience and their contributions has been praised, and was so encouraging to move forwards to the next conference with larger audiences, and increase the engagement of supporters on all sides; Palestinian, Israeli and International.

Examples of the very positive reactions on the part of internationals and the Swiss, and the locals were mentioned, and this included individual and group initiatives on how to follow up on the conference and tackle issues that were not yet tackled, how to get into details, or volunteering to write policy papers on specific sectors. This is in addition to using some other cities in Europe as study cases and models for the sectors that unite the city, like the case of Basel suggested by Prof. Alfred Bodenheimer, and which will be studied by the team in the coming weeks.

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