

Permanent Committee for the Implementation of the Alexandria Declaration (PCIAD)

Israel/Palestine Project Work

Briefing Sheet

Following stagnation of the Oslo Peace accords, Canon Andrew White was approached in the summer of 2001 to ascertain whether anything could be done to engage the religious leadership of Israel and Palestine in the faltering peace process.

After a series of meetings with leaders from all sides, a three-day summit took place in the Egyptian city of Alexandria hosted by the Grand Mufti of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Mohammed Sayed Tantawi and chaired by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey. This brought together representatives of the three monotheistic faiths in the region and resulted in the signing of the Alexandria Declaration in January 2002, which contained a joint condemnation of violence and a commitment to working together for peace.

The summit set up a Permanent Committee for the Implementation of the Alexandria Declaration (PCIAD), and this has since met in Jerusalem, Rome, Egypt and London. Many see the Alexandria Process as being the religious track of the Middle East Peace Process. It aims to complement though not replace the political peace process, and as such has gained the backing of the Israeli Government, the Palestinian Leadership, the British Prime Minister and the US State Department.

The breakdown of the –Road Map“ affected the running of the Alexandria Process, which operates best when in tandem with a functioning political dialogue. The escalation of the conflict also meant that many of the Palestinian delegates encountered severe difficulty in gaining access to PCIAD meetings in Jerusalem, which hampered the momentum of any inter-religious dialogue. Nevertheless, the work continued and a summit for Muslim delegates from the West Bank and Gaza was organised in January 2004 in Cairo. This sought to broaden the support base for the Alexandria Process by empowering moderate Islamic leaders actively to reduce incitement and denounce violent resistance.

Following the death of Yasser Arafat, and the subsequent election of President Mahmoud Abbas, new initiatives to revive the peace process have created a fresh impetus amongst the Alexandria Group. Despite the continued difficulty of gaining access to meetings, the Group is determined to take the work forward and is continuing to meet to work through issues.

Proposed Project Work

- Establishing two local centres in Gaza and the West Bank, that will partner a centre that exists in Jerusalem, to provide a framework for grassroots projects

in the region. These aim to address community, cultural and religious issues and facilitate projects that are consistent with FRME's strategic objectives.

Crucially, the Gaza and West Bank centres will engage with local Islamic leaders who have influence over significant parts of the media, communication with militant groups and a close affiliation to the Palestinian Authority.

- Establishing practical mechanisms to respond to serious crises that PCIAD delegates may be able to help resolve swiftly and peaceably.
- Co-ordinating engagements in Washington and London with religious leaders from Israel/Palestine in order to give them the opportunity to liaise with key political, religious and diplomatic figures. This in turn will enable a better understanding of the various regional needs and will aid in the efficient implementation of the projects run by the centres.
- Conducting a consultation on Jerusalem and the Holy Sites with Search for Common Ground, aided and supported by the USIP, the Church of Norway and the British Foreign Office. This is in continuation of the process of research and dialogue between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim academics.