

Sustainable Development as a Necessary and Integral Ingredient of Sustainable Peace in Israel/Palestine

Panel Proposal submitted to Middle East Dialogue
By: Dr. Adina Friedman and Fareed Mahameed

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict seems intractable, with no end in sight. Political agreements, when reached, are merely documents – not actual peace. They tend not to address many of the conflict’s critical dimensions and both/all parties’ real needs, and thus are not sustainable and do not yield the outcome the parties purport them to. Psychologically, the many existing barriers of mistrust and enmity are continuously reinforced rather than dismantled. Parties are weary of agreements made by politicians whom they largely do not trust and are disillusioned by the peace process overall. Indeed, much of this distrust is warranted, since past agreements have failed to change the structures that create and sustain conflict.

Any sustainable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will have to tackle the conflict’s underlying sources and the core needs of each society. It will have to change attitudes by promising to change structures. Only this may allow for buy-in and give parties a direct and immediate incentive to engage and to embrace an agreement.

True peace – whether between or within countries – entails the safety, security, and wellbeing of members of the societies involved. **Sustainability is at the core of peace.** Sustainable environmental peacebuilding rests on the premise that the environment knows no political boundaries, and that cooperation between societies and nations in conflict zones offers a platform for ongoing intercultural dialogue, enabling trust-building and fostering the establishment of cross-border societal linkages, thereby advancing peace.

Sustainable Development, defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,” has four interdependent dimensions, including society, environment, culture, and economy. **Environmental peacebuilding**, an emerging field in both academic and practitioner circles, is “the process through which environmental challenges shared by the parties to a violent conflict are turned into opportunities to build lasting cooperation and peace.” The field blends observations regarding communal use of and access to natural resources, with insights about how this resource use relates to communal conflict as well as communities’ standards of living.

In the MENA region, as in the world at large, there is a growing awareness of the critical importance of environmental considerations and sustainable development. Numerous initiatives exist throughout the region tackling issues such as [water scarcity](#), [renewable energy](#), and [sustainable farming](#). In some instances, these are government sponsored; in many other cases, they originate from civil society non-governmental organizations. The latter, while working from “below”, usually work simultaneously on achieving cooperation from “above” (governmental and international organizations). Many of these initiatives include [cultural and communal/intercommunal dimensions](#), and some include intercommunal and cross-boundary cooperation.

This panel will discuss the ways in which environmental peacebuilding can be (and is) employed as a tool, and the ways in which sustainable development is integral and critical to sustainable peace. Fareed is a Palestinian citizen of Israel and Adina is a Jewish Israeli. Their presentations will be unique and complementary, combining Jewish and Palestinian experiences and perceptions; theory and practice; and environmental and peacebuilding examples. The

speakers will also discuss a project they have jointly initiated and are currently working on with additional partners from the MENA, titled Towards Shared Societies: Transboundary Environmental Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development in the MENA.

Fareed Mahameed

Fareed has worked for years on projects involving sustainability and environmental peacebuilding within Israel, as well as on Palestinians-Israeli-Jordanian transboundary projects. He himself is a graduate of such an MS program at the Arava Institute, Israel. Much of his work has been with Bedouin communities in the Negev/Naqab, which are among the most marginalized and impoverished communities in Israel, viewed negatively by most Jewish Israelis. He will discuss various endeavors in which he was/is involved, which promote sustainable development and sustainable peace.

One such project, titled Oasis of Co-Existence – Reconnecting Roots, encourages Bedouin students to document their community's fading oral history through the lens of medicinal herbs. These students also work with Jewish students to explore Jewish and Bedouin traditions surrounding those plants, and to learn how to use the herbs for the benefit of all. Another program, called Transboundary Education, brings together students and teachers from the Dead Sea Basin in Jordan and Israel, to jointly implement a transboundary scientific curriculum that caters to the needs of communities in both countries. Another transboundary project focuses on water and water management – a central and critical issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

These and other projects are all examples of intercommunal, transboundary projects around environmental issues and sustainable development, that are also important peacebuilding tools.

Adina Friedman

Adina has worked for many years in the peacebuilding field, mainly in and on the MENA region and with special focus on Israeli-Palestinian (and broader Israeli-Arab) relations. While not all peace endeavors involve environmental issues or sustainable development per-se, any comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement/resolution to the conflict will have to include these issues at their core.

Adina will discuss the inseparability of sustainable development from sustainable peace in theoretical/conceptual terms. As mentioned, sustainable development has four main dimensions: society, environment, culture, and economy. Any comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement will have to include these dimensions as well.

Adina will bring examples from the Israeli-Palestinian context (including some in which she was directly involved), as well as examples from the broader MENA context. In particular, she will discuss projects in Morocco that combine sustainable development, community (and women's) empowerment, and intercultural-interfaith (Jewish-Muslim) peace work. Involvement of Palestinians and Israelis in work in Morocco/with Moroccans is a way of building transboundary bridges, as well as strengthening Israeli-Palestinian peace and anchoring it in a broader context.