Written evidence submitted by Kids Creating Peace (KCP)

Part I: Executive Summary

Factual Information

- The British Government is committed to resolving the prolonged and complex Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a negotiated two-state solution with a secure and recognized Israel living alongside a sovereign and viable Palestinian state. Majority of its budget is spent through the Department for International Development (DFID) on development projects in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) while the majority of its interdepartmental Conflict Pool that funds conflict prevention, stabilization and peacekeeping is dedicated to advocacy work in Israel.
- Given the fragile state of the economy and infrastructure in the OPTs, we believe that establishing a secure and stable Palestinian state alongside a secure Israeli state lays the foundation for a sustainable peace. As such, the DFID work in the OPTs is vital and should remain a high priority.
- Alongside economic growth and state development, allocating funds to the Conflict Pool is necessary to counteract and overcome incitement, loss of hope and the de-humanization of the “other” as a viable partner for peace on both sides.
- Based on experience and impact, Kids Creating Peace offers an exemplary model for cross-border work that effectively engages otherwise-alienated and hostile youth, transforming them from apathy (on the Israeli side) and hatred (on the Palestinian side) to respect and understanding the "other," and to serving as active advocates for peace within their communities, among peers and stakeholders. Evaluation points to striking results on youth: Nearly 100% of youth experienced a dramatic positive shift in their perception of the other (for 95% of them this was the first time they met a peer from the other side) and many vocalized a commitment to advocate for peace.

Brief Introduction to Kids Creating Peace

- Established in 2006, Kids Creating Peace (KCP) is a non-profit organization that aims to counteract the downward spiral of mistrust and hopelessness within Israeli and Palestinian societies, by engaging children and youth on both sides in direct interaction, dialogue and joint work. Over the years, KCP engaged over 10,000 Palestinian and Israeli, Jewish and Arab, children and youth in diverse programs, resulting in tangible shifts of perceptions and increased commitment to peace in the ME. As one of only a few cross-border dialogue groups, KCP's double-pronged focus works to 1. Engage Israeli and Palestinian youth in direct dialogue; 2. Develop Israeli and Palestinian youth to become committed agents of change with clear multiplier effect on their surroundings.

Recommendations

- KCP is respectfully submitting evidence to the senior British Parliamentary Committee to make the case for increased support for direct cross-border dialogue and cooperation as an effective and strategic direction necessary to achieving a lasting peace in the Middle East. It is proven that as youth meet and work jointly they lower their guards, become more sympathetic and actively seek peaceful approaches to ending the ME conflict.
- To effectively move the leadership forward in offering a policy horizon for an attainable and viable resolution of the conflict, necessitates strengthening the UK Government's Conflict Pool’s support by: 1. Increasing capacity to reach wider sectors of society; 2. Building a grassroots, bottom-up momentum that will move forward action for peace, complementing the diplomatic and international efforts in the region.
Part II: Factual Information

Overview of the ME Conflict and root obstacles to peaceful resolution

1. Rooted in decades and generations of territorial, nationalist, and religious disputes, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has had devastating consequences on both Israel and the Palestinians in realizing their full potential, especially as Palestinians vie for sovereignty in their land. The Department for International Development (DFID)'s policy to allocate funds to infrastructure, relief, and state-building in the OPTs is consistent with the current state in the OPTs. The £86 million that the DFID allocates to state-building in the Palestinian territories is consistent with the great need to strengthen key infrastructure in the territories. According to the World Bank, the Palestinian territories experience one of the weakest economies in the Middle East North Africa region. GDP growth in the territories has decreased dramatically in the last few years, falling from 9 percent in 2008-2011 to 5.9 percent in 2012 and to 1.9 percent in the first half of 2013 (with negative growth of -0.1 percent in the West Bank). According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the unemployment rate at the end of 2013 was at 23.7 percent.

2. Moreover, the quality of infrastructure including water and transportation are deteriorating, therefore limiting economic growth. In a continued state of conflict with several Israeli restrictions on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the territories face impeding economic and state growth. Partially, removing Israeli restrictions would increase Palestinian GDP and facilitate implementation of sustainable economic systems as well as advance establishment of civil, political, economic and social rights. Hence, we maintain that infrastructure building in the OPTs, alongside advocacy in Israel and confidence-building cross border work are integral to building a stable and prosperous ME with a viable Palestinian state living peacefully next to a secure Israeli state.

The State of Our Youth - Young Israelis and Palestinians as Change Agents

3. The trend in Israel and the OPTs is such that "young Israeli and Palestinian people today have no positive association with peace" (Dalia Schniedlin, Ha'aretz, April 2011). In Israel and the OPTs, the younger generation is less inclined to support negotiations towards a real peaceful resolution, since they have come of age during four wars (the Second Intifada, the Second Lebanon War, Operation 'Cast Lead' and the recent Operation 'Pillar of Defence', both in the Gaza Strip). Direct interaction outside of the military context between the two populations is almost non-existent. Furthermore, both Israelis and Palestinians mostly receive their information and form their opinions based on the polarized mainstream media coverage of the conflict and regional developments.

1 http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/10/03/000456286_20131003173450/Rendered/PDF/AUS29220GZ0Are030Box379840BOOOUO090.pdf
4. On the Israeli side, in contrast to roughly 70 percent of Israeli adults supporting negotiations, just over half of the Israeli youth surveyed (including Israeli Arabs) support negotiations (Peace Index surveys in Israel). This gap in support for renewing negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel can be attributed to the formative role that media plays in shaping public opinion regarding key issues and groups. Israel's youth (between the ages of 13 and 18) represent the highest media consumption rates in Israeli society at over 90% in contrast to 60% of the general Israeli population. This striking figure signifies the dominant role the internet serves in the sharing and receiving of information among Israel's youth. Through the media's oversimplification of the "other" and of the conflict, the youth understand the current situation to be acceptable and irreversible. Consequently, we also witness a drastic increase in young Israeli Jews defining themselves as right-wing (from 48% in 1998 to 63% in 2010) with 46% of Israeli Jews preferring to maintain the status quo of the conflict rather than to advance the peace process (Friedrich Ebert, Youth in Israel, 2010).

5. Similarly, Palestinian youth exhibit parallel lack of trust and hope for a real resolution of the conflict and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. While Palestinian youth comprise 27% of the total Palestinian population, a third of them are unemployed and lack democratic outlets to mobilize change in the conflict among their leaders (Study by Sharek Youth Forum, “The Status of Youth in Palestine,” 2013). Nearly three quarters of youth from the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank are unaffiliated to any party and assert that no faction has proven trustworthy. Almost two-thirds of Palestinian youth believe Israel's policies in the OPTs coupled with internal Palestinian politics will impede efforts to establish a Palestinian state (Reuters, April 2013).

6. Recent regional developments, such as the Arab Spring and riots in Syria, Egypt and Turkey, have demonstrated the power of young people mobilizing change in society. Due to the importance of youth in social and political transformation, Israeli and Palestinian youth are the prime target for peacebuilding work. As young people tend to be receptive and open-minded to competing ideas both through meeting their peers and cultural/media exposure, we believe that the most effective approach to conflict resolution is to facilitate positive interactions between Israeli and Palestinian youth. A recent study (University of Haifa, 2013) established a direct link between culture and tolerance, showing that young Israelis' opinions of Palestinians changed after watching plays on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Following the viewing, the percentage of students blaming the Palestinians for the stalemate dropped from 55% to 38%, the percentage of those holding negative feelings towards Palestinians decreased from 65% to 47%, and those supporting roadblocks fell from 78% to 60%.

Part III: Introduction to Kids Creating Peace Approach and Impact

7. The following evidence is to present the case for more support to dialogue and cross-border cooperation groups, as their work is essential to laying the building blocks for propelling forward a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that will be supported by the majority of the public on both sides.
8. KCP designs cutting-edge programs geared at bringing together Palestinian and Israeli youth. At the core of our approach, we tackle the conflict from a non-politicized angle, avoiding the collective nationalist and historical narratives. Rather we focus on the individual young person's journey to becoming more confident, acquiring non-violent communications skills, getting to know the "other" and recognizing both sides' legitimacy. Once children and youth gain practical tools to deal with life's challenges, and the moment they feel more confident they are able to come to terms with the "other" and avoid prejudice. To strengthen the individual youth, KCP works holistically with schools, community organizations, and civic institutions at the local, regional and national levels. We offer education programs for personal and societal conflict management and resolution among youth in Israel and the OPTs. Our curricula are based on life skills, sensory and experiential methods tailored to engage, empower and motivate youth. Our programs incorporate leadership and dialogue training, inspiring the youth to choose the path of affecting change within their communities. **KCP places youth at the centre, viewing them as future leaders and important agents of change, with a clear “ripple effect.”**

9. KCP’s youth participants embark on a personal and collective journey, exploring one another’s daily realities through weekly meetings, joint projects, and a bi-national 4-day summer camp in order to facilitate unprecedented cross-border dialogue. This program marked not only a shift among individual perceptions, but also prompted community involvement and enabled sustainable institutional impact. We offer a leadership, public speaking, and performing arts program for YCP graduates to further hone their leadership skills as well as to promote continued dedication to advocating for peace. Youth Creating Eco-Peace is a program that employs the concept of a “shared ground” into a “common ground” by uniting Israeli and Palestinian youth on environmental initiatives, working together to impact the land. We also offer the 'Game of Life,' a fun and interactive video curriculum that aims to achieve spiritual fulfilment (security, happiness, love, and confidence) by engaging hundreds of youth throughout Israel and the OPTs in a personal empowering learning process.

**KCP’s Strategic Model with Clear Multiplier Impact**

10. KCP programs both engage youth with the "other" and equip youth with the necessary conflict-resolution skills and decision-making processes to do so successfully. Furthermore, the programs foster a sense of "oneness" amongst the mixed Israeli and Palestinian groups by challenging them with a common end-project that places them as "one" group with a common cause "against" an outside force. Moreover, we believe that education is enhanced by strong role models, as evidenced by our committed and responsible teachers and instructors. The teachers and instructors come from within the community itself, are experienced and skilled in delivering dialogue and youth-cantered programs, and serve as role models for tolerance and cross-border dialogue.
11. Not only does KCP's multifaceted approach shift perceptions directly among program participation, but it establishes a long-lasting shift in behaviours and yields outputs and actions that have institutional and public impact. KCP often leverages past program's youth graduates to serve as leaders and active in recruitment and management of the new groups of young Israeli and Palestinian participants, ensuring effective peer-to-peer interaction and providing powerful role models. These newly-cultivated youth leaders equipped with the necessary tools, then initiate and carry out creative peace educational campaigns and activities in their schools reaching thousands of additional youth. Through these leaders' work, we ensure the sustainable and longer-term impact of their work and their commitment beyond the program's period. Furthermore, our programs' outputs and tools ensure a broader sustainable impact, by utilizing online forums, new media campaigns, key messaging, visual branding, and other creative means that frame peace in a fresh, young, and positive way that youth can relate to. KCP programs offer hands-on leadership of the youth empowering them as they demonstrate their power to act and affect others through concrete peace work in classes. Finally, throughout the program, parents, teachers, and stakeholders get involved; these influential community players such as teaching staff, elected officials from city councils, and representatives from the Ministry of Education gain exposure to a positive model of bringing together Israeli and Palestinian youth uniting under a common goal to achieve a lasting peace in the region.

12. At a cost of 1,200 GBP per one participant – an Israeli or Palestinian youth, for a year-long program comprised of two separate preparatory work, seven bi-national meetings, a joint 4-day camp, a joint hands-on arts or environmental project in bi-national teams, leadership development and further outreach in the youth's schools, vis-a-vis new media outlets and with the youth’s parents and educators, local and national stakeholders.

Evidence of Impact of KCP's Approach

13. In 2012-2013, KCP led the program Youth Creating Peace. This program brought 50 Israeli and Palestinian youth together through workshops, a four-day summer camp, and joint art project, demonstrating impact on several levels:

   i. On an individual level, the program identified significant changes in perceptions of Israeli and Palestinian youth of the other population. 95% of participating YCP Palestinian and Israeli youth had never previously encountered a peer from the other group. The high level of mistrust and fear of the other group (75% of the Israelis, 82% of the Palestinians) significantly decreased as nearly 100% of the participating youth expressed a dramatic shift in their views following the program. Furthermore, prior to program participation, %60 expressed indifference to the current situation of the Palestinians and to working towards peace. Following completion of the program, over 95% of the Israeli youth expressed a firm commitment to achieving peace as well as engaging their communities at home.

   ii. The multi-layered approach of the project resulted in involving more than 200 parents and siblings of the participants. The post-project surveys clearly show
how in addition to witnessing the positive change their children went through, both Israeli and Palestinian parent’s opinions were positively affected by the program. Following the program, 92% of the parents expressed an interest in meeting a family from the other side and getting involved in similar mitigating activities. The family of Palestinian participant Fadi Ghattas, who used to participate in demonstrations against Israeli policies in the OPTs, was impressed by the change he experienced following the program. Instead of attending demonstrations, Fadi is now committed to work in conjunction with his Israeli peers. Fadi’s mother remarked, “I am so pleased to see the change he went through; he now understands that not all Israelis are the same.”

iii. The program succeeded in impacting a great number of people and institutions beyond the participants themselves. This list of people affected includes, but is not limited to schools, municipalities, ministries, NGOs, youth movements, and several more. In addition, YCP’s staff was also influenced, and many reported integrating the program model and curriculum into other programs. The program also resulted in increased commitment to peace among mayors and education stakeholders. Ilana, Head of the Education Department of the Jerusalem municipality has participated in many of our meetings and stated that she looks forward to participating in several more joint projects with us.

iv. Over half a year after completion, the youth graduates launched a letter-writing campaign addressed to both Palestinian and Israeli leaders calling for dialogue in addition to diplomatic efforts to establish peace, as part of the renewal of negotiations in 2013-14. This civic engagement effort led to over 500 Israeli and Palestinian youth signing the letter, holding a successful meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, generating news coverage and increased internet circulation of these efforts for peace among their young peers.

14. In 2010, one of KCP’s successful programs - Sach Ten that engaged 24 Israeli (Jewish and Arab) and Palestinian youth, resulted in an actual joint youth-drafted peace agreement that the youth themselves presented to the French Parliament.

**Part IV: Recommendation**

15. KCP respectfully makes the recommendation to the British Government to supplement DFID’s work in the OPTs and the Conflict Pool’s advocacy work in Israel with direct cross-border programs engaging young Israelis and Palestinians in joint work on common interests and issues.

16. Recognizing that apathy and lack of hope, together with a void in policy, on both sides lay at the foundation of the current stagnation, KCP strives to serve as a model for cross-border projects that aim at reinvigorating the younger generation with forward-looking optimism and creative peace-building goals.

17. We maintain that an imperative stepping stone towards achieving a just and sustainable two-state solution is fostering inter-personal, direct relations and cross-border
cooperation in order to bring about change from the bottom-up and on a broader scale. As more people get involved and become passionate about mobilizing change, the leadership will be motivated to progress towards achieving peace. Only if we reach wider and more diverse sectors in Israel and the OPTs in direct dialogue will we prepare the public opinion to accept the necessary concessions entailed in an agreement, reinvigorating the possibility of a sustainable peaceful ME.