Executive Summary

- The Jerusalem Intercultural Centre (JICC), founded in 1999, has established itself as a leader in advancing conflict resolution, inter-group relations, cooperation and community development in Jerusalem. It empowers residents to take care of their own needs, protect their own rights and create a stable human and physical infrastructure that will serve the Palestinian population of Jerusalem (as well as other groups) under any future scenario. The JICC's board spans the religious, cultural and ethnic spectrum, from Palestinians to Ultra-Orthodox Jewish and secular Jews.

- Today Jerusalem includes some 300,000 Palestinians, suffering from severe and widespread poverty and lack of basic services and infrastructures. If these problems are not dealt with now, they will be so deep, and the scope will be so large, that the ensuing emergency conditions will be nearly irreversible.

- The JICC’s approach is very practical and well-suited to East Jerusalem, as it prepares residents to function peacefully, regardless of the political situation. The JICC empowers its participants with the tools to obtain their rights, receive services, and improve their everyday lives. JICC programmes have created networks of community leadership that are civic-minded, building a sustainable civil society as well as human and physical infrastructure that can continue to lead into any future. Indeed, researchers have noted the importance of cultivating mainstream, grassroots groups in order to facilitate long-term peace-building processes between Israelis and Palestinians.

- The JICC has found that programmes such as the following have been effective peace-building tools in East Jerusalem, successfully developing local grassroots leadership:

  - The MiniActive women’s empowerment programme has grown to a network of 1,000 volunteers in just 18 months. Working in groups of 4-5, they, together with local service providers, have fixed thousands of everyday problems, mostly relating to physical infrastructure. During severe winter storms in January 2013 and again in December 2013, the MiniActive network worked around the clock to report and fix the significant damage that took place in East Jerusalem.

  - Paramedical Professional Training Courses were developed in 2012 as a response to a severe lack of Palestinian paramedical personnel in East Jerusalem. The courses enable those had trained in the West Bank and Jordan to work legally in East Jerusalem. In the first year alone, 40 nurses and occupational therapists passed the requisite certification examinations, up from 1-2 in each discipline previously. This programme will help to ensure Palestinians’ employment rights, as well as improve the quality of health care.

  - Cultural Competency is an awareness that others’ worldviews can drastically affect their perceptions and interactions. The JICC initiated Cultural Competency in the Health Care System in 2008, and has since become a local and national authority, offering training courses in cultural sensitivity workshops, medical interpretation courses, translation of forms, and more. The JICC has also developed training materials and initiated national peer learning networks. The JICC applies these concepts to other disciplines as well, in making Jerusalem and Israel more accepting and understanding of the ‘other’.

  - Emergency Response Networks enable responses to emergencies (snow, fires, earthquakes, etc.) to begin within neighbourhoods with the use of local manpower, significantly cutting down response time. Operated by a local Palestinian organization, supervised by and in coordination with
the JICC, local service providers and other organizations, the Networks began 3 years ago will soon be operational in 12 Palestinian neighbourhoods. In the December 2013 snow storm, Networks recruited all the heavy equipment available in the neighbourhoods and worked day and night to ease conditions. This showed how the programme fosters community solidarity and gives communities the confidence in their ability to take care of themselves.

- The **Palestinian Lay Leader Forums** began in 2009, and seek to build capacity among active residents and community leaders in neighbourhoods such as Silwan, the Old City, and Wadi Joz, in peaceful conflict management and resolution. They prioritize needs, decide on plans of action, devise creative solutions to complex issues, and explore a wider range of methodologies that allow them to exercise their rights through due process, creating an on-the-ground civic community leadership.

### The Jerusalem Intercultural Centre

1. The Jerusalem Intercultural Centre (JICC) was founded in 1999 with the intent of assisting all the city's residents, including its Palestinian residents from different identities, in becoming active partners in affecting the future of their communities. The ‘culture’ in the name refers to that which defines all aspects of one’s identity – religion, traditions, history, ethnic group, nationality, and more – and the name ‘Intercultural’ was chosen for its preciseness in all contexts and languages. The JICC focuses on bringing about practical change by enabling all of Jerusalem's residents to improve their everyday lives, receive basic services and learn skills that allow them to cooperate with one another peacefully. Since its establishment, the JICC has established itself as a leader in advancing conflict resolution, inter-group dialogue and community development in Jerusalem, contributing to peace-building actions throughout the city.

2. The JICC recognizes that it does not work in a vacuum. It appreciates the complex issues faced by Jerusalem's diverse residents – from political to legal to socio-economic to physical. It understands the delicate issues that influence leaders' and residents’ decisions. It is also sensitive to the tapestry of organizations and agencies that are invested in improving Jerusalem's future. In advancing its approach, the JICC encourages cooperation, consensus-building and community-building. The JICC seeks to create a city that fosters respect for all its inhabitants, conducting training programmes, providing professional guidance, facilitating community dialogue and working within multi-cultural frameworks, to gain practical results on the ground.

3. The JICC takes pains to stay away from the political arena. We believe that empowering residents to take care of their own needs, protect their own rights, and develop their physical and human infrastructure today is vital for making East Jerusalem viable and sustainable in the future, under any political configuration. In this way we are contributing to the peace process in the Middle East.

4. This approach is also reflected in the JICC board, which spans the religious, cultural and ethnic spectrum, from Palestinians to Ultra-Orthodox Jewish and secular Jews, with a range of political views.
Jerusalem Today

5. There are some 300,000 Arab Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem. According to most recent statistics, all Palestinian neighbourhoods in Jerusalem were classified as having a low socio-economic status. 73% of the Palestinian population (and 85% of the children) live below the poverty line, and 39% are under the age of 14.¹

6. According to the Fourth Geneva Convention, basic services - education, health, infrastructure, religious - must be provided by the Jerusalem Municipality and other service-providing agencies to the Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, yet the reality is not so. Asymmetrical power relations, compounded by immense cultural differences, have left the needs of East Jerusalem residents unfulfilled. If these trends continue, chances are greater that East Jerusalem will become a society with too many uneducated and too many in poor health; a society with poor infrastructures that cause severe public health crises. If these problems are not dealt with now, they will be so deep, the scope so large, that the ensuing emergency conditions will be nearly irreversible. It is also likely to increase the volatility of already exceedingly sensitive circumstances.

JICC Approach and Programmes in East Jerusalem

7. The JICC’s approach to work with Palestinians in East Jerusalem is very practical - it seeks to empower them to obtain rights and services, improving their everyday lives. Focusing on the practical reality, its approach prepares residents with the tools to function in any political climate on a grassroots level, and is therefore highly suited to East Jerusalem. As noted in The Evaluation of Cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli NGOs: An Assessment, “Preparing the community requires working internally to empower the community and support cooperation as a way which can help end the suffering caused by occupation.”² In the same vein, the JICC’s approach concentrates on problems over which there is little debate, which creates a broad, mainstream network of partners, ready to work peacefully toward common goals. Although the gaps are still huge, change is beginning – more streets are lit, more garbage is being collected, more public nuisances are being fixed, more public health issues are being addressed.

8. JICC programmes have created networks of grassroots community leadership that are civic-minded, building a sustainable Palestinian civil society. They do not focus on the political future; they create a human and physical infrastructure that can continue to lead in any future political scenario. In this way, deep-seated, mainstream male and female leadership are being cultivated to help the professional development of Palestinians in Jerusalem.

9. Given the current situation, the JICC recommends programmes such as the following, which exemplify our approach in building human and physical infrastructure, paving the way for a peaceful future for Palestinians in East Jerusalem:

A. MiniActive

10. The MiniActive grassroots empowerment programme for Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem has redefined the community’s advocacy work to receive vital rights and services. MiniActive utilizes small groups of 4-5 people, mostly but not exclusively women, to fix problems, mostly physical infrastructure in nature. Begun in May 2012, MiniActive quickly grew to a network of 1,000 volunteers, from every corner of the city. Thus far, they have solved thousands of problems and improved everyday lives of tens of thousands of residents via continual communication with service hotlines (telephone, electricity, water, municipality, etc.), fixing street lamps and potholes, replacing traffic signs that had been damaged, improving bus stops, ensuring garbage was picked up and garbage were receptacles in place, re-paving bad roads, repairing electricity and telephone problems, and more.

11. The most dramatic change was felt during the storms that hit Jerusalem in January 2013 (see JICC blog http://jer-icc.org/blog/?p=1309) and later, in December 2013. In both cases, MiniActive set up virtual and real ‘situation rooms’ that coordinated the onslaught of reports and problems from the field. Those in the situation rooms were in constant contact with the appropriate service providers to report damages and find solutions to these and other urgent problems. Updates were uploaded to the MiniActive Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/miniactive). Both times, when Mother Nature wreaked havoc in Jerusalem and especially in East Jerusalem, the networks we cultivated (MiniActive and Emergency Response Networks, see below) were the only ones that actually functioned. In the latest storm, MiniActive to the Emergency Response Networks (below), joined together to help residents weather the storm.

12. In just 18 months, MiniActive has become the one of the largest networks of Palestinian volunteers working in East Jerusalem to improve everyday life. As a result, methodology has been developed to successfully work with service providers despite asymmetrical power relations and cultural, social and political gaps. Women throughout East Jerusalem have been empowered with the skills to effect change in their neighbourhoods, building the human infrastructure for a peaceful future in any political configuration. The programme has also developed partnerships with other organizations.

B. Paramedical Professional Training

13. In 2012 the JICC had just led a successful campaign to re-open a public well-baby clinic in Silwan, but was unable to find qualified nurses for staff, uncovering a much deeper and broader need for paramedical professionals qualified to work in East Jerusalem. This situation came about because many Palestinian professionals had studied in the West Bank and Jordan, and were required to pass a proficiency examination in order to legally work in East Jerusalem. Further research found that only 1-2 people passed the proficiency exams each year in any medical or paramedical profession, which further intensified the problem. In a step to remedy the situation, we developed 3 courses to prepare nurses and occupational therapists for the exam. These classes were overwhelming successes in their first year - 26 nurses and 10 occupational therapists passed the qualifying exam. In 2013 we added a course in physical therapy in which 4 passed the first time.
14. This self-sustaining programme will bring about a revolution in health provision in East Jerusalem on two levels and improve Palestinians’ human rights: The first level is that of the individual workers and their social rights, who will now receive full salaries and benefits as required by law. The second, much broader level is the vast improvement in health care, also a fundamental right. This programme is yet another example of developing human infrastructure among Palestinians in East Jerusalem, which will serve the community in the future, regardless of politics.

C. Cultural Competency

15. Cultural Competency is an awareness that others’ worldviews have different sensitivities to our own, and these can drastically affect perceptions and interactions. Culturally competent service providers are able to communicate in a sensitive and respectful manner, regardless of cultural or ethnic background, in a way that facilitates resolution of issues.

16. The JICC initiated cultural competency programmes in the health care system in Israel in 2008, since the fundamental right to healthcare includes one’s right to understand your medical condition and that of your loved one. Using a multi-pronged approach, it provides language training for health care providers; sensitivity training on cultural issues that can hamper proper health care; encourages form-translation into multiple languages; and facilitates cultural adaptations to make the delivery of health care easier.

17. Since the project’s inception, the JICC has led cultural competency efforts on a local and national level. Together with the Israel Ministry of Health it forged national standards for culturally competent care and nationally-recognized training courses. It works with all major hospitals and health funds in Jerusalem, helping develop specific action plans. It developed first-of-its-kind training manuals and curricula, together with Bar Ilan University, specifically adapted to the unique cases in Israel and in Jerusalem. It is creating national networks for cultural competency professionals, which has improved the level of professionalism through peer learning and discussions. For the first time, we are bringing cultural competency to the field of public mental health, which has lagged behind traditional medical fields. After working in the health care system for over 5 years, we believe these concepts can – and should – be applied to other disciplines, in order to make Jerusalem and Israel more accepting of the ‘other’ and more open to understanding the ‘other’s perspective before acting. This is one of our major challenges for the future.

D. Emergency Response Networks

18. Community preparedness is critical in the case of an emergency (such as: a natural disaster, earthquake, fire, flooding, automobile accidents, terrorist attack, war). Having a network of local residents and professionals means that individuals are able to get the help they require quickly and efficiently.

19. The East Jerusalem Emergency Response Networks are operated by a local Palestinian organization, supervised by and in coordination with the JICC, local service providers and other organizations. They enable responses to begin within neighbourhoods with the use of local manpower, significantly cutting down emergency response time. They also facilitate cooperation between...
Israel and Palestinian aid providers. This programme relies on local expertise and facilities – doctors, nurses, paramedics, social workers, engineers, operators of tractors and other heavy machinery, local schools and community institutions – and the use of local resources. The network also minimizes obstacles that can slow Israeli and Palestinian response time. In addition, this system also empowers and galvanizes local residents.

20. The Network began 3 years ago, and soon the Networks will operate in 12 Palestinian neighbourhoods. There has been a very positive response, and many other local Arab organizations have requested to join the project.

21. In the snow storm of December 2013 the programme proved quite successful. The Networks succeeded in recruiting all the local 4x4 vehicles, tractors and other heavy machinery to clear away snow and provide aid to individuals in need. The Networks were covered in a number of media outlets, including: http://972mag.com/photos-denied-services-by-jerusalem-palestinian-residents-form-emergency-response-team/83730/

22. This programme strengthens and empowers Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem, which is critical for a peaceful future to the region. Communities gain confidence in their ability to take care of themselves. The programme fosters community solidarity and cultivates communication within the neighbourhoods. And it improves skills of leaders and community professionals, which will have a ripple effect throughout the city.

E. Palestinian Lay Leader Forums

23. The Palestinian Lay Leaders Forums changed the way Palestinian residents sought to solve critical problems. Begun in 2009, the project seeks to build capacity among active residents and community leaders, in neighbourhoods such as Silwan, Wadi Joz and the Old City. The programme imparts peaceful conflict management skills that enables them to access basic rights and services and work to effect change within and for their own communities. They prioritize needs, decide on plans of action, devise creative solutions to complex issues, and explore a wider range of methodologies that allow them to exercise their rights through due process. The project teaches both residents and service providers culturally competent communication skills. As a result, community leaders are empowered and processes of action in methodological problem solving have improved, and problems have been solved. Successes include: a 2-year campaign to re-open a well-baby clinic in Silwan, which serves 1/3 of the Palestinian population of Jerusalem. This experience later empowered other organizations to open other preventative health services for children such as child development centres. Other examples include the facilitation of the draining of a neglected pool in a highly-sensitive area outside the Old City; working with the Abna al-Quds Community Centre in the Old City to ensure resident participation in the Centre’s activities; increased access in Arabic to service providers.

Conclusion

24. In conclusion, programmes such as these strengthen both human and physical infrastructure in East Jerusalem, strengthening the Palestinian people and strengthening the chance of a future solution
to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If implemented with the appropriate political sensitivity, programmes such as these advance grassroots leadership among Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem. In addition, the contact our programmes bring between Israelis and Palestinians shows each side that it is possible to find partners on both sides for a stable solution in the future.