Executive summary

We are pleased to share with the committee information about a project undertaken by Gisha and funded by the UK Government's Conflict Pool.

Gisha is an Israeli human rights organization, founded in 2005, and is the only organization in Israel which uses legal and public advocacy to promote the right to freedom of movement for residents of the Gaza Strip.

The project "Moving towards Cohesion" promotes access between Gaza and the West Bank in recognition that territorial contiguity and socioeconomic cohesion between the two parts of the Palestinian territory are critical to the establishment and maintenance of a peace agreement.

The partnership between the UK Government and Gisha through the project furthers shared goals to promote conflict resolution, human rights, dignity and well-being.

Submission

1. Gisha, which means "access" or "approach" in Hebrew, is an Israeli human rights organization, founded in 2005.

2. Gisha is the only Israeli NGO with a programmatic focus on Gaza, using both legal and public advocacy efforts to address the right to freedom of movement. In so doing, Gisha promotes the rights guaranteed both by international and by Israeli law.

3. We are pleased to share information with the committee about our project through this submission to enumerate the manner in which the project supports the objectives of the Conflict Pool and the UK Government in general.

4. The provision of legal assistance to individuals serves as the cornerstone of our work. Gisha assists individuals who need to travel to and from the Gaza Strip and also engages in principled legal advocacy, which seeks to promote transparency regarding access policy and encourage the fulfillment of Israel's obligations towards residents of Gaza in the areas over which they maintain control and influence in the Strip. In addition to legal work, Gisha also engages in public advocacy, producing information about access policy through various online platforms, serving as a resource for the Israeli and foreign media, and encouraging those with influence on policy to speak out in favor of freedom of movement based on their values and spheres of influence. We work directly vis-à-vis Israeli and foreign decision-makers but also engage security and policy experts, the business community, academia, think-tanks, and influential commentators.

5. The Conflict Pool funds a small project implemented by Gisha called "Moving towards Cohesion", whose objective is to promote access between Gaza and the West Bank, in the belief that such access is necessary for the fulfillment of human rights – the right to family, the right to obtain the best possible standard of living, etc. The project also furthers the goals promoted by the Conflict Pool, namely reducing the impact of conflict and also seeking to promote solutions to conflict.
6. The common assumption is that the viability of the future Palestinian state depends on the integrity of Gaza and the West Bank as a single territorial unit, as neither area can thrive independently of the other and because of extensive ties which connect the two areas socially and economically.

7. “Moving towards Cohesion” produces evidence, via statistical data and qualitative analysis, revealing the extent and importance of ties between Gaza and the West Bank, thus providing a basis for credible advocacy for maintaining territorial unity between Gaza and the West Bank. For example, a poll commissioned by Gisha in the context of the project revealed that one in four Gaza residents has family members in the West Bank, suggesting the need for access between the two parts of the Palestinian territory. In the coming phase of the project, we will map out the economic ties between the two parts of the territory - past, present and future - to show what the economy used to look like before movement restrictions intensified and also to show the potential that exists should access be allowed. We hope that this and other information produced by the project proves useful to all those seeking grounding for arguments in favor of territorial contiguity, including the UK Government.

8. While Gisha, as a human rights organization without a political mandate, does not seek to promote any particular solution to the conflict, we recognize that the territorial contiguity of Gaza and the West Bank is necessary to fulfill the vision of the two-state solution as it is currently conceived. Access, which Gisha directly promotes, furthers this vision and also enables the fulfillment of rights, which is our primary goal.

9. As a local, not-for-profit organization based in Israel, our mandate is to prevent and help correct violations of rights which result from restrictions on access vis-à-vis our own government, the Government of Israel.

10. We believe that the decision to fund our project, and those like it being advanced by partners in the Israeli human rights community, derives from a sound analysis which takes into account, inter alia, the following: 1) the need for solutions to conflict to come from within the societies affected by conflict 2) the fact that the protection of human rights enables a stabilizing environment in which solutions to conflict are more likely to arise and take hold in the long-term 3) the provision of aid, while of great importance, may reduce the impact of conflict, but in the long-term it does not bring about solutions to conflict and must be accompanied by strategies which seek to lessen tensions and promote economic development and thus stability.

Recommendations to the committee

- We believe that the funding of projects like “Moving towards Cohesion” should continue and serves as an integral facet of the Conflict Pool’s ability to have positive influence in the region and beyond.

- We wish to extend an open invitation to the committee members to visit our offices in Tel Aviv during their trip to the region and/or to contact us with any questions, concerns and comments that may arise about this submission or about our work in general. Please contact info@gisha.org.