SECTION 1: Executive Summary

- The British Government is committed to resolving the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The majority of its budget is spent through the Department for International Development (DFID) on development projects in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) while its interdepartmental Conflict Pool is tasked to fund conflict prevention, stabilization and peacekeeping activities. Majority of its funded projects focus on advocacy as opposed to bringing Israelis and Palestinians together.

- Given the dire needs of Palestinians living in the OPTs and the understanding that building-up Palestinian infrastructure and promoting economic growth is the only way to ensure that the future Palestinian state will be an effective partner for peace, MEET does not take issue with the UK’s aforementioned budget breakdown. We do, however, support the senior Parliamentary Committee’s inquiry into whether the Conflict Pool is administered effectively; and we agree with the notion that it ought to shift its focus from advocacy projects to programs that bring together Israelis and Palestinians in meaningful and sustainable ways.

- Advocacy, though important in persuading governments to adopt more humane policies, is not enough to ensure a lasting peace in the region. Rather than promote further polarization along ethnic and political lines, we ought to focus our efforts towards developing a new generation of Israeli and Palestinian leaders who share a common vision, set of values, and first-hand experience of collaboration with the “other.” We believe that a peaceful and economically successful future for Palestinians and Israelis will depend on our ability to generate a motivated cadre of bi-national leaders prepared, committed and able to work collectively to address the pressing issues of the individual and collective societies.

- MEET (Middle East Education through Technology) provides a three-year technology education program that brings together Israeli and Palestinian young leaders through the common language of computer science and entrepreneurship. We are strategically and effectively building a generation of future Israeli and Palestinian leaders who are empowered, equipped and positioned to work together on joint regional challenges with a clear desire to promote peace through positive economic, political and social change.
SECTION 2: Introduction

1. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is arguably one of the most complex and contentious international disputes of our time. The British Government is committed to bringing about a negotiated two-state solution resulting in a secure and universally recognized Israeli living alongside a sovereign and viable Palestinian state. The UK spends approximately 90 million GBP per year in Israel and the OPTs, with the vast majority understandably going to the latter. In addition to promoting economic growth in the Palestinian Territory, the UK funds several advocacy-based organizations through its Interdepartmental Conflict Pool.

2. Given the dire needs of Palestinians living in the OPTs and the understanding that building-up Palestinian infrastructure and promoting economic growth is the only way to ensure that the future Palestinian state will be an effective partner for peace, MEET does not take issue with the UK’s budget breakdown in which majority of its funds are aimed at development in the OPTs. We do, however, support the senior Parliamentary Committee’s inquiry into whether the Conflict Pool is administered effectively; and we agree with the notion that it ought to shift its focus from advocacy projects to programs that bring together Israelis and Palestinians in meaningful and sustainable ways.

3. While advocacy is an important and effective tool in bringing about social change, it ignores the increasing need – and high-impact opportunity – to build bridges between Israelis and Palestinians. Rather than continuing to pour limited resources into advocacy organizations, it is preferable that the Conflict Pool funds include support for groups that promote sustainable cross-border partnerships between Israelis and Palestinians to instigate real impact. On the ground, Israelis and Palestinians have little to no contact with one another, and their perceptions are primarily fueled by horrific events of the past and the media’s harsh polarization. The current isolation and dehumanization has caused both sides to become apathetic to the other’s needs and fears. With growing disillusionment on both sides, specifically amongst youth, cultivating cross-border relationships is now harder and more pressing than ever. A peaceful and economically successful future for Palestinians and Israelis will depend on our ability to generate a motivated cadre of leaders prepared, committed and able to work collectively to address the complex issues of their individual and collective societies.

4. The lack of bi-national networks of Palestinians and Israelis who share the motivation and capacity to work together towards solving mutual problems is a major challenge on the way to achieving a nonviolent resolution of the conflict. In the current reality, the absence of shared networks and sustained opportunities to interact severely limits the abilities of these Palestinian and Israeli youth (the future leaders of our region) to build the trust and cultivate the relationships needed to work effectively on joint goals and to solve common challenges. A
peaceful resolution of the conflict will rely on our ability to build lasting bridges between young Palestinians and Israelis, utilizing our common resources to create partnerships built on positive, pragmatic change in the region.

5. At MEET, we believe that the main way to strengthen isolated Israeli and Palestinian communities is to work together on shared interests by securing high-skilled, academic, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for Israeli and Palestinian youth. MEET is an innovative program aimed at educating and empowering tomorrow’s most promising Israeli and Palestinian leaders. Working together with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) since 2004, MEET’s goal is to develop an active professional network among its excellencing students, while empowering them to individually and collectively create positive economic, political and social change within their communities and, eventually, the Middle East. In 2014, over 400 youth will be working together towards this goal.

SECTION 3: Factual Information

About MEET

6. MEET is a three-year educational program that brings together Israeli and Palestinian young leaders through the common languages of computer science and entrepreneurship. Referenced by US President Obama as an example of how innovation is reshaping the Middle East, MEET is managed and run by a devoted professional team – Israeli and Palestinian Co-CEOs and a bi-national staff – as well as a large group of international volunteers from MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and the Middle East. Oversight is provided by an executive board of Palestinians and Israelis. MEET has also established long-term relationships with key institutional partners, such as MIT, the Hebrew University, HP, Google and others. In this way, MEET models the cross-border network that we believe is critical to a pathway to peace, and all too rare in the current environment. We employ a “learn-by-doing” approach that challenges students to move beyond theory and to engage in hands-on activities. Students are taught to think big while working together on real-world projects with leading companies. The program comprises two stages: 1) the Student Program which runs in parallel to high school over the course of three years; and 2) the Alumni Program, which ensures the achievement of MEET’s long-term mission. The entire program incorporates a values-based ‘Deeper Understanding’ curriculum focused on dialogue and conflict resolution.

Student Recruitment

7. The selection of participants is comprised of a six-month recruitment process that engages Palestinian and Israeli high school students and identifies the top candidates to participate in the three-year program, ensuring equal representation of Israelis and Palestinians; males and females. Students are recruited from over 40 high schools from East and West Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Mevesseret, Beit Shemesh, Nazareth and more, engaging the OPT populations central to the Conflict Pool. Applicants undergo a rigorous selection process, including a written exam, a group dynamics session and a personal interview. As an excellence
model, admittance is highly competitive (in 2013, 999 students applied while MEET only accepted 70 participants). All students receive a full scholarship, regardless of socio-economic background. This means youth populations who would otherwise never meet, let alone collaborate, have equal access to world-class education and empowerment towards a common goal of a peaceful future based on positive economic, political and social change.

Student Program

8. The three-year Student Program begins with an intensive summer course taught by volunteer instructors from MIT at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Participants learn the basics of teamwork, business, technology and leadership. Students meet during the school year, after school for 3.5 hours each week at our tech hubs in Jerusalem and Nazareth to learn advanced technology skills and work on joint projects. Based on methodical research and practical evidence, as well as 10 years of experience in the field, MEET employs a strength-based conception of youth development, recognizing their potential to impact society and alter social frameworks. Our academic model was designed by experts in the fields of education, business, technology, entrepreneurship, conflict resolution and dialogue.

9. The academic level at MEET is highly challenging. Students engage in over 800 academic hours, providing them with high-level computer science, entrepreneurship and leadership skills. Dealing with high standards and demands helps students to develop critical thinking, problem solving and work ethic, which translate into thinking creatively about changing the Palestinian-Israeli status quo. Exposure to the computer programming work has encouraged students to enroll in computer studies in school, affording them increased opportunities for personal academic enrichment and professional advancement – of particular benefit to students in the OPTs who often do not have access to this quality of computer science. Students have remarked that the program made them ‘learn how to learn’, both individually and by seeking the assistance of others.

10. Teamwork is one of the primary tools in the program’s work model and its main objective is to encourage collaboration between students from different groups. The integration between Israelis and Palestinians poses a challenge for most students, as it requires them to contend with contradicting opinions and even carry out decisions taken by the group that run contrary to their own preferences. The most successful teams are usually those that have talked through the difficulties and have undergone a mutual process from beginning to end. Evaluations demonstrate that the degree of cooperation substantially increases with familiarity and experience. Dealing with these challenges is a significant educational and personal process for students. Throughout the course, participants learn how to contend with opinions and positions that are different, at times even contradictory, to their own, to conduct themselves as a group that affords equal importance to a variety of opinions, and to move forward by persuading others to adopt a fresh viewpoint. Evaluations demonstrate that the longer students have been participating in the program, the more at ease they are working with members of other teams.
Deeper Understanding Curriculum

11. In addition to the academic and professional components of the program, MEET has developed a ‘Deeper Understanding’ (DU) curriculum that focuses on promoting dialogue and conflict resolution. It is a values-based education that teaches youth how to communicate and deal with different subjects, such as respect, identity and “the other.” The main purpose of these sessions is to provide students with a framework where they can express themselves openly, and to discuss the difficulties Israelis and Palestinians experience as a means of learning and attaining tools to deal with conflict situations in real life. It allows subjects and stress points that are naturally kept under the surface to become exposed in order to equip the youth with tools to express themselves in relation to a complex situation, and expand their critical thinking abilities as a result of encountering new perspectives. The direct effect of the DU sessions is that they strengthen social connections between students, which allows them to expand the range of topics they are able to discuss to include deeper and more sensitive subjects of a social and political nature. DU encourages students to behave in a responsible and mature manner, decreases disciplinary issues, and fosters a more productive environment.

12. Evaluations reveal that the DU sessions have a positive influence on the relationship and social atmosphere within the group. Students recognize that it is possible to speak, argue and disagree while still maintaining mutual respect and civilized discourse. One of the most important skills acquired through these sessions is the ability to properly convey a message so that it is clear and authentic, and expressed in a respectful and non-insulting manner. These skills are designed to help with interpersonal and inter-group conflicts, and to cultivate habits that translate into personal and professional norms in their MEET teams, alumni ventures, higher education, and eventually positions of leadership.

Alumni Program

13. The Alumni Program is designed to achieve our long-term mission, allowing us to continue impacting our participants throughout their lives and in their academic and professional pursuits. We have a growing network of over 200 alumni, 75% of whom are living in the region and actively engaged in various MEET Alumni activities. The program is comprised of three pillars: network building, professional development and a bi-national Venture Lab. Network Building takes place through quarterly conferences and online platforms; Professional Development occurs via monthly workshops, courses and a six-month mentorship program; and the Venture Lab (launched in partnership with Google), is a space designed to incubate technology, business and social projects (commissioned and self-initiated) led by the growing number of MEET alumni. The Venture Lab is an important endeavor that allows us to affect meaningful change in the region. MEET alumni have already built six projects in the Venture Lab and are currently developing five projects in bi-national teams. In addition to enrolling in various
alumni activities through MEET, we track our alumni as they embark on their individual academic and career paths, an investment we deem critical to understanding the long-term effectiveness of MEET’s efforts.

**Effectiveness of a Long-Term Program**

15. Meeting over this extended period of time (three-year program and ongoing Alumni Program) is extremely significant in shaping the minds and attitudes of participants. Evaluations clearly demonstrate that the longer the students have been in the program, the more frequent and significant social interactions become. At a certain point in the program, trust is born through mutual familiarity and interaction between the youth, creating a shift in the perceptions and opinions for the other group. Most students arrive at the program never having met someone from the other nationality. Many described their surprise at having discovered the many similarities between themselves.

16. One of the most significant accomplishments of the program is the participants reaching a mutual understanding that they are not essentially different from their counterparts on the other side, and that they have the ability to communicate with one another and connect on a personal level. MEET succeeds in overcoming the primary obstacle of perceiving others as essentially different from oneself (dehumanizing the other). During the course of the program, youth from both sides come to the realization that they deal with similar problems, are troubled by similar issues, and enjoy similar activities. This realization is a significant milestone for a more comprehensive social change. Understanding points of similarity creates fertile ground for the emergence of personal ties and deeper acquaintance.

17. Both internal and external evaluations of our programs have indicated that MEET causes students to: understand each other’s narratives; care about the future of their respective and shared societies; commit to giving back to their communities; believe that joint Israeli and Palestinian efforts will lead to a better and more peaceful region for all; have higher self-esteem and self-confidence; and are driven to become successful in business. This coming together of communities is an important step toward building a lasting peace in the region.

**Budget**

The following budget calculations are based on MEET’s 2014 proposed budget, and exchange rate of 1 USD = 0.61 GBP. MEET’s proposed 2014 annual budget is $1,613,664 (£979,581); Summer Program is $597,601 (£362,776); Yearlong Program is $359,287 (£218,106); Alumni Program is $143,666 (£87,213).
SECTION 4: Recommendations

18. Historic changes are sweeping the Middle East, while the region’s youth are learning to harness the power of technology as a tool to mobilize positive social and economic change. MEET’s goal is to empower young Palestinian and Israeli leaders to leverage their bi-national and global networks, and to use education as a means of promoting positive change in local Palestinian and Israeli communities. We are strategically and effectively building a generation of future Israeli and Palestinian leaders who are empowered, equipped and positioned to work together on joint regional challenges with a clear desire to promote peaceful and positive change. Advocacy, although important in persuading governments to adopt more human policies, is not enough to ensure lasting peace in the region. The lives of Israelis and Palestinians are inherently intertwined. We believe that youth on both sides must become professionally and personally connected through working on joint projects and acquiring a mutual set of skills and values.

19. The MEET model has proven its strength and resilience in the face of some of the most challenging political and economic times. Having invested strongly in relationship-building with students, parents, schools, and multi-national corporations, MEET has developed a strong branch name associated with integrity, clarity of mission, and excellence in delivering a high-quality educational program. Currently, we are the only long-term, local, skills-based educational program that brings together Israeli and Palestinian youth for the explicit purpose of jointly finding transformative solutions to social, economic and political problems facing both sides.

20. We believe that MEET is a strong and viable partner for the British Government in its pursuit of a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. We have previously met with representatives of the British Embassy in Tel Aviv and were encouraged to submit a proposal for funding in March 2013. Unfortunately, our request was denied due to the fact that the British Embassy was considering a different approach to working with NGOs in Israel and the OPTs. We hope that, based on evidence such as that provided in this document, the British government will reconsider funding projects such as ours that bring together Israelis and Palestinians to create positive change.