Written Evidence Submitted by Heartbeat

Executive Summary

Heartbeat, an international NGO based in Jerusalem, unites Israeli and Palestinian youth to build trust and transform conflict through music and popular media.

Working to overcome the segregation that fuels the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, Heartbeat develops ensembles of young Arab and Jewish musicians (ages 14-23 years old) who come together weekly for sustained music based dialogue programs in cities throughout the region. Heartbeat youth musicians bring their recordings, music videos, and performances to their communities in an attempt to build trust, share understanding, inspire hope, and engage more people in taking responsibility for the future.

Less than 1% of the Israeli and Palestinian populations has had a meaningful positive interaction with someone from the other side. While extremism and violence dictate public opinion, the vast silent majority of peace seeking citizens on both sides is largely unheard and so remains unaware of partners for peace on the other side. Without contact, distrust persists and so the cycles of discrimination, violence, poverty, and political instability continue throughout the region.

The United Kingdom’s extremely valuable contributions to the Middle East in the areas of education, health, poverty alleviation, care for refugees and security hold limited impact without addressing the root cause of these issues: the ongoing distrust between Israelis and Palestinians.

People-to-people diplomacy, particularly amongst youth, is the proven and necessary tool to build trust between Palestinians and Israelis and therefore to establish the foundation for a lasting peace for Israelis, Palestinians, and all of their neighbours.

Over 100 organisations, including Heartbeat, work tirelessly to empower Israeli and Palestinian citizens to build peace from the ground up. Heartbeat encourages the Parliament, the DFID, and the British Interdepartmental Conflict Pool to make people to people diplomacy a central tenant in its Middle East policy by increasing its investment in the work of these organisations, particularly those who offer participants a sustained, long-term, encounter experience with a common goal.

Heartbeat invites the UK to become a principle investor in the International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace (modeled after the International Fund for Northern Ireland), which seeks to establish a $200 million (USD) annual fund to support joint Israeli-Palestinian initiatives.

Organizational Overview

Heartbeat, an international NGO based in Jerusalem, unites Israeli and Palestinian youth to harness the tools of music and popular media to build trust and transform conflict. Working to overcome the segregation that fuels the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Heartbeat creates spaces for young Palestinian and Israeli musicians to work together, develop creative non-violent tools to build trust, understanding and respect, and provides youth with opportunities to amplify their voices and positively influence their communities.
Heartbeat’s core program focuses on the establishment and facilitation of ensembles of young Arab and Jewish musicians (ages 14-23 years old) who come together weekly for sustained music based dialogue programs in Jerusalem, Haifa, and Jaffa. During these weekly sessions, Heartbeat youth explore each other’s cultures and narratives in safe, politically neutral settings that support creativity and communication. Developing skills in improvisation, song-writing, performance technique, music theory, communication, and leadership while engaging in dialogue about their daily lives and the conflict, participants raise their critical consciousness, and harness their agency to transform the conflict between their communities. When ready, Heartbeat youth musicians bring their recordings, music videos, and performances to their communities in an attempt to build trust, share understanding, inspire hope, and engage more people in taking responsibility for the future.

Reason for Submitting Evidence

Heartbeat recognises the transformative power that the United Kingdom holds, should it choose to fully invest in addressing the root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict once and for all. Undoubtedly, the UK’s remarkable and at times vital contributions in the areas of education, health, poverty alleviation, care for refugees and security play an important role in promoting a sustainable future for the region. Sadly, each of these areas remains in a perilous state due to the ongoing instability caused by decades of sectarian conflict. To address each of these issues in the most pragmatic and effective manner, one must begin by addressing the root causes underlying the issues: the ongoing distrust between Israelis and Palestinians.

Heartbeat submits this testimony to call attention to the severely under-utilized potential of people-to-people diplomacy, particularly amongst youth, as the proven tool to build trust between Palestinians and Israelis and to establish the foundation for a lasting peace for Israelis, Palestinians, and all of their neighbours.

To end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a critical mass of Israelis and Palestinians must come to trust one another. The only thing separating today’s reality from this goal is funding.

Heartbeat encourages the UK to become a principle investor in the International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, which seeks to establish a $200 million (USD) annual fund to support joint Israeli-Palestinian initiatives.

The Challenge: Separation Fuels the Status Quo

In Israel and Palestine, physical and psychological barriers fuel hatred, violence, discrimination, and distrust. Extremism and violence dominate headlines, dictate public opinion and control how community members interact with one another. While those who use violence wield untold power, the vast silent majority of peace seeking citizens on both sides is largely unheard and so remains unaware of partners for peace on the other side. Without contact, each side fears and distrusts the other. In the past 20 years, less than 1% of the Israeli and Palestinian populations has had a meaningful positive interaction with someone from the other side. Separate schools, neighbourhoods, buses, and in some cases even streets further isolate each community from the other, which in turn paves the way for
stereotyping, fear, and mutual hatred. As such, the cycles of discrimination, violence, poverty, and political instability continue.

The only way to transform this pattern of negative interaction is for the two sides to develop trust and respect for one another. To end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a critical mass of Israelis and Palestinians must come to trust one another. Only then will political leaders have the political will and constituent support to negotiate and enforce a lasting peace agreement.

Continued strife between Israelis and Palestinians offers an easy distraction and rallying cry for political leaders and armed groups across the Middle East. A just and lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would eliminate a major point of contention across the Middle East.

**Theoretical Foundations for Heartbeat’s Work**

The theoretical framework upon which Heartbeat bases its work weaves together concepts and lessons from a wide array of disciplines: music education, psychology, community and youth empowerment, and conflict transformation. Scholarly research on what we today refer to as people-to-people or track two diplomacy emerged in the 1960’s through the pioneering work of John Burton in Malaysia and Cyprus, and then Herbert Kelman, who brought together groups of Israeli and Palestinian community leaders and academics for secret dialogues at Harvard University.

One of Kelman’s colleagues was G.W. Allport, whose “Contact Hypothesis” asserted a theoretical basis for utilizing interpersonal encounters to solve intergroup conflict, citing examples from the white and black communities in the United States, but with an eye to inter-group relations around the world. Dr. Ned Lazarus explains, “The Contact Hypothesis theorized widespread inter-racial hostility as a product of social segregation, which prevented blacks and whites from knowing each other as individuals, allowing mutual misconceptions and de-humanizing stereotypes to flourish.” (Lazarus, 2011) In the 50 years since the initial development of these theories, numerous interventions have attempted to meaningfully utilise these theories amongst Israeli and Palestinian participants and their communities.

Dr. Gabriel Salomon’s pioneering analysis of the effectiveness of dialogue interventions between Israelis and Palestinians offers perhaps the most striking evidence for the power and limitations of such encounters. Dr. Saloman’s study finds that “Measures taken right after the completion of the encounter showed that friendships developed during the encounter did indeed generalize in both groups to the way the other side's members were perceived and to willingness for contact with them.” (Salomon 2009)

While contact and interaction has been proven to show an immediate impact, improving participants’ attitudes and behaviours towards the other side, Salomon’s study also shows that the impacts of such an encounter wear off over time unless the interaction is sustained.
Furthermore, such encounters are much more effective when they provide a shared activity and more specifically, a shared purpose — such as preparing for a public concert. Salomon and Biton further explain, “The implication is that different sides in a conflict need to participate in programs that are specifically tailored to their needs, culture, political status and social background. The challenge is to find ways to implement such a differential approach, given the desire to also have the participants meet each other and engage in common activities...The challenge then is to design activities – jointly playing music, staging plays, scouting – that not only demand cooperation and interdependence but that set goals which in the eyes of the participants are of utmost importance.” (Biton & Salomon, 2006)

Given these findings, it becomes clear that successful interventions must be sustained over long periods of time and must offer shared activities in which each participant, given his/her unique motivation for joining the project, can find a meaningful reason to stay engaged. As such, Heartbeat’s programs are specifically designed to continue over many years and offer an open creative space for youth artists on both sides to express themselves freely and promote any message they wish to share, so long as it does not call for violence or espouse hatred.

**The Power of Dialogue**

Through dialogue, eminent scholars agree, the social hierarchies and distances between members of a group can be erased and together, through this dialogue, group members can raise consciousness and become empowered to transform their lives. Drs. Everett Rogers and Arvind Singhal outline four main lessons by which individual and communal empowerment can take place:

- The empowerment process fundamentally consists of dialogic communication. Individuals gain a belief in their power to achieve desired goals through talking with others, particularly peers.
- The process of empowering individuals occurs especially in small groups. These groups often must be organized by a trainer of change agent, who then withdraws from the scene, with the groups, hopefully, continuing.
- The small groups that serve as informal schools for empowerment may be organized for a specific purpose, such as combating a particular social problem, but then the members of these groups gain a sense of empowerment and often attack other problems that are perceived as important to them.
- The mass media can play a role in empowerment, for example, by providing role models for empowerment to an audience, but the effects are greater (as) when the media message follow an entertainment-education strategy and (b) when audience members are organized in listening or viewing groups.

(Rogers and Singhal, 2003)

**The Power of Music**

Research from a variety of disciplines has begun to decipher the near mystical properties that make music and the arts so powerful. John Paul Lederach, the pioneering scholar in the field of conflict transformation, witnesses the uncanny power of music, professing, “The artistic five minutes...when it is given the space
and acknowledged as something far beyond entertainment, accomplishes what most politics has been unable to attain: It helps us return to our humanity, a transcendent journey that, like the moral imagination, can build a sense of that we are, after all, a human community.” (Lederach, 2005)

Dr. Craig Zelizer supports this understanding, stating that, “Arts-based peacebuilding processes can play an important role in helping to foster interaction in divided societies and help facilitate reconciliation.” (Zelizer, 2003) In Norway, Kjell Skyllstad studied intercultural music programs amongst middle school youth. Comparing students’ attitudes over a three year period “showed that intercultural music making breaks down prejudice in children, leading to reduced ethnic conflicts in school (mobbing and harassment) while strengthening individual identity and self-esteem among minority children.” (Skyllstad, 2000). According to Skyllstad, even audience members, who had not otherwise participated in the shared music making activities, can improve social relations between ethnic groups. (Skyllstad, 2000)

Heartbeat’s Impact
Assessments of Heartbeat’s programs reflect Heartbeat’s tremendous success in building trust and improving attitudes towards “the other.” In doing so, Heartbeat equips its youth participants with skills for self expression, communication, and deeper understanding of themselves, their environment, and “the other,” while serving to enhance participants’ commitment to civic engagement. As members of Heartbeat, youth musicians enhance their musical and creative abilities and become deeply committed to working together to promote cooperation, justice, and respect in their communities. Each year Heartbeat serves more than 30 youth musicians (ages 14-23). Since Heartbeat’s founding in 2007, over 100 youth have participated in Heartbeat’s programs. In time, thousands will participate. Over 60% of Heartbeat’s original ensemble members are still involved five years later, and some have even become staff members. Over 80% of participants stay involved for more than one year.

Furthermore, Heartbeat aims to enable its youth participants to positively transform attitudes and behaviors, inspire hope, and promote civic engagement across their communities. Since 2011 Heartbeat musicians have performed and led workshops for over 10,000 people. Heartbeat music videos have been viewed by more than 50,000 people and media coverage has shared the music and messages of Heartbeat’s youth musicians with millions across the world.

The Opportunity
Dr. Everett Rogers’ landmark analysis of the Diffusion of Innovation, most famously used in marketing and sales strategies throughout the world, argues that when 25% of a population adopts an idea, the idea becomes unstoppable. Less than 1% of the Israeli and Palestinian population has come together for a meaningful and sustained dialogue. To build trust across a critical mass and lay the foundation for a just, lasting peace, the world community must invest to build
and sustain trust across 25% of the Israeli and Palestinian population. Quite simply, we get what we pay for.

Over 100 groups work tirelessly to build trust between Israelis and Palestinians youth. However, with few available resources, their impact has been severely limited. Heartbeat is the only organisation that utilises popular music as the principal means to bring together Israelis and Palestinians. Heartbeat is also the only organisation that emphasises song-writing, and the sharing of its participants’ personal understanding and narratives. Music offers tremendously powerful tools to engage young people in dialogue, provides them with a shared purpose, and holds a natural means to share their trust-building experience with a much wider audience. Unlike most forms of dialogue, a good song can spread far beyond the studio where it was created, potentially influencing millions through concerts, videos and recordings. Heartbeat seeks to utilise music’s power by creating opportunities and spaces for young Israeli and Palestinian musicians to develop and amplify their voices, become the voices of the silent majority, and work together to build trust and create a better future.

With full awareness of the powerful influence the UK and other world leaders can have, we ask you to make building trust and mutual respect between Israelis and Palestinians a central tenant of your Middle East Policy. Only by addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at its root cause will we see a sustainable, peaceful Middle East.

To hear Heartbeat’s music, see our music videos, and to learn more about our work, we invite you to visit: www.heartbeat.fm

Sources:


Moses, Daniel and Shneyer, Aaron. “Gaza needs a peace stimulus: History shows the power of people-to-people contact.” Christian Science Monitor, January 14, 2009