Written evidence submitted by the Alliance for Middle East Peace

Executive Summary:

The Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP), a United States charitable organization, comprised of grassroots peacebuilding nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, urges this Committee to:

- Adjust and equalize the 96%/4% split between Department of International Development and interdepartmental Conflict Pool funds, to permit dramatically enhanced funding for people-to-people projects in Israel and the Palestinian Territories; and
- Dedicate the entirety of Conflict Pool funds to NGO projects promoting reconciliation and cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians, Arabs and Jews.

ALLMEP also urges:

- Site visits by visiting high level UK officials to NGO people-to-people programs in Israel and the Palestinian Territories

and stands ready to assist the Committee to these ends.
Written Evidence Submitted by the Alliance for Middle East Peace

To the International Development Committee:

1) Thank you for the opportunity to present evidence regarding Britain’s spending in Israel and the Palestinian territories. This is an important inquiry at a pivotal moment in the quest for a final status agreement, hopefully resolving decades of conflict in the region. The Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP) lauds the Committee for its effort; seeks to encourage the Committee to recommend dramatically enhanced funding for people-to-people (P2P) projects in the region that demonstrably lay the groundwork for any sustainable peace; and encourages visits of high-level officials to those projects at the earliest possible time.

2) It is our understanding that the goal of the British government is a “prosperous Middle East with a sovereign and viable Palestinian State living in peace alongside a secure Israel…” and that “resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a UK priority.” To this end, the UK expends approximately £90 million annually (approximately US $54.6 million) in Israel and the Palestinian territories, with the vast majority (£86 million) dedicated to Palestine economic development through the Department for International Development (DfID). None of these funds support people-to-people activities, and only £4 million (US $6 million) goes to both Israel and the Palestinian territories through the interdepartmental Conflict Pool. Although the majority of the Conflict Pool funds go to Israeli and Palestinian NGOs, only one of the thirteen projects currently being funded (ALLMEP member Peres Center/Palestinian Red Crescent) brings Israelis and Palestinians together in cooperative activities.1 It is this disparity that ALLMEP seeks to address.2

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1 Data provided by Foreign Minister for the Middle East, 25th November 2013.
2 Given our lack of expertise, ALLMEP offers no evidence regarding the administration of the Conflict Pool overall. Our testimony will imply that there are additional and different NGOs – those directly engaged in P2P work by contrast to protest and campaigns – that would benefit from these funds. Similarly, we cannot comment on the experience of NGOs endeavoring to access British government funds: our expertise there lies with the US government.
3) ALLMEP recommends:

- That the 96%/4% split between DfID and Conflict Pool funds be adjusted and
  equalized. Monies expended on people-to-people conflict resolution activities will
  pay dividends in peacebuilding; and
- That the entirety of the Conflict Pool be dedicated to NGO people-to-people projects.

The Alliance for Middle East Peace

4) The Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP), a United States charitable
organization, is a grassroots consortium of some 80 NGOs conducting people-to-people
(P2P) coexistence, reconciliation, and cooperative activities among Israelis and Palestinians,
Arabs and Jews in the region. Serving thousands of Israelis and Palestinians, these
organizations daily lay the foundation for any sustainable peace in the region, striving
through their programs both to solve intractable problems and to produce the behavioral
shifts essential to attitudinal change. Their work is critical, yet dramatically under-resourced.
ALLMEP's mission is to foster its members' efforts and efficacy by working, primarily in the
United States, to increase funding and support for these projects from the public and private
sectors and to raise the successful profile of peacebuilding activities both as an essential
ingredient of the peace process and as a counterpoint to violence and conflict. Today, this
robust, growing coalition is connecting true peacebuilders to the policymakers, to the public,
and to the press.

5) Through an annual US Congressional appropriation – ALLMEP's signature
accomplishment to date – more than $60 million in United States Agency for
International Development (USAID) funding expressly for people-to-people
peacebuilding programs has flowed to the region. Not only is ALLMEP the only advocate
for this crucial US funding, but we have become the acknowledged “go-to” resource for both
USAID and our members regarding this critical “track II diplomacy.”
ALLMEP is currently seeking to initiate an even more potent mechanism for dramatically enhanced funding for people-to-people activities: an **International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace**. Building on the enormous success of the annual US Congressional appropriation, ALLMEP has, for some time, been in negotiation with the Israeli government and Palestinian Authority, the US Administration and Congress, the United Nations, the European Union, and numerous Arab governments as well as potential private donors for the creation of the International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace. The proposed International Fund would be modeled on the hugely-successful International Fund for Ireland, founded in 1986, which provided billions of dollars to people-to-people peacebuilding efforts in Northern Ireland. With the resumption of peace talks last summer, the proposed Fund has garnered significant traction: we expect introduction of a bipartisan authorizing bill in the US Congress within weeks. The Fund is integral to and intertwined with the success of “track I” diplomatic efforts, permitting a dramatic scaling up of successful P2P programs/efforts. US $200 million is the Year I target, with $50 million to come from the US. To the extent that the Commons Select Committee is investigating whether the modest influx of British Conflict Pool Funds (only minimally committed to P2P work) is sufficient, ALLMEP respectfully submits that the Committee consider Britain’s active participation in this proposed International Fund.

**The significance of people-to-people (P2P) projects**

Since 2004, with ALLMEP’s energetic advocacy, the US Congress has provided funding through its foreign assistance program for worldwide “people-to-people reconciliation programs which bring together individuals of different ethnic, religious and political backgrounds from areas of strife and war… [including] such programs in the Middle East.” To date, these USAID Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM) funds have provided direct support through competitive grants for innovative people-to-people conflict mitigation and reconciliation programs in at least 36 countries, including those in the Middle
East. So successful have these grants been that, since FY 2008, a dedicated component of the global fund has been reserved for programs in Israel and the Palestinian territories, thus ensuring key funding for Middle East projects vital to stabilizing the region, while preserving funding for other conflict areas. Since FY 2010, Congress has provided US $10 million annually (£6 million) to this end. USAID manages the Middle East reconciliation grant program through its Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM). NGOs apply directly to USAID for grants and USAID distributes the funds through a competitive process. These grants “provide opportunities for adversaries to come together to address issues, reconcile differences, and gain understanding and mutual trust by working toward common goals.”

3) ALLMEP member organizations⁴, competitors for and recipients of the USAID CMM grants⁵, are on the front lines of the Middle East conflict. These organizations turn the challenges of daily life into opportunities for cooperation and, in so doing, lay the groundwork for any sustainable peace. Every day, they tackle the spectrum of challenges and opportunities inherent in the region, engaging thousands of people on the ground in cooperative projects, breaking down barriers and stereotypes, and changing attitudes, while at the same time building trust and laying a foundation for lasting peace. These programs provide respect and dignity, hope and understanding, cooperation and reconciliation – elements often missing in conflict situations, but without which, resolution is impossible. In the ebb and flow of diplomacy, the ups and downs of the peace process, these NGOs are a constant: they are on the ground modeling what Israeli and Palestinian politicians in the area have failed to achieve – tangible, concrete examples of what peace can look like.

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⁴ A complete list of members can be found at www.allmep.org.

⁵ ALLMEP’s expertise lies in the USAID CMM grant program. However, by extension, the analyses in this presentation of evidence are equally applicable to all people-to-people peacebuilding programs, those that could and should be supported by the British Conflict Pool.
9) As examples: These groups help Jewish settlers and their Palestinian neighbors open constructive interfaith dialogue; they engage Israelis and Palestinians who have lost loved ones in the conflict to talk about non-violence; they create soccer and basketball leagues engaging tens of thousands of kids, who learn teamwork and cooperation with new friends from the “other side”; they pair Israeli and Palestinian villages to share environmental resources, since water knows no borders; they bring together Israelis and Palestinians to cooperate in medicine, business, and education; they expose Israelis and Arabs to positive and human images of one another through TV shows and films; and they mobilize hundreds of thousands to call on their leaders to work toward a two-state solution.

10) These actions confirm that peace is no mirage, but an achievable reality. When the peace process reaches closure – and it must – it will be these programs that have laid the groundwork and planted the seeds necessary to support a successful outcome.

Evidence of Success

11) In fact: these programs work. Rigorous analyses and evaluation by USAID conclusively demonstrate greater trust; enhanced cooperation; increased “conflict resolution values”; decreased aggression and loneliness; and mitigation of hazardous environmental and health conditions between project participants from opposing sides of the conflict. An in-progress, comprehensive evaluation of the Reconciliation Program by USAID is expected to provide even more data upon completion later this year.

12) Not only is there empirical data to validate the success of people-to-people programs, but participants themselves are acutely aware of the tremendous benefits that are realized through funding of people-to-people NGOs:

- “CMM funding has made a significant impact in the ability of the Arava Institute to bring young Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian students and researchers together to teach them that nature knows no borders. By supporting P2P programs, CMM grants help reframe the relationship between people in the Middle East, building trust and laying the ground work for a sustainable resolution of the conflict in the region.”

David Lehrer, Executive Director, Arava Institute for Environmental Studies
• “CMM grants create the possibility of cross-border contact and communication that would not otherwise exist. The result is people, including local leaders, who see a horizon beyond conflict. They begin to understand from experience that, as neighbors, not only are they are interdependent, but by working together win-win solutions can be found.” Nader Khateeb, Co-Director (Palestinian); Gidon Bromberg, Co-Director (Israeli); and Munqeth Mehyar, Co-Director (Jordanian), Friends of the Earth Middle East

• “CMM grants have enabled the Jerusalem International YMCA to run youth programs that foster meaningful contact between Israeli and Arab children from preschool through teen years. By providing a mechanism to form friendships instead of prejudices, these programs help ensure a future marked by cooperation and understanding, rather than conflict.” Forsan Hussein, CEO, Jerusalem International YMCA

• “CMM funding has allowed the Parents Circle-Families Forum Narrative Project to reach thousands of Israelis and Palestinians and give them the opportunity to hear and understand the narrative of the ‘other side’. Results show that this funding has improved participants’ levels of trust, increased knowledge of the other, and improved belief in the possibility of peace and reconciliation.” Robi Damelin, Israel Office, Parents Circle-Families Forum

• “CMM funding significantly contributed to the financial stability of PeacePlayers International (PPI), helping it to broaden and deepen programming in the Middle East and to bolster organizational capacity. Grant support was critical in allowing PPI to expand programs into new communities and undertake exciting initiatives such as the Jerusalem All-Stars, the first integrated Palestinian-Israeli girls' teams ever to compete in the Israel Basketball Association's youth league.” Karen Doubilet, Middle East Managing Director, PeacePlayers International

• “CMM support for the ‘Language as a Cultural Bridge’ program has brought Jewish and Arab children and educators together through joint projects that focus on environmental sustainability, music and healthy living. USAID funding has made it possible for the curriculum to be taught in nearly 24% of Israel's public elementary schools, while cultural workshops are taught in nearly 200 Jewish schools and 68 Arab schools across Israel.” Mohammad Darawshe and Amnon Be'eri-Sulitzeanu, Co-Executive Directors, The Abraham Fund Initiatives

• “Thanks to a CMM grant, the Israel Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI) has been able to launch an innovative youth empowerment project involving Jewish and Arab youth living in mixed communities in Israel. The success of this project has attracted other local councils and municipalities who would like IPCRI to administer such a project for them, providing further proof of the ripple effect CMM grant initiatives can have.” Dan Goldenblatt and Riman Barakat, Co-Directors, Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information

• “Sikkuy’s Equality Zones Project, which would not exist without CMM’s critical support, brings together Arab and Jewish municipal, business and civil society leaders to cooperatively advance shared regional infrastructure projects that serve to equalize governmental budgets and resource allocations. The project already has inspired committed, mixed working groups that will forever change the impacted regions for
Ron Gerlitz and Ali Haider, Co-Executive Directors, Sikkuy: The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality in Israel

- “Our longstanding partnership with USAID has allowed our programming to inspire, engage, and support thousands of young leaders and educators from the Middle East as they work to create peaceful learning environments, cooperative economic development opportunities, and the conditions necessary for peace to take root in their societies.” Leslie Adelson Lewin, Executive Director, Seeds of Peace

These personalized accounts – and there are countless more – of successful people-to-people reconciliation efforts made possible through CMM grants underscore the critical need for funding to ensure that the progress of peace continues, including through the British Conflict Pool.

13) This “track II diplomacy” is a critical foreign policy tool in addressing the Middle East conflict. Without building grassroots support for peace, as these projects do, political peace agreements in the Middle East may never arrive and cannot endure. Thus, bolstering nascent peace agreements through people-to-people efforts is critical to long-term stability, democracy and growth in the region. It will be these programs that will enable the success of any diplomatic solution.

14) In addition, these P2P projects give the often-silent two-thirds majorities on both sides, who support a two-state solution in poll after poll, tangible ways to work toward that better tomorrow. They prove “there is a partner.” These people-to-people programs bolster diplomatic efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by establishing grounds for cooperation and existence and building grassroots constituencies for peace on both sides. That groundwork must be laid first, to hasten an agreement and to give it the best possible chance of success. Projects underway at this very moment confirm that these people can successfully work together across borders and conflict lines, developing true professional and personal relationships. Ultimately, the programs provide a mechanism for people on both sides to overcome stereotypes and accept each other’s right to live in peace.
15) There can be little doubt that people-to-people programs have broad, positive implications for long-term stability and a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. The United States investment, although substantial, is not sufficient; a similar commitment to such programs through the British Conflict Pool – and ultimately through an International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace – is essential. Additionally, NGOs like those supported by USAID – those engaged in P2P programming – should be supported by the entirety of funds in the Conflict Pool. ALLMEP urges British officials to visit these hopeful and inspiring programs, and stands ready to assist the Committee in any way possible. Thank you for this opportunity.