I wish to submit this submission of evidence on behalf of PeacePlayers International – Middle East, an organization that uses basketball as a medium for bridging divides between Palestinian and Israeli youth.

1. Executive Summary

- PeacePlayers International – Middle East (PPI – ME) is a grassroots organization – managed by a partnership of Palestinian and Israeli co-directors – which helps support the conditions for a negotiated solution by using basketball to strengthen civil society relationships.
- Separation between Palestinian and Israeli societies, both within Israel and the Palestinian Territories, has exacerbated fear and distrust of the other side, with these negative attitudes posing a deterrent to peace. A bottom-up approach to peacebuilding rests on the assumption that positive attitudinal change can be catalyzed through inter-group contact conducted under favorable conditions.
- Basketball, the agent's primary tool for affecting change, is particularly powerful as it provides participants with a common goal that requires cooperation and “cannot be achieved by the efforts of one group alone”.
- Since 2005, PPI – ME has used the game of basketball and a conflict transformation to create shared goals and identities for 6,000 Palestinian and Israeli young people.
- PPI – ME is committed to evaluating the impact of programming, and results of external evaluations have consistently demonstrated significant positive impact. The organization is currently participating in a long-term study conducted by New York University, which will constitute a major addition to the very little literature that exits on grassroots interventions.

2. Organizational Background

Established in 2001, PeacePlayers International (PPI) is non-profit organization that uses the game of basketball to unite, educate and inspire young people in divided communities, based on the premise that children who play together can learn to live together. Since its launch in 2001, PeacePlayers International has worked with over 60,000 children and trained more than 600 youth leaders in Israel, Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Cyprus. In all of its bases, PPI uses the language and unique dynamic of basketball to break down seemingly insurmountable barriers.

In 2005, PeacePlayers International – Middle East (PPI – ME) initiated multi-faceted, year-round programs for Palestinian and Israeli youth. PPI’s core program, the PeacePlayers Basketball Clubs (PPBC), seeks to promote peaceful coexistence by bringing Palestinian and Israeli youth together through joint peacebuilding and athletic activities. PPI’s innovative peacebuilding curriculum, designed and implemented in partnership with the global consultancy the Arbinger Institute, integrates tested conflict transformation techniques into basketball activities. The curriculum provides our participants with an opportunity to build friendships with children from the “other” side, develop practical skills to deal with conflict in their everyday lives and grow into ambassadors for peace in their communities. By offering
structured, equitable athletic and educational programming, PPI – ME challenges the status quo of hatred and fear that grip Palestinian and Israeli societies, making cross-community cooperation logical and normal.

Past external and internal evaluations, conducted by Bar Ilan University (Israel), have consistently demonstrated significant attitude change among youth following participation in the program (see the Evaluation section for more details on program evaluation and impact). In November, 2012, PPI – ME launched a three-year randomized control study in cooperation with New York University. PPI – ME successfully implemented the first year pilot of the study and is currently running year two of the study.

Accomplishments include:

- Three consecutive years in the Israel Basketball Association's elite youth league, featuring the first-ever integrated teams from East and West Jerusalem (Four teams currently participate);
- In 2013, sponsored coaches' certification training for 5 youth leaders, who are now employed by the agency;
- In 2012, operated basketball education for 100 girls in refugee camps in the West Bank;
- Was awarded 'NGO of the Year' at the 2011 Peace and Sport International Forum in Monaco;
- Was shortlisted for the 2012 'Sport for Conflict Resolution Award' by Beyond Sport;
- Integrated the first ever Palestinian players in the championship-winning Israeli girls' team Elitzur Holon.

3. Problem Analysis

The Palestinian-Israeli stalemate of recent years is not sustainable. The population growth rate of Israeli settlers in the West Bank is 2.5 the growth rate of the citizen population within Israel,ii hampering the possibility of implementation of the two-state solution. Moreover, controversial legislation on the Israeli side has been accompanied with an increase in racist sentiments and actions aimed at Palestinians. On the Palestinian side, sanctions imposed against "normalization" activities involving Israelis hamper the growth of pro-peace initiatives.

To date, U.S.-led peace talks have yielded little fruit, and populations on both sides are skeptical regarding the possibilities for peace. This is supported by the fact that recent approaches to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict emphasize that a negotiated solution will require a transformation of the attitudes of both communities in the direction of reconciliation, mutual trust, and cooperation: a "bottom-up" approach, in which a change in public opinion precipitates a shift in policy.iii

Israeli and Palestinian societies are separated by walls physical and social; language, religion and culture have created a “tight, almost impermeable ethnic boundary”iv between the two communities. Individuals are left to learn about the “other” primarily through the media, myths, and stereotypes, allowing prejudice and fear to thrive. These misconceptions serve to justify further segregation, in turn begetting only more ignorance. Equitable, structured contact in pursuit of shared goals has been shown to powerfully reduce such prejudicesv, and team sports – such as basketball, PeacePlayers International – Middle East program’s primary tool for integration –
serve as an ideal tool to facilitate such encounters, aided by clear, impartial rules and easily identifiable team goals.

Equitable, structured contact in pursuit of shared goals has been shown to powerfully reduce such prejudices\textsuperscript{vi}, and team sports – such as basketball, PPI – ME's primary tool for integration – serve as an ideal tool to facilitate such encounters, aided by clear, impartial rules and easily identifiable team goals. Palestinian and Israeli children may attend different schools, live in segregated towns and neighborhoods and speak different languages, but they all play sports according to the same rules. Sport also enjoys almost universal appeal, attracting individuals independently of their politics, socioeconomic status and ethnicity. By bringing the two sides together for regular integrated practices and games, PPI – ME provides a neutral forum for the establishment of deep personal bonds and lasting friendships. This sustained contact successfully challenges youths' negative preconceptions of the “other,” allowing them to explore different cultures in a positive setting.

A critique of many past coexistence programs has been that they offered either intensive, but short-term interventions\textsuperscript{vii}, or programming that was long-term in nature but offered limited, irregular contact\textsuperscript{viii}. Moreover, few facilitators of such programs had received any formal training in conflict resolution, and thus were deemed ineffectual as facilitators.\textsuperscript{ix} In addition, one study has claimed that although stereotypes develop during early childhood, most inter-group cooperation activities did not engage participants in this age group. From these observations, we may conclude that necessary conditions for effective coexistence activities would include regular, long-term programming, would be led by trained conflict resolution facilitators and would engage participants starting at a very young age. PPI – ME has adopted each of these conditions in developing its programming, and in 2012, augmented the effectiveness of programming by adding two local curriculum facilitators who have received intensive training to be certified to deliver Arbinger conflict resolution workshops to a variety of audiences.

4. Activities

PPI – ME runs frequent, year-round programming, which includes the following:

**PeacePlayers Basketball Clubs** – A network of youth basketball clubs in which Palestinians and Israelis children come together for integrated practices led the guidance of a diverse group of coaches.

**Jerusalem All-Stars:** Three fully integrated PPI – ME teams compete in the Israel Basketball Association’s elite youth league, in cooperation with top women's basketball club ASA Jerusalem. Teams are comprised of Israeli and Palestinian girls from East and West Jerusalem, marking the first time a joint Palestinian-Israeli team from Jerusalem has joined the league.

**Peace Education Retreats:** Palestinian and Israeli participants embark on one three-day retreat per year, at which they take part in intensive peace education workshops.
Leadership Development Program: Exceptional teen leaders engage in weekly practices, volunteer as assistant coaches with younger participants, lead social action projects and embark on an annual three-day Leadership Development Retreat.

Coaches for Conflict Resolution: PPI – ME's newest program, launched in 2013, Coaches for Conflict Resolution is a two-year bilingual (Arabic and Hebrew) training program, designed and implemented by PPI – ME in cooperation with Zinman College at the Wingate Institute and the Arbinger Institute. The course features professional coaching certification training (legally required for coaching in Israel and East Jerusalem); quarterly intensive conflict resolution workshops (including an annual weekend retreat); foreign language instruction (Arabic for Israelis, Hebrew for Palestinians) to enhance symmetry, instill an appreciation for the "other's" culture, and to improve participants' ability to communicate with one another; and a year-long hands-on supervised practicum, in which coaches-in-training help facilitate joint activities for PPBC participants.

5. Evaluations

Independent evaluators conduct impact evaluations on PPI – ME's programs on an annual basis. From 2005 – 2011, evaluations were conducted by a group of researchers from Bar-Ilan University. Data demonstrated the both Palestinian and Israeli participants had fewer stereotypes and ethnocentric attitudes and were more willing to engage in social contact with the "other" side following participation in the program. These positive attitudes became stronger with long-term participation over the course of four years.

In the 2012-2013 program year, PPI – ME launched a long-term randomized control trial (RCT) conducted by two professional evaluators, in cooperation with New York University. The study will take place over three years, and will employ sophisticated behavioral and attitudinal measures to study the effects of PPI’s programs on adolescents living in conflict, examining intergroup and intra-group perceptions, political identity formation, and communities’ capacities for conflict management. In 2013, the pilot year of the study was completed successfully, and conclusions from the pilot study were used to refine the methodology. The second year of the study has recently been launched. Funding has been achieved for an additional two years of research, and the organization and the university are currently seeking funding in order to extend the study further. Little quantitative research exists in the field of grassroots peace-building interventions, and the results of the study will represent a much needed addition to the understanding of conflict resolution.

6. Conclusion

We thank the House of Commons for this opportunity to present evidence regarding the unique circumstances of the Israeli Palestinian conflict, and for the need for increased civil society actions that will build trust among individuals on both sides. Popular support for a formal peace agreement will give leaders the power to make what seems now to be a distant, unlikely possibility into a viable endeavor.
Regards,

Karen Doubilet

Managing Director, PeacePlayers International – Middle East

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