



Alliance for Middle East Peace

2550 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037

(202) 618-4600 (phone)
(888) 784-4540 (fax)
info@allmep.org
www.allmep.org

**U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Fiscal Year 2014 Budget Request**

**Testimony of Rabbi Michael M. Cohen
Chair, Policy Committee
The Alliance for Middle East Peace
March 1, 2013**

Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member Lowey, Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify – again – in strong support of the successful Reconciliation Funds program of the Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM) within the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA). Since its inception in 2004, DCHA/CMM has 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. As the Chair of the Policy Committee of the Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP), I urge this Subcommittee to commit in FY 2014, as it has in FYs 2013, 2012 and 2011:

- **\$28 million to the worldwide reconciliation programs funded through the Economic Support Fund in the FY2014 budget; of which**
- **\$10 million is dedicated to people-to-people peacebuilding programs in the Middle East, specifically those fostering reconciliation between Arab and Israeli populations.**

ALLMEP is the coalition of some eighty (80) non-governmental organizations (NGOs), all of which promote people-to-people coexistence, cooperation, and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, Arabs and Jews in the Middle East. These organizations turn the challenges of daily life into opportunities for cooperation and, in so doing, lay the



groundwork for *any* sustainable peace: they thus fulfill the very purpose of the Reconciliation Funds Program wisely created by this Subcommittee. Organizations funded by CMM grants -- like the Arava Institute, the Abraham Fund Initiatives, Parents Circle, PeacePlayers, Friends of the Earth Middle East, the Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Education, the Jerusalem YMCA, Seeds of Peace, Hand in Hand Schools, and many more -- demonstrate by their results that change is possible and that these funds are essential to it.

The Arab-Israeli conflict remains *the* painful unfinished business of this evolving region. The organizations in our coalition are on the front lines: every day, these people-to-people nongovernmental organizations (P2P NGOs) engage thousands on the ground to cooperate in projects, break down barriers and stereotypes, and change attitudes, while at the same time building trust. These programs provide respect and dignity, hope and understanding, cooperation and reconciliation – elements often missing in conflict situations, but, without which, resolution is impossible.

Furthermore, evidence demonstrates that these programs work. Rigorous analysis and evaluation by USAID conclusively establishes that people-to-people programs result in 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.

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 the continued funding of P2P 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 interdependent, but by working together win-win solutions can be found.” **Nader Khateeb, Co-Director (Palestinian); Gidon Bromberg, Co-Director (Israeli); 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 the better.” **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 continued funding to ensure that the progress of peace continues.

Bolstering nascent peace agreements through people-to-people efforts is not only critical to long-term stability, democracy and growth in the region, but also to United States national security interests. When the peace process eventually resumes – and it must – it will be these programs that will enable the success of any diplomatic solution. Said Bradley Bessire, Director, Office of Democracy and Governance, USAID/West Bank & Gaza to ALLMEP’s Executive Director:

During the past two and a half years, I have been honored to work with agents of change in the CMM program in both Israel and the West Bank who see the potential of a different life. I am continually amazed at what can be accomplished once a dialogue begins. The CMM program is what makes this happen.

In addition, as demonstrated by two December 2012 polls conducted by the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace, these P2P projects give the often-silent two-thirds majorities on both sides – who say they support a two-state solution – tangible ways to work toward that better tomorrow. 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.



The benefits to our national security of fostering and maintaining peaceful partnerships abroad is clear; however, as Congress works to reduce the deficit, foreign aid can become an easy target. While the perception of foreign aid expenditures is often vastly overblown from reality, we are nevertheless very sensitive to the economic constraints faced by this Subcommittee. Thus, despite the enormous need and the undeniable fact that the NGOs in our coalition are ready to expand their dramatically scalable projects to new communities and participants as resources become available, **our funding request - \$10 million - is identical to that of FYs 2013, 2012 and 2011.** This amount will ensure that investments in peace-building already made in the region by the United States will not be wasted, and that people-to-people programs which already have proven to be effective continue to thrive. Given the gravity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, maintaining this separate funding stream at least at current levels is critical to laying the groundwork for lasting peace.

Members of this Subcommittee: it is wiser to be proactive than reactive. It is not only vastly cheaper to invest in peace than in war, it is also an insurance policy for our national security and the security of those in the Middle East. I urge you not to abandon Israelis and Palestinians who are ready, waiting for an opportunity to become part of the solution. I urge you to take the *less* expensive path by continuing funding for these projects, and thereby enhancing our security, the region's stability, and peace in the region. I implore your support for the brave and inspiring peacemakers through the "people-to-people" competitive grants programs of the USAID Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation. **Please include \$28 million worldwide with \$10 million dedicated to the Middle East – and expressly to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- in the FY 2014 Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill.**

Thank you.