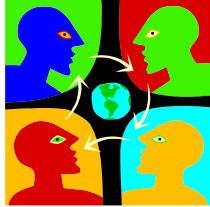


IPCRI

מרכז ישראל/פלסטין למחקר ולמידע  
مركز إسرائيل فلسطين للأبحاث و المعلومات

Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information

Strategic Affairs Unit  
**POLICY STATEMENT**



## The Need for Civil Society Involvement in the Rebuilding of the Israeli-Palestinian Political Process

To the Donor's Meeting – December 7-8, 2004 Oslo, Norway

We are facing a new era with great possibilities and opportunities for rebuilding an Israeli-Palestinian political process. Palestine is heading towards democracy and soon a new government will be sitting in Ramallah. The Israeli government is also in the process of being reshaped where its main policy directive will be the implementation of the disengagement plan. There is already shift in attitudes in Jerusalem regarding the needs and possibilities for implementing the disengagement in coordination with the Palestinians. Field level coordination between Israeli and Palestinian security personnel is already beginning. Internationally and locally there is more talk about moving the process from disengagement into the Road Map.

One of the challenges facing the political echelon in Israel and in Palestine is in rebuilding public confidence and trust in the possibility of renewing a political process. Both leaderships have less than the necessary or desired political legitimacy to advance the process sufficiently to rebuild trust and confidence. There remains a gap between the new rhetoric and the reality of the ground. There are many spoilers within both societies who can disrupt and perhaps derail the hopes for a new beginning.

The Oslo process to a great extent ignored the importance of engaging and involving civil society in shaping the process. The old "people-to-people" projects were little more than paying "lip service" to the idea that civil society should support the peace process. Civil society has many roles to play in helping to ensure the success of a new political process. Governments – Israel and the Palestinian Authority, as well as the international community (the donors) convening in Oslo this week to assist the process, should look seriously at building a public sector-civil society partnership for strengthening positive steps that would help to ensure greater success.

This partnership should be involved in monitoring the process, and the sides should demonstrate a real interest in having it monitored in a fair and genuine way. The partnership would assist in creating and building wider

public legitimacy for moving away from violence and back into dialogue and negotiations. Developing the economy and rebuilding economic coordination and cooperation is another area where the partnership should be emphasized.

Israeli and Palestinian civil societies are abundant with civil society organizations and initiatives that are anxious to play a positive role. IPCRI requested to have civil society representatives present at the Donors meeting in Oslo later this week. This request was rejected without sufficient good reason. We must assure that transparency is built into the new political process so that the public will feel trust and confidence that developments are taking into account the best interests of both societies. Through a public sector-civil society partnership we can implement some of the lessons learned from the mistakes of the past. There is too much at stake to risk the chance that lessons learned will not be implemented and that the mistakes of the past will be the same mistakes of the future.

The Donor's should insist on having civil society observers present at the donors meetings where Israeli and Palestinian representatives are participating. The presence of these representatives would help to ensure that decisions regarding the means to rebuild coordination and cooperation reach beyond the level of government. The donors should ensure that civil society is given information regarding the decisions taken on providing financial resources for the rebuilding of the political process and for the rehabilitation of the Palestinian Authority, including the elections process in order to ensure the ability of civil society to play a monitoring role.

The donor community should engage civil society organizations that have on their agenda supporting and building cooperation and peaceful relations between the two parties. Cross-boundary cooperative endeavors must be placed high on the agenda and supported so that the publics can see the fruits of the new era.

Civil society must be involved with the governments and the donors in fighting incitement and in reforming education in both societies as concrete evidence that a new era has begun. The development of a new political process must be both from the "top-down" and from the "bottom – up" reaching the grassroots and having an impact on the lives of Palestinians and Israelis. This partnership must begin now, from the beginning and not be left until it becomes an afterthought. Now is the time for civil society and government to support each other and the international community as the third party must facilitate and encourage this role and this part of the process.