

Peres Center for Peace Delegation to Elk Shoals from Israel
And the Palestinian Authority

מרכז פרס לשלום
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The Peres Center For Peace



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WHY ELK SHOALS?

Shahar Eylakim, a basketball coach for the Palestinian-Israeli "Twinned Peace Basketball Schools" projects was introduced to the Elk Shoals Interfaith Camp through the film: "Trust Me" which illustrated the important activities of the Camp which provides joint activities for Christian, Jewish and Muslim children in a residential environment.

The tenets of interfaith work closely match the work of the Sport Department of the Peres Center for Peace which utilises sport as a peace-building tool for Palestinian and Israeli youth. Sport is an ideal means of stimulating a child's body, mind and spirit, which in turn positively influences overall health. In addition, sport has an unparalleled ability to overcome barriers of language, politics and religion and as such as a powerful tool in the modern day challenge of peacebuilding.

The opportunity for a delegation of children from our projects to participate in the Elk Shoals Interfaith Camp will be very precious – they will get the chance to experience a new environment, contribute to interfaith dialogue, share their outlook on peacebuilding and interfaith dialogue together and build friendships with American children of different faiths. The experience will also offer the children the chance to enjoy a much needed break from their high stress environment (caused by the ongoing conflict) at home.

RECENT FILMS ILLUSTRATING THE WORK OF THE SPORT DEPARTMENT

Mohammed and Yossi

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxSjOU4JRL0&feature=channel_page

Sport Department Video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEGyHhZavYU>

Mini-Basket Event

<http://il.youtube.com/watch?v=WKEzU7QUlcE>

Jordan Farmer Visits a Palestinian-Israeli Joint Activity

<http://www.vimeo.com/2494060>

THE PALESTINIAN –ISRAELI CONFLICT

The recent fighting between the IDF and Hamas in Gaza has had a severe, direct and relentless affect on both the Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip and the Israeli communities in the areas close to the Gaza border. It has also had an indirect impact on our projects.

Most of the Israeli children in the projects were directly affected –they were under fire within the range of the Hamas rockets; the Israeli army imposed restrictions on organised gatherings and the children did not attend school during the military operation (as a safety precaution). The Palestinian children are from the West Bank so they were not in any direct danger. However they felt very scared to come and meet with the



Israelis and witnessed the anger and demonstrations of the adult population towards the Israeli incursion in Gaza. They watched terrible footage shown in the media – images which are very difficult to make sense of in light of their belief in peace, their Israeli friends and their parents' constraints and anger towards Israel in general.

In response to the events we held emergency meetings with the Israeli coaches and Palestinian coaches (separately) in order to touch base and plan any necessary changes to the program. At the meetings the coaches reported on the status of their communities, the atmosphere in each community and solutions were discussed for the issues that we are facing in order to begin mental preparation for the coaches before re-commencing joint activities (how to cope with the children's stress, fear and anger).

All of the coaches, Palestinians and Israelis, who live in the communities in which they train, have expressed once again their commitment to the project, to its goals and objectives and all agreed that following the war, all efforts must be made to further strengthen the project.



The ongoing conflict therefore continues to have a severely negative affect on individuals and communities in the region. The continuous violence and lack of security is profoundly impacting the region's socio-economic situation. Along with the impact from the worldwide economic crisis, international

restrictions on funds for the Palestinian Authority and with rising levels of unemployment in Israel's peripheries continues to result in frustration and negativity – a ripe breeding ground for hostility and violence. Children inevitably suffer to a great degree from a high-level of emotional stress and tension, having little capacity to internalize and manage the impact of the conflict situation.

In the Palestinian Authority many children are unable to attend school on a daily basis because of frequent IDF checkpoints closures, the separation barrier and other military activities. The youngsters in the refugee camps are particularly affected by the harsh effects of their community's low socio-economic status and are thus affected on many levels including emotionally, psychologically and academically. The participating Israeli communities of the "Twinned Peace Football Schools" programs are economically disadvantaged and situated in isolated areas. The youth feel detached from mainstream Israeli society, and feel starkly disadvantaged in comparison to Israel's wealthy and protected center. This only adds to the distress of the ongoing conflict.



The protracted conflict situation renders little opportunity for Israeli and Palestinian youth to interact and get to know each other. This lack of contact is further perpetuating negative attitudes toward the "other", and as such, the "Twinned Peace Football Schools" project is designed to allow the participants to transcend these barriers, to experience a different outlook on life and to approach the



concept of peace with their counterparts. This approach is in direct contrast to media portrayals displaying reactionary responses to immediate events and the framework of the educational system in both Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

THE PERES CENTER FOR PEACE

Nobel Peace Laureate, former Prime Minister and current President of Israel Shimon Peres founded the Peres Center for Peace in 1996 with the aim of furthering his vision in which people of the Middle East region work together to build peace through socio-economic cooperation and development and people-to-people interaction.

The peacebuilding activities of the Peres Center focus on common Arab and Israeli economic and social interests, with particular emphasis on Palestinian-Israeli relations. Peace-building projects are developed to address these interests, through partnerships with regional and international partners.

The Peres Center's areas of activity include; Agriculture, Community Development, Civil Society Dialogue and Cooperation, Peace Education and Culture, Academia and Research, Economics and Business Development, Medicine and Healthcare, Sports, Youth Activities and more.



THE SPORT DEPARTMENT

Since its inception in 2002, the Sport Department of the Peres Center has been extremely active in utilizing "Sport" in the service of peace. Joint sporting activities involving Palestinians and Israelis have been shown to promote cultural integration between the two populations, providing a medium through which to communicate, and an avenue by which social change can be encouraged. The Peres Center's "Twinned Peace Sports Schools" program and the "Twinned Peace Kindergartens" programs presently touch the lives of some 2,000 Palestinian and Israeli youth from some 35 disadvantaged Palestinian, Arab and Israeli communities in the regions, promoting cultural integration, mutual understanding and respect, and equality.

The Sport Department also works to expand opportunities for the young participants, sports coaches and their respective communities by way of the Palestinian-Israeli Coaches Training and Development program, participation in international sports tournaments, the annual Mini World Cup, National and International Peace Matches, visits from high profile sports stars (such as Jose Mourinho, Samuel Eto'o, Sven Göran Eriksson and the Real Madrid FC team), and through the Infrastructural Development Project which facilitates construction of football fields in



disadvantaged areas within the Palestinian Authority. These additional projects embody the grassroots philosophy of the "Twinned Peace Football Schools" program, showing the participating youth and coaches, and indirect beneficiaries, that sports and peacebuilding activities can bring a wide range of valuable opportunities to their doorstep – opportunities of which they were previously devoid.

OUR PALESTINIAN PARTNER ORGANISATION – THE AL QUDS ASSOCIATION FOR DEMOCRACY AND DIALOGUE

The Al-Quds Association for Dialogue and Democracy was established in 2006, and electively partnered with the Peres Center for Peace in the same year. The organization, whose headquarters is in Al-Ram, aims to establish a peace-building mechanism which will eventually bring a long lasting and just peace to the region between both nations through the dissemination of the values of peace, democracy tolerance and the culture of peace in Palestinian society; the broadening of the circle of supporters of peace within Palestinian and Israeli society and encouraging the culture of dialogue; enhancement of the exchange of culture and heritage between regional and international organizations; and the establishment of an Academy for Research and Peace Studies in the Middle East.



OUR FLAGSHIP "TWINNED PEACE SPORT SCHOOLS" PROJECT

The "Twinned Peace Sport Schools" project was launched in 2002 to provide an opportunity for cooperation and teamwork and to promote a safe forum for the development and establishment of peaceful relationships between Palestinian and Israeli youth. The project allows nationality and religion to play a secondary role and

encourages the youngsters to focus on their similarities rather than their differences.

Instead of meeting in a formal educational framework, the youth bond through the joint sporting and social activities which take place on a regular basis within the framework of the "Twinned Peace Football Schools project". In recognition of sport's unparalleled ability to overcome barriers of language, politics, and religion, and its role as a powerful tool in the modern day challenge of peacebuilding, the Peres Center for Peace seeks to facilitate the continuation of this vital endeavour as much as possible, in the hope that this grassroots tool will positively influence today's young generation – who are, in effect, the leaders and decision makers of tomorrow.

The project has made, and continues to make, a positive impact on the participating communities, by providing a practical avenue through which to engage Palestinian and Israeli children. The program breaks down stereotypes, builds self-confidence, and improves physical skills and academic abilities whilst teaching empathy and offering a safe and meaningful space for dialogue and fun with the 'other side'. Additionally, the "Twinned Peace Football Schools" project has had played a significant part in community development,



providing extra-curricular and socio-economic opportunities to youngsters and their coaches respectively, not to mention the vital role which it has had in transforming youngsters attitudes and, in this case, sensitively promoting gender equality within traditional and conservative communities.

On a personal level the benefits of a healthy, active lifestyle include increased confidence, improved self-esteem, reduced stress, greater empowerment, an improved ability to face new challenges, not to mention an opportunity to simply have fun, away from the stresses and limitations of every day life in a conflict zone. The "Twinned Peace Football Schools" for boys is the only project of its kind within the participating communities providing the youth and their families with a safe, educational extra-curricular program which improves their personal, social, educational and sporting abilities.



OUR COMMUNITIES

The delegation to Elk Shoals will include boys from the following communities:

Jericho

Located to the north of the Dead Sea close to the Jordanian border, is home to 25,000 Palestinians. It is renowned for its recent prison siege in which a massive conflict broke out during Israel's pursuit of wanted PLFP associates. This large-scale incident somewhat soured the general population's stance towards the political situation. Jericho's population is affected by the socio-economic ills which come as a result of border closures and difficulty in reaching central, more affluent areas for employment.

Tulkarem Refugee Camp

Also known as Nur Shams, the Tulkarem Refugee Camp is the second largest camp situated in the West Bank next to Tulkarem (City) and is under the control of the Palestinian Authority. Many children face difficulties on a daily basis from frequent IDF checkpoints closures, the separation barrier and other military activities. The youngsters in this refugee camp are particularly affected by the harsh effects of their community's low socio-economic status and are thus affected on many levels including emotionally, psychologically and academically. There is also an acute lack of after-school activities including sport.



Kiryat Gat

An Israeli city with one of the country's highest unemployment rates. Established following the '48 war, Kiriyat Gat thrived on local and agricultural development and attracted waves of immigration from North Africa, Ethiopia and Russia. There are very few high quality educational or recreational outlets in this city – a result of the overall low standard of education and decreased government funding.