

Letter to the Editor

Bridges, the Israeli-Palestinian Public Health Magazine

Following the Oslo accords (1994), a truly cooperative spirit prevailed among Palestinians and Israelis, including those in the health field.¹ However, since the start of the second *Intifada* (Arabic for uprising) in September 2000, the situation took a turn for the worse. Sadly, many joint ventures that had brought these two peoples together stopped. The health field was not immune to the changing environment and cooperative health initiatives also dwindled, though did not cease completely.² To crystallize the notion of bringing 'people-to-people' together in the face of the isolation and suffering of the conflict, a new initiative has been launched.

Under the auspices of the World Health Organization (WHO) representation in the West Bank and Gaza, both Palestinian and Israeli health experts have launched *bridges*, a bimonthly magazine on public health issues. The first issue came out in December 2004 and the fourth in June 2005, the magazine is published bimonthly. As its name bears witness, it intends to become a bridge for peace. Its mission statement reads, among other

concepts, that 'The magazine embodies the WHO paradigm of "Health as Bridge for Peace": the integration of peacebuilding concerns, strategies and practices with health care.'

WHO has been involved in analogous initiatives of health as a bridge for peace, for example in Central America, where both Sandinistas and 'contras' fighting in Nicaragua ceased their fire to enable immunization campaigns to take place,³ or in the Balkans, where it sponsors the mental health component of the Stability Pact for the region.⁴ Armed conflicts have been framed in public health terms. Not surprisingly, the dead, the physically and mentally wounded, the disabled, the bereaved, and the destruction of health facilities fall under the responsibility of the health sector, which is never consulted when wars are declared.

The members of the joint editorial and advisory boards wish to state their case while inviting other constituencies of both sides to walk the road of coexistence. Only when peace and reason will prevail can health be attained by the population of each side in conflict. The European public health community is being asked to register the birth of *Bridges*, and called to support it.

A. Manenti
Head of Office WHO West Bank and Gaza

I. Levav
WHO Consultant
F. Abumoghli
WHO West Bank and Gaza National
Health Officer
H. Abdeen
Dean Al Quds University Medical School
R. Garber
The American Jewish Joint Distribution
Committee-JDC-Brookdale Institute
doi:10.1093/eurpub/cki091

References

- 1 Barnea T, Abdeen Z, et al. *Study of Israeli-Palestinian Cooperation in the Health Field, 1994–1998*. Jerusalem: JDC (Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute, JDC-Israel, AJJDC) and Al Quds University, 2000.
- 2 Rockoff Y, El Jabari C, et al. Coping with breast cancer among Palestinian and Israeli women. *Project Cope final report, phase A. 2000–2003* 2004.
- 3 WHO. Health as Bridge for Peace (HBP). Online: <http://www.who.int/hac/techguidance/hbp/en/> (9th June 2005, date accessed).
- 4 Health Development in Action in South East Europe. *Enhancing social cohesion through strengthening community mental health services*. Denmark: WHO Europe, Council of Europe, Hillerod, 2002.

Comments can be sent to bridges@who-health.org and soon: www.bridgesmagazine.org