



## **PROMISE AND FAILURE: ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS AND PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI COOPERATION**

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*In the early days of the Oslo peace process, numerous activists in the peace and environmental camps in Israel and the Palestinian Authority called for the creation of joint non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to confront the region's environmental ills. Such groups are often the largest, best-funded environmental organizations in the Palestinian Authority. Yet they have faced serious challenges of legitimacy, even prior to the current intifada, and have been largely unable to survive conflictual periods with their mandates and organizations intact. This study examines a number of such joint environmental NGOs, assesses their responses to the decline in the peace process, and discusses the failure implicit in the strategy of approaching environmental cooperation primarily as a vehicle for promoting coexistence and peace.*

Since the founding of the Palestinian Authority, there has been a proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the West Bank and Gaza. Among those NGOs are those acting in the fields of environmental activism, education, and policy advocacy. This research focuses on the experiences of environmental NGOs in two related components of state and society building: First, in their contribution to institution-building and policy-making in the environmental sector within the Palestinian Authority. Second, their relationship to the larger process of expanding civil liberties, developing a functional model of participatory politics, and furthering Palestinian civil society. This paper argues that while environmental NGOs have recorded small but substantive achievements in civic education and capacity-building for environmental protection, they have largely failed in the promotion of participatory policymaking in the Palestinian Authority.

This assessment of professional successes and political failures is based on interviews and site visits within the Palestinian Authority and Israeli-controlled East Jerusalem during summer 2000. Those visits were conducted

during a period of relative calm in the Middle East, but widespread disillusionment with the peace process amongst many Palestinians. During this time period, then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak met with Palestinian Authority President Yasir Arafat in Camp David, under the auspices of the United States, in an attempt to reach a settlement on the Final Status of Israeli-Palestinian relations. With the failure of these negotiations, the political and security climate deteriorated, with open hostilities breaking out in September 2000 in a new *intifada*. Since then, the economic and societal conditions for Palestinians, particularly but not exclusively in Gaza, have fallen precipitously, and the PA itself is in grave financial difficulty, with severely limited capacity for governance in many sectors.(1)

Perhaps the most interesting environmental NGOs operating in the West Bank and Gaza and forming relationships with the Palestinian Authority are binational (Israeli-Palestinian) or multinational. Such groups differ from indigenous Palestinian organizations in size, funding, and level of integration into international networks of researchers, policy advocates and activists.

This article examines four NGOs with joint Israeli and Palestinian constituencies. All are funded mostly from the Israeli side or from international partners, although all except the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies claim to be equally Israeli and Palestinian in their orientation and focus. The Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information and its affiliated Joint Environmental Mediation Service, the Palestinian-Israeli Environmental Secretariat, and Friends of the Earth-Middle East are all geographically located within the West Bank or East Jerusalem in areas claimed by the Palestinians. Despite that fact, they are identified mostly with their Israeli and international donors and partners and face subsequent challenges of legitimacy. All conduct their work primarily in English, the language of Israeli-Palestinian relations, and all face crises associated with the violent interruption to the Oslo process in the *intifada* and reversion to open hostilities.

### **THE DANGER OF PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTALISM AS A PROXY FOR THE PEACE PROCESS**

According to Manuel Hassassian of Bethlehem University, “PNGOs [Palestinian NGOs] formed before and during the [original] *intifada* have tended to be characterized by a sense of strong ideology and activism. PNGOs established with the signing of the Oslo Accords are perceived to be a function of the new political process. PNGOs with a strong sense of ideology tended to survive better and be more effective than those organizations that were contingent on the peace process.”(2) Hassassian’s warning applies a hundredfold for those Israeli-Palestinian cooperative NGOs that sprung up in the early-middle 1990s during the most optimistic periods of the peace process. Such institutions exist not only in the environmental field, but also in the business, health, and social welfare sectors. During the early 1990s, Israeli-Palestinian cooperation on the environment was viewed as a helpful proxy for supporting the peace process, and when the peace process withered, so did donor support

for cooperation on the environment. This applied similarly for a range of development and aid initiatives, as relayed in one mournful anecdote in a *Washington Post* article.

To feed newly impoverished Palestinians, the World Food Program last month sent word to wealthy donor countries that it needed \$3.9 million in additional funding. The request was met with silence.

“Donors say they’re here to fund the peace process, not the Palestinian people per se,” said one aid official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. “Now there’s no peace process, so there’s less enthusiasm about giving money.”(3)

During the most idealistic periods, when the Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information hosted its first “Our Shared Environment” conferences, speakers were forthright about the attractiveness of linking environmentalism to the process of building peace and mutual tolerance. Robin Twite of IPCRI opened the first volume of *Our Shared Environment* with the following call:

“All those who love the land between the Jordan and the Mediterranean [...] can readily see that its future is threatened by rapid uncontrolled development, population increase, political tension and many other dangers. The conference underlined the need for all concerned parties to work closely together if they are to achieve a future in which [all] can look forward to a life spent in a harmonious and positive environment. Nothing else will do.”(4)

This attitude has dominated much of the discussion on cooperative Israeli and Palestinian environmental management. Indeed, the plenary session in the 1995 IPCRI conference was entitled “The Role of

Environmental Issues in Promoting International Understanding and Cooperation in the Middle East.” Yet there is a crucial and perhaps deadly counterpoint to this perception. If donors and participants see environmental cooperation primarily as a vehicle for promoting coexistence and peace, then when the peace process fails, where does that leave the environment? As numerous writings argue, it has been in crisis since the new *intifada* began.(5) In conversations, many activists working in binational NGOs regretted their overwhelming dependence on the ebb and flow of the peace process, but few seemed able to suggest alternatives. With one notable exception, all the binational environmental NGOs were formed in the immediate afterglow of the signing of the Declaration of Principles, when the environment was viewed as an issue around which Israelis and Palestinians could rally together. Since that time, the appeal of cooperative environmental initiatives has faded rapidly.

On the surface, there is a natural attraction to environmental issues as a means of drawing Israeli and Palestinian communities together. As the title of the IPRCI conference noted, environmental benefits and risks are shared between communities and across borders. It is as impossible for Israelis to draw a curtain over Tel Aviv to prevent transboundary air pollution as it is for Palestinians to stop the hydrologic processes that carry their wastewater into pre-1967 Israel. Around the world, environmentalists call for collective responses to transboundary environmental threats. These same appeals that motivate the world’s environmental activists—a common ecological heritage facing common threats—exist in this case as well.

#### **PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI ENVIRONMENTAL SECRETARIAT**

The Palestinian-Israeli Environmental Secretariat (PIES) is the product of binational cooperation in two other fields, health and economic development. Formed in 1997, PIES is a project of the Palestine Council on Health

(PCH) and the Israel Economic Cooperation Forum, both post-Oslo transition-era institutions, with whom it shares office space in the East Jerusalem suburb of Wadi Joz. PCH was a World Health Organization-sponsored organization that developed a national healthcare strategy. In a striking example of Palestinian “embryonism,” nine of its ten units were eventually recruited into the new Palestinian Ministry of Health.(6) The original policy unit is all that remains of PCH as an independent NGO.(7) The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), the oldest environmental organization in Israel, is also a founding partner.

PIES depicts joint environmental projects as a means of promoting reconciliation and coexistence. It focuses its efforts in environmental education and the industrial sector, based on existing networks from the Economic Cooperation Forum. PIES intends to serve as a meeting-place for Israeli and Palestinian environmental NGOs and speaks highly of its relationships with many independent Palestinian NGOs, as well as other business and government contacts in the environmental field. Like most binational NGOs, PIES has an Israeli and a Palestinian co-director. In an interview, co-director Imad Khatib initially described relations with both governments and other NGOs as good, and said that PIES always works with Palestinian and Israeli NGOs to recruit participants for its activities.(8) A major focus of PIES’s work is the transfer of expertise and technical skills to the Palestinian environmental community from Israel.(9)

While describing governmental relations as generally good, he acknowledged that PIES had registered officially as an NGO neither in Israel nor in the Palestinian Authority. He said the process was agonizingly slow in the former and no clear law existed in the latter. For example, at the time of the interview, the Palestinian Ministry of Interior was registering domestic NGOs and local branches of international NGOs, but not binational NGOs. Khatib was sympathetic to the PA’s need to

develop institutions, but frustrated by the inability to progress and the existing NGO law. Due to these bureaucratic difficulties, PIES was contemplating registering overseas, presumably in the United States, instead of within Israel or the PA.

The difficulty of registering has more than symbolic significance. Many of the world's most prominent international environmental NGOs, including Friends of the Earth-International and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) have partnerships only with registered organizations. While Khatib boasted of PIES's solid relations with the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature in Jordan, and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature in Switzerland, these ties were on a personal, not institutional, level. Most of the initial funding for PIES came from the Dutch Representative Office in Ramallah. In the first year of operations, in addition to the initial support of Dutch seed money, PIES received \$490,000 in donations from the Swiss, South African, Norwegian, Canadian and Irish governments, as well as prominent liberal pro-peace Jewish philanthropies in the United States (the Cummings-Dorot Foundations and the Goldman Fund).

Despite the high levels of political and financial support that PIES has enjoyed, Khatib stressed the uncertainty of the future of PIES' work, when interviewed during the Camp David negotiations between Barak and Arafat. "Politics interfere with every aspect of our lives," he said, stressing the vulnerability of cooperative binational NGOs to the vicissitudes of security concerns.(10) This vulnerability is noteworthy because PIES's two honorary co-presidents were Leah Rabin, widow of the former prime minister, and Dr. Fathi Arafat, brother of Yasir Arafat. If an institution with the funding and political connections of PIES complains of the vulnerability of its work to political crisis, it bodes poorly for NGOs with less prominent or well-endowed supporters.

## ISRAEL-PALESTINE CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND INFORMATION/JOINT ENVIRONMENTAL MEDIATION SERVICE(11)

IPCRI, the Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information, has unusual stature in binational cooperation. While most binational NGOs were formed in the early 1990s following the Madrid and Oslo Accords, IPCRI was formed during the worst days of the *intifada* in 1988, before the peace process existed. In its literature, IPCRI draws an explicit contrast between it and similar organizations that arose after the Declaration of Principles.

IPCRI was born before a Middle East peace process existed.... In 1993, after Oslo, when working on Israeli-Palestinian peace became fashionable, organizations and institutions, academic research centers and private sector initiatives sprouted like mushrooms after the rain. However, after the wave of terror following the Rabin assassination and the election of a right-wing government in Israel, most of the international and local initiatives disappeared as the financial resources for this work [were] diverted to other parts of the world. IPCRI did not disappear. In fact, during this very difficult period IPCRI's agenda swelled with new initiatives as did its legitimacy in the eyes of the Israeli and Palestinian governments.(12)

Based originally in East Jerusalem, IPCRI relocated to Bethlehem after the Palestinian Authority assumed control of the city. IPCRI's two co-directors are American-born Israeli Dr. Gershon Baskin and Palestinian Dr. Zakaria al-Qaq, with additional staff and management for its five divisions of operations: Strategic Affairs, Peace Intelligence, Pathways Into Reconciliation, Law and Development, and Water and Environment. With this varied range of activities, IPCRI is engaged in Israeli-

Palestinian research and dialogue from the level of high school peace education classes to off-the-record workshops with senior Israeli and Palestinian legislators and military personnel. Its range of publications covers such fields as civil society, the future borders of Jerusalem, economic development and cooperation, and religion in public life. The breadth of IPCRI's work, and its level of contact with the Palestinian and Israeli governments, as well as major funders like USAID, the European Union, and major governments worldwide, makes IPCRI's role a significant one in its fields.

At the time of its foundation, IPCRI stated its guiding principles:

- IPCRI would be established as a fully joint organization based on equal partnership and ownership.
- IPCRI would be managed by two directors - 1 Israeli, 1 Palestinian and on the basis of full parity.
- IPCRI would have a Board of Directors comprised of equal numbers of Israelis and Palestinians, with two Chairmen, 1 Israeli and 1 Palestinian.
- IPCRI's work would be constructive in nature, aimed at proposing political policy options that would enhance the mutual interests of both sides.
- IPCRI would direct itself at enlisting the support and the involvement of people from the center of both societies and not from the fringes.(13)

IPCRI has kept these principles at the fore, while acknowledging greater ease on garnering support and participation from the Israeli side than the Palestinian. IPCRI has the unusual distinction of registration both in Israel and the PA, having been "grandfathered in," despite the general Palestinian unwillingness to registering binational NGOs.

The IPCRI Water and Environment program, founded in 1992, is directed by Robin Twite, O.B.E., a Briton who has spent much of his life in Israel. The program began with a

high profile with its *Our Shared Environment* seminars and workshops, and benefited from high levels of cooperation with leading Israeli and Palestinian researchers and activists. Laskier credits this initial effort for raising awareness both domestically and internationally about the fate of the Middle Eastern environment.(14) The range of IPCRI-affiliated activities runs from such seminars to training programs in solid waste or nature reserve management, and discussions of public awareness of environmental issues or environmental health. Most of IPCRI's activities are at the policy and training level, with the goal of developing capacity in a range of management issues. IPCRI operates at an institutional rather than implementational level, with participants from environmental NGOs, business leaders and ministries, but does participate in some implementation activities, such as a wastewater project in Hebron.(15)

The Joint Environmental Management Service (JEMS) is IPCRI's newest environmental initiative, in cooperation with the Consensus Building Institute (CBI) of Cambridge, Massachusetts. JEMS aims to introduce the techniques of environmental conflict resolution to the Middle East by training Palestinians and Israelis. Its goal is to eventually develop a corps of trained environmental mediators on-staff within ministries, NGOs, and the community to prevent political and cultural conflicts from exacerbating environmental disputes—and vice-versa. The project is funded by the V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation, a major funder of environmental projects worldwide, and training has begun with ten Israeli and ten Palestinian participants despite the *intifada*. The training sessions led by CBI's Dr. Lawrence Susskind took place in Turkey in December 2000, which illustrates the need to set binational activities outside the context of the conflict. While training has occurred, JEMS's pilot mediation attempts, addressing the badly degraded Jerusalem-Ramallah road and joint sewage management in the Qalqilya (PA)-Kfar Saba (Israel) area, have been halted.

The fact that IPCRI's environmental program and JEMS continue to operate during the *intifada* can be seen as cause for optimism, but on a very basic level its work has been severely curtailed. The office which houses the organization in Bethlehem is often closed because it is on the main Jerusalem-Bethlehem road near border police stations, and clashes are frequent. As a result, IPCRI has relocated to the former campus of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, in Area C (full Israeli control) between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. But Palestinian staff members cannot always cross borders to attend meetings or do research, and the necessity of training JEMS participants overseas is indicative of the stress that the organization suffers.

While there are options to conduct business electronically via e-mail and the telephone, much of IPCRI's mission can be characterized by the wish for Israelis and Palestinians to work together cooperatively and develop productive ties. Nonetheless, staff of CBI and IPCRI report that JEMS has taken off successfully, and other prominent members of the Middle East environmental community confirm that IPCRI and JEMS stand almost alone in that regard during the *intifada*.(16)

### **FRIENDS OF THE EARTH-MIDDLE EAST**

Friends of the Earth-Middle East was founded by South African-born Israeli Gideon Bromberg in December 1994. Unlike the binational NGOs described above, FoEME is a four-nation partnership of Israelis, Palestinians, Egyptians and Jordanians, headquartered in Amman with regional offices elsewhere. EcoPeace, as it was first known, was the first-ever umbrella organization comprising such a membership, and its peak had more than 200 partner organizations. In 1998, EcoPeace became the Middle East chapter of Friends of the Earth-International, the world's largest network of environmental organizations.

FoEME is the only Friends of the Earth chapter that operates on a regional rather than national level, and its formation differs

significantly from other chapters. While national chapters are usually founded when local environmentalists agree to campaign together on crucial issues, FoEME developed from Bromburg's initiative to create an umbrella organization operating regionally. According to Paul Wapner, FoE's global structure is confederational, with individual chapters allowed to determine their own policies, funding priorities, and so on. They are bound to the global organization "only in name and orientation," and frequently join FoE-International only after years of independent operation on the local or regional level. Groups that apply for membership are reviewed and then put on a one-year-long probation period before being recognized as official FoE affiliates.(17)

FoEME is registered in the United States as a 501(c)3 non-profit, due to the difficulties of registration in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Most of its funding is from Western consulates and representative offices, and pro-peace Jewish groups in the United States. Additional supporters include European and North American environmental NGOs and a range of peace groups. Palestinian co-director Anis Salah says that EcoPeace originally presented its mission as "support[ing] peace through environmental issues," a portrayal that quickly became unsustainable as the peace process sputtered. Following the transformation into FoEME and greater links with world environmental forums (FoE-International, the Global Environment Facility, Euro-Med Partnership), the environmental message became more central to FoEME's mission.(18)

FoEME's objectives include strengthening NGO capabilities in cooperation with governments, assessing the transboundary environmental implications of development projects, forging a common environmental agenda among NGOs, information collection and sharing, and promoting sustainable development and peace in the region.(19) Some particular projects include renewable energy "solar villages," a regional development plan for the Dead Sea basin, a sustainable tourism

initiative in the Gulf of Aqaba, and research on the environmental implications of trade and investment in development projects.(20) According to Salah, interviewed at FoEME's East Jerusalem office, FoEME is trying to define new links between funding agencies and the Ministry of Environmental Affairs, via the World Bank working group on Palestinian NGOs. Salah described this World Bank forum as the means by which NGOs have their greatest impact on PA policies, because their concerns reach donors directly.

At the time of the interview, Salah described both NGOs and MEnA as "in a good mood" about cooperation in a range of implementation sectors, although Salah regretted that the ministry had developed all its regulations from within, without NGO assistance or participation.(21) Salah repeated the frequent claim that his NGO's relations to MEnA and other ministries were dependent on personal connections, rather than a solid institutional arrangement. FoEME's annual General Assembly is open to all regional environmental NGOs, which vote on core priorities for the coming year and elect a four-member secretariat to implement policy. The secretariat and staff conduct most activities, while informing and consulting with member NGOs.

FoEME has been badly battered by the *intifada*. "We don't see any public activity taking place—certainly not for the next three months and maybe not for the next six months," said Bromberg in an interview in November 2000.(22) That period will surely be extended further in the current political climate. FoEME's project to declare the Dead Sea basin a World Heritage and Biosphere Reserve in the United Nations Economic and Social Council has fallen through, as has its work on a Jordanian-Israeli cleanup of the Gulf of Aqaba and its opposition to a planned USAID funded Palestinian highway system. The East Jerusalem office in which this interview took place was closed due to fears of violence and no updates of the FoEME website and or new publications have emerged since early 2000. Reportedly, all cooperation with Egypt has

ceased, as Arab professionals who cooperate with Israelis are blacklisted and boycotted.

### **ARAVA INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES**

The Arava Institute for Environmental Studies (AIES), housed in a kibbutz in the southern deserts of Israel, qualifies for inclusion here only because of its key role in educating Palestinian environmentalists. AIES's board of directors and staff are all either Israeli or American, its registration as an NGO is Israeli (with Canadian and American registration as well), and its program of instruction is in English. Since 1996 a mixed class of Israeli Jews and Arabs, Palestinians, Jordanians, Egyptians and non-Middle Easterners have been taught a wide curriculum of graduate-level environmental science, management, law, policy and ethics in the kibbutz overlooking the Jordanian border. Given its unique location, among its academic specialties are coral reef management in the Gulf of Aqaba, sustainable agriculture, and desert ecology. With a student body of around 30-40 students per semester, AIES has taken its classes on field trips through Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan and Sinai.(23)

Among AIES graduates are a number of Palestinians working with leading environmental NGOs, including former and current staff on IPCRI, the Hebron-based Rural Center for Sustainable Development, and FoEME. Indeed, one of the objectives of the Institute is to create a network of trained leaders in the environmental field who can conduct a dialogue across borders in the Middle East, forming a nexus for future cooperation. With the *intifada*, borders have been closed off to potential Palestinian students and faculty, and pressure within Egypt and Jordan has dissuaded most students from attending. "We thought about whether we should just cancel the whole thing," said program director Miriam Ben-Yosef.(24)

Founder Dr. Alon Tal, the American-born founder of numerous Israeli environmental initiatives, explains that AIES continued

operation with a smaller student body and greater emphasis on the Israeli Arab community, a previously under-served sector, but that funding from pro-peace NGOs in North America and Israel has fallen precipitously.(25) Tal has also launched the Arava Center for Environmental Policy Research, based on recognition that Israel's own environment has languished despite high degrees of funding and awareness. The Center has completed eight projects under contract to public and semi-public agencies, including the Israeli Ministries of Environment and Health and the Jewish National Fund.(26)

### **INHERENT PROBLEMS FOR COOPERATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR LEGITIMACY IN THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY**

As the discussion in this article indicates, cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians in the environmental sector began with great optimism in the early and middle 1990s, but has fallen sharply in the current political climate. The vulnerability to outside political and security crisis is clear, and indeed has been so since previous crises during the Netanyahu administration and conflicts over Hebron and the Israeli tunnel along the Tunnel Mount. During all these periods, binational cooperation has been severely curtailed, but has always recovered. The current *intifada* may follow a similar pattern, but in the death toll, economic dislocation, and political hostility, it seems certain to last far longer.

But behind the banal observation that binational NGO cooperation is staggeringly vulnerable to renewed hostility between Israel and the Palestinian Authority lies a more deep-seated concern about the fate of such cooperative environmental ventures. The two political entities are at such different levels of socioeconomic development and civic education that priorities in one sector are likely to be discounted or ignored in the other. Cases can be seen in the work of the Israel Union for Environmental Defense, the Arava Center for

Environmental Policy Research and other Israeli environmental policy NGOs. The Arava Center, for example, has completed studies on fines for environmental non-compliance, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and policies for protecting open areas and forests.(27) These focuses are the environmental policy concerns of the developed world, and indicate a perception that development-oriented environmental problems like access to clean water and adequate grain, have been solved within Israel, even though this is not true in many specific cases.

Michael Laskier writes that Israeli environmentalism has developed along similar paths and with similar influences as European and American predecessors, with partial successes and numerous failures.(28) Israeli NGOs face continued difficulty reaching sizable enough constituencies to have true impacts on policy. Few Israeli environmental NGOs concentrate on environmental justice, basic environmental education, or development, which limits their ability to find common ground with Palestinian colleagues for whom these concerns are paramount.

As long as the Israeli-Palestinian disparity in prosperity and living conditions continues to widen, it will remain difficult for Israeli and Palestinian environmental NGOs to develop common priorities. On the questions of environmental protection vis-à-vis development, there are special concerns frequently noted in the difficulties of cooperation between NGOs in the developed and developing world. Lawrence Susskind discusses the "North-South split" as one of the three serious obstacles to global cooperation on the environment, along with sovereignty and the need to find adequate incentives to conserve.(29) Although he stresses that "unofficials" including the non-governmental community have key roles to play in the international environmental treaty system, Susskind primarily addresses state-to-state relations and international organizations. But related differences between developed-world and developing-world NGOs have fostered similar difficulties. Environmental NGOs in the



developed world are characterized as principally concerned about biological diversity, climate change, endangered species of animals and plants, or diffuse global concerns, while NGOs in the developing world frequently advocate on issues of displacement of indigenous people, destruction of livelihoods, erosion or loss of agricultural land, urban air pollution, shortages of water, or alternative models of development.(30)

But while disparities between the “North” and “South” are easy to conceptualize, albeit simplistically, they are rarely as pronounced, visible, or in such close proximity as in Israel and Palestine. Impoverished rural Palestinian villages with inadequate water or sewage sit a few kilometers across the Green Line from well-tended, prosperous Israeli towns. Under such conditions, even the most well-meaning NGOs, wishing to cooperate to mutual benefit, are likely to reach profoundly different conclusions on environmental or development priorities.

Other difficulties that are likely to arise between Israeli and Palestinian NGOs include management structures and funding. According to Nitza Nachmias and Amiram Bogot, Israeli NGOs are heavily dependent on state funding via allocations or contract vehicles, and stake out policy issue areas or provide social services as “franchises” for the state, whereas Palestinian NGOs provide the bulk of social services instead of the PA, with funding from outside donors.(31) They see similarity between Israeli and Palestinian NGOs only in the realm of advocacy for rights or empowerment. These differences in structure, organization, audience, aims, and funding will pose continual challenges for Israeli and Palestinian NGOs attempting to cooperate in the environmental field, and for those binational NGOs with joint staffing and management.

The final factor that emerges throughout the discussion of binational NGOs is the struggle for legitimacy in Palestinian affairs. When relations have been generally positive and the peace process has advanced, binational NGOs have played leading roles in bringing together leading scholars, advocates and policymakers.

IPCRI’s *Our Shared Environment* conferences, Arava Institute alumni networks, and FoEME’s general secretariat of regional environmental NGOs, are striking examples. These play invaluable roles in linking professionals and creating opportunities for productive partnerships and knowledge transfer.

When the peace process falters, however, all these forums in which environmental networks can be created have collapsed. The fundamental problem is the shaky legitimacy within the Palestinian Authority of cooperative NGOs whose funding and direction emerge from Israel or Jewish sources. It is notable that IPCRI, FoEME, and the originating institutions for PIES were formed by Israelis or international supporters of the peace process, rather than Palestinians. While all the aforementioned organizations have Palestinian co-directors and staffing, they have never been seen as wholly legitimate in the Palestinian Authority or among the general Palestinian population. Comparing the relative abilities of solely-Palestinian think tanks and environmental advocacy groups, these binational groups fail in conducting operations during periods of political strife, as the *intifada* makes abundantly clear.

Most recently, word has emerged that the Palestinian Ministry of NGO Affairs has actively worked to make life difficult for NGOs cooperating with Israeli organizations. According to Gershon Baskin of IPCRI, the Minister of NGO Affairs is “actually leading the battle against joint activities, and Palestinian institutions that engage in such activities are targeted for punishment and boycott.”(32) The recent track record of political difficulties demonstrates the fundamental unsustainability of the current model for binational cooperation, especially as political strife exacerbates differences in environmental and developmental priorities.

## CONCLUSION

Binational and cooperative environmental NGOs, formed with great fanfare and abundant funding in the post-Oslo period, have proven

severely vulnerable to downturns in the peace process. While they recorded notable initial successes in developing much-needed arenas for networking for environmental professional and advocates, these NGOs have been less capable of jointly implementing projects, and their work in the Palestinian Authority is subject to continual struggles for political legitimacy. Most binational NGOs have given up on registering officially in the PA, and their ability to influence Palestinian policy suffers accordingly.

These difficulties can be blamed generally on the inability of normalization and cooperation to continue during political and military strife, but background issues also contribute to the faltering success. The environmental priorities of Israeli environmentalists may appear irrelevant or abstract to Palestinian activists, who must address more fundamental development needs. The meeting grounds for Israeli-Palestinian projects have frequently been ecosystem and biodiversity issues, which provide ample opportunities for environmental education, but do not meet the basic environmental needs of underdeveloped Palestinian communities. Additionally, the different funding systems and structures of Israeli and Palestinian NGOs may play a contributory role to the difficulties of binational NGOs or cooperative ventures in functioning effectively.

The success of such NGOs in the future will likely depend on the creation of lasting institutional and personal ties between Israeli and Palestinian environmentalists, like those created through IPCRI's conferences, FoEME's secretariat of NGOs, and the Arava Institute's alumni networks. These networks must be maintained and cultivated vigorously in order to withstand the security and political crises that erupt all too frequently. It does not seem likely that Israeli and Palestinian NGOs will have the same priorities in environmental management priorities, however, due to the vast disparity in wealth and development. For that reason, a wise allocation of efforts favoring binational awareness and education campaigns,

and professional and academic cooperation on policy, may be more effective than trying to jointly develop environmental management priorities.

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#### NOTES

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2. Hassassian, Manuel. Speech given June 29, 1999. In Adwan, Sami and Bar-On, Dan (editors). *The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Peace-Building Between Palestinians and Israelis*. PRIME, Beit Jala, January 2000, p. 28.
3. Hockstader, Lee. "Sanctions Suffocating Gaza Fragile Economy." *Washington Post*, December 6, 2000, p. 1.
4. Twite, "Toward a Common Future," in Twite and Menczel, *Our Shared Environment*, Volume One, p. 3.
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6. The notion of "embryonism," refers to the expectation that alternative organs of power—universities, newspapers, municipal councils, banking cooperatives, plus social service agencies—would be developed under

occupation to further Palestinian identity and meet collective social needs. In the ideal, Palestinian scholars and activists envisioned that, "When the historical moment comes, these 'embryonic' institutions [would] act as the nascent alternative state in the making. Any future Palestinian state [would] have to establish its power base on foundations of these nascent organs." (Abdul Hadi, Mahdi. "Identity, Pluralism and the Palestinian Experience." In Abdul Hadi, *Dialogue on Palestinian State-Building and Identity*, p. 23.) To this, Salim Tamari remarked derisively, "This strategy proved to be completely mistaken." (Tamari, Salim. "Government and Civil Society in Palestine." In Abdul Hadi, *Dialogue on Palestinian State-Building and Identity*, p. 30)

7. Interview with Dr. Abdel Rahim Abu Saleh, Wadi Joz, July 17, 2000.

8. Interview with Imad Khatib, Wadi Joz, July 17, 2000.

9. Palestinian-Israeli Environmental Secretariat (PIES). *Nature Knows No Boundaries: Activities Report for the Period July 1997-February 1999*. Wadi Joz, Jerusalem, 1999.

10. Interview with Imad Khatib, Wadi Joz, July 17, 2000.

11. This section is based on my experiences as an environmental program assistant at IPCRI/JEMS in summer 2000, when I participated in some of the projects discussed here. This assessment represents my own views, not those of IPCRI or JEMS.

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