

PEACE Programme
7th International PEACE Conference
on
Academic Cooperation and the Palestinian Universities
Barcelona, 22-23 November 2010

FINAL REPORT¹

The Conference was attended by 70 participants – presidents/rectors, vice presidents/vice-rectors, directors of international relations offices, and senior academics – from Higher Education and research institutions in Europe and the USA. A special feature of the Barcelona Conference was the attendance of representatives of 11 IGOs, NGOs and foundations. (cf. **Annex 2**, List of participants). Nine out of the twelve Palestinian member universities of PEACE were represented by presidents, vice presidents and other faculty members. Unfortunately, the continued difficulties encountered in traveling abroad rendered it impossible for two universities in Gaza (Gaza Islamic and Al Azhar) to attend. The participants appealed to the international community to help put an end to the violation of the right to travel imposed on Palestinian academics in disregard of human rights, and of academic freedom.

The Agenda of the Conference is presented in **Annex 1**.

Opening Session

Professor Antonio Giro Roca, Rector of the Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC) welcomed the participants on behalf of the host institution. Commending PEACE for its commitment to promote academic cooperation and solidarity with the Palestinian universities, he thanked the participants for attending the Conference and looked forward to its debates which would undoubtedly contribute to further strengthening cooperation relations between European and Palestinian universities. He expressed the solidarity that Catalonia feels towards Palestine and expressed the hope that the Conference would support the aim of Palestinian universities to raise their academic standards.

Stressing the importance of the social responsibility of the universities, he referred to the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI) and its 5th International Conference on Higher Education which was to begin the following day at UPC.

Professor Radwan Barakat, Vice President of Hebron University and President of PEACE, thanked the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya for generously hosting the Conference. He expressed special thanks to UNESCO for its constant support to PEACE as well as to Fundacion Universidad es. and its Executive Director, Ms. Monica Margarit, for the important financial support extended to the organization of the Conference. He thanked also the other member universities which have extended financial support to the organization of the Conference.

¹ Note: PEACE will publish the contributions presented at the Conference on its website (www.peace-programme.org). Consequently, the present report will focus mainly on its debates, more especially on the views expressed and the proposals made by the participants.

Presenting briefly the situation of Higher Education in Palestine, he pointed out that the Palestinian universities are relatively young and need to raise the quality and relevance of their programs in order to better meet market and community needs. He stressed the commitment of the Palestinian Prime Minister and of the PNA to improve the university system and highlighted the efforts to enhance the quality of research through international programs with overseas universities. In this respect, he mentioned the contribution of several international organizations and institutions which have set up the Quality Improvement Fund (QIF) with a view to provide overall assistance to Palestinian universities. The Palestinian universities appreciate very highly the PEACE Network, especially for its having enabled 140 Palestinian youngsters to pursue academic education in Europe and to return to Palestine to help their country. He urged the member universities of PEACE not only to continue offering grants but also to collaborate in research programs and to encourage academic exchanges on a broader scale, acting with the conviction that their work represents also a contribution to securing a better and peaceful future for Palestine.

Mrs. Sonia Bahri, Chief of Section for International Cooperation in Higher Education at UNESCO, who could not be present at the Opening Session, addressed the Conference the following day. She greeted the participants on behalf of Mrs. Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO and reiterated the full support of the Organization to the PEACE Programme which aimed at enhancing the quality of teaching and research at Palestinian universities. She highlighted UNESCO's appreciation of the PEACE network as a means to promote dialogue and international cooperation, and emphasized the close working relations established between the UNESCO Secretariat and PEACE. She stressed UNESCO's commitment to sustain PEACE and its contribution to resolving one of the longest conflicts of modern times.

Mr. Andreu Claret, Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) said that he was looking forward to the debates and to finding out how the ALF and PEACE could collaborate. The Foundation's primary mission is to promote intercultural dialogue and to working with civil society. The Foundation focuses on removing mistaken perceptions and stereotypes resulting from prolonged conflict by promoting debate, aimed at developing critical thinking, especially among youth. The Foundation has an active network of NGOs working in Gaza and the West Bank that bring together civil society organizations in Palestine and Europe and, in some cases, Israel. Much of the work of the ALF since the January 2009 war in Gaza has been to try to restore trust. He gave as an example a youth mobility fund for promoting participation of youth in intercultural dialogue, which provides also an opportunity for cooperation between the Anna Lindh Foundation and PEACE.

Ms. Monica Margarit, Director of the Fundación Universidad es. referred to her long involvement in the activities of PEACE in her former capacity as Director of the International Relations Office of the University of Barcelona and as a former member of the Steering Committee of PEACE. She presented the Foundation, which had been set up to assist Spanish universities as a connecting agency, facilitating their international contacts and cooperation. She appreciated PEACE and expressed the hope that more Spanish universities would join it. Such initiatives, she stressed, represented investments in a peaceful and prosperous future, although this depended essentially on the political will of governments and of the international community as a whole.

Dr Hilligje van't Land, Director, Membership and Programme Development of the International Association of Universities (IAU) said that. IAU's aims are to be a global forum for Higher Education and to foster international cooperation as means to peace building. She highlighted the success of the IAU International Conference on the Role of Higher Education in fostering Intercultural Dialogue held in Lebanon in 2009. While there are barriers to dialogue, academic cooperation can overcome cultural, religious and political divides. As a global association whose main aim is to foster international cooperation in higher education, IAU did not focus on one country or region specifically, but aimed to ensure that all universities were free to contribute to debates and to academic exchange. She recognized the importance of the efforts made by PEACE to internationalize Higher Education in Palestine and to open avenues for cooperation with Europe and elsewhere. She wished success to the Conference and looked forward to its debates.

Professor Dumitru Chitoran, Adviser to the PEACE Programme Office at UNESCO, expressed warm thanks to all participants for attending the Conference. Special thanks were addressed to the Polytechnic University of Catalonia for having agreed to host the Conference soon after it became a member of PEACE. He also thanked the universities of Granada and Sevilla (Spain) and the University of Pavia (Italy) for their financial support, which made it possible to assure the participation of 12 Palestinian participants at the Conference. Prof. Irene Hazou and Prof. Henry Diab had agreed to serve as rapporteurs of the Conference, with the help of Ms. Eleanor Brown who was to take extensive notes of the debates.

Session 1: Priority Needs of the Palestinian Universities that could be met through International Academic Cooperation

The Session was moderated by **Prof. Daoud Zatari**, President of the Palestine Technical University. He outlined the structure of Higher Education in Palestine and its key strategic goals: meeting increasing demand for Higher Education, improving quality, ensuring that outputs are relevant, guaranteeing sustainability, developing governance and management and upgrading vocational and technical training. In particular, the demand for increased access was a main challenge, the universities finding it difficult to secure qualified faculty, and adequate financial support. 74% of the students are in the Humanities and Social Sciences and urgent action is needed to increase the number of students enrolled in the Natural and Applied Sciences. For example, only 1% of students study Agriculture. The Israeli confiscation of Palestinian land is a main factor in diminishing agricultural activity.

The Palestinian universities rely very much on working closely together with international partners among which PEACE member universities occupy a very special place. He mentioned several areas in which PEACE could make a benefic contribution, notably: human resources development, capacity building - especially through PhD scholarships-, developing more graduate programs, including doctoral ones, of which there is only one at present in Palestine. Short visits or exchange programs for research based on sharing knowledge and resources would also be most valuable.

Professor Mohammad Alsubu, Head of the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC) of the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, was unable to attend the Conference, but sent his contribution, which was presented by **Professor Imad Khatib**, Secretary General of the Palestinian Academy of Science and Technology. This considered the development of Higher Education in Palestine since the 1950s and included basic data pertaining to the current status of Higher Education. The pressing need to meet the growing demand for access to Higher Education in Palestine was again stressed, together with the related issue of quality. The contribution of the AQAC in enhancing the quality of Higher Education and its work in setting performance indicators for the overall activities of institutions was described.

Professor Adnan Yahya, Vice President for Academic Affairs of Birzeit University, focused on graduate programs and research at Palestinian universities. He suggested increased research contacts and the development of long term joint projects that were mutually beneficial to both Palestinian and external partners. To achieve this, it was suggested as a first step to set up a scientific research committee which could initiate projects. He recommended the holding of workshops in order to familiarize people with such a new initiative, which he suggested might begin in autumn 2011.

Professor Maher Natsheh, Vice President for Academic Affairs of An Najah University, also spoke of the demand for access, quality and equity as key issues for Palestinian Higher Education. These problems were aggravated by the lack of qualified faculty. The older generation of academics was about to retire, while many of the new generation were being lost to the private sector, to universities elsewhere in the Arab world, and outside the region. Hence the need for the universities to ensure scholarships for qualified academics to study abroad, with the stipulation that they return to their universities after having obtained their degrees. He hoped that PEACE would continue to develop its scholarship scheme, that European universities would initiate more Erasmus Mundus and Tempus projects and include Palestinian universities as partners and beneficiaries of such large scale mobility programs of the EC.

Dr. Imad Hodali, the President's Assistant, Al Quds Open University, made a presentation on E-learning platforms, blended learning modules and other distance teaching/learning facilities already in use at Palestinian universities. He stressed the role of new information technologies in alleviating the difficulties resulting from restricted mobility. Al Quds Open University had taken the lead in promoting ICT in Palestinian higher education, opening a Center for Technology in 2008 within the framework of the Avicenna Project implemented by UNESCO with support from the European Commission. The Center includes an Academic Portal with video streaming and many other facilities. However, there were still problems as many students do not have a computer at home, or reliable internet access. It was also necessary to provide adequate training to students and staff on the optimum use of ICTs. He appealed to PEACE member universities to assist in the efforts build up the infrastructure for distance learning at Palestinian universities, to provide more opportunities in this area, particularly for the pre-service and in-service training of teachers and to facilitate the sharing of best practices.

Professor Roland Lombard, President of *Collectif Interuniversitaire pour la Coopération avec les Universités Palestiniennes* (CICUP), introduced the organization, whose main goal is to disseminate information to French academics about the situation of Higher Education in

Palestine. It also aimed at encouraging collaboration between French and Palestinian universities.

Questions and Discussion

The contributions were followed by question and discussion. Several participants mentioned the difficulties encountered by European academics to teach or attend conferences in Palestine. It was pointed out that these difficulties might be overcome through careful planning the nature and duration of the visit together with the hosting institutions. This would be enhanced through advanced information on the PEACE website. Lack of funds to attend international conferences abroad was the main problem for Palestinians. PEACE was requested to consider ways in which it could assist them.

Cooperation and exchange opportunities with the Arab universities were mentioned and PEACE was asked to explore possible ways to extend them. It was pointed out that, although there were difficulties for Palestinian students to study in some Arab countries, many do receive scholarships or benefit from reduced fees to study in Arab universities, especially in Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. However, studying at an Arab university was not a favorite choice for many students.

Palestinians in the Diaspora, especially in academia, comprise a rich resource that should be tapped. While they provide much financial support, their academic contribution is limited at present. Reference was made to the TOKTEN Programme of UNDP which had helped set up a data base of Palestinian expatriates before 2004. It was suggested that PEACE should update the database by contacting Palestinian academics and students abroad and involve them in cooperative networks to assist Palestinian universities.

The need to develop E-learning and ICT integration at Palestinian universities was strongly stressed. In particular, a common virtual library was recommended, so that staff and students could access it across all Palestinian universities. It was also pointed out that technical developments allow now a more intense sharing of resources, providing that there was the commitment and the will to encourage it.

The heavy teaching load in Palestinian universities impeded faculty from doing substantive research. This needs to be addressed if Palestinian universities want to enhance quality and ensure sustainability. Several Palestinian speakers indicated that one way to overcome this problem would be through more collaboration and networking with partner international universities in delivering virtual courses, thus freeing teachers to do research. There would be no problem accrediting such courses, but they would require willingness of European universities to spare faculty members to help deliver them.

There was a lively discussion on the issue of competition in Higher Education. All Higher Education institutions should aim at raising their standards in order to take part actively in international cooperation which assumes increasingly global dimensions. This must also be a priority for the Palestinian universities as well. However, this was often best achieved through cooperation which was recognized even by the most advanced global universities. The

Universitas 21 network is an example. Given the common problems and pressures faced by Palestinian universities, it was essential that they co-operate with each other as well as with universities elsewhere, if they were to ensure the best use of limited resources.

Session 2: European Support to Palestinian Universities: A Cornerstone in the Development of Palestinian Higher Education

The Session was moderated by **Professor Ignacio Molina**, Vice President of the University of Granada. Introducing the topic from the perspective and perceptions of European universities, he stressed the important role of the Palestinian universities for the development of the Palestinian society and emphasized the need to assist them overcome isolation. That went hand in hand with the need to raise the quality, efficiency and relevance of their programs, in terms of curriculum development, improvement of the student/teacher ratio and availability of resources. He emphasized the importance of postgraduate education and research, suggesting that there was a need for postgraduate schools and quality research centers, which can drive the rest of the research system,

Stressing the need to make increased use of the higher education mobility programs of the European Commission and of foundations and other institutions, he commented that there was room to find more partners, referring in this respect to the Euro-Arab Foundation for Higher Studies in Granada, which promotes cooperation, exchange and dissemination of knowledge and intercultural dialogue. In addition to support available at national and international levels, PEACE could also look at existing sources at the regional level. This is true of Spain as well as of many other European countries. The need to tap new funding sources was rendered more acute by the fact that there are increasing requests for assistance from institutions in the developing world and the European universities find it difficult to respond positively to all of them. The University of Granada had always supported the Palestinian universities, but it also has links with other countries whose assistance needs to be considered.

Professor Paul van Cauwenberge, Rector of Gent University, stressed its strong involvement in cooperation with Palestinian universities. Following the signing of an agreement between the Belgian authorities and the Palestinian authorities in May this year, cooperation projects have been set up in three main areas: education, local administration and health care. There was also cooperation in the reconstruction of schools in the West Bank, and for capacity building development of e-learning. Providing details about the cooperation between Flemish and Palestinian universities, he recommended a more structured approach, referring in particular to the opportunities for research cooperation in Science and in Medicine, which were open to competent scholars from Palestine. He reiterated the commitment of Gent University to further promote cooperation with Palestinian universities and emphasized the role played by PEACE in the respect, as exemplified by the number of Palestinian students who could study in Gent through the PEACE scholarship Scheme.

Professor Christine Mengin, Vice President of Université Paris 1, stressed that the university, which is devoted to Social Sciences and the Humanities, had a long tradition of cooperation with Palestinian universities and has been engaged in a number of forms of international cooperation, such as: international student exchanges, joint PhDs and other graduate degrees. Noting that the Human Sciences are at the heart of cooperation, she cautioned against the risk of turning academic topics into political matters. Paris 1 had contributed to the development of various programs leading to the BA diplomas. It has also provided academic staff through exchange programs, which the university had with both Israeli and Palestinian universities. She referred specifically to joint degrees, pointing out that, while there are inherent difficulties to organize them, they offered opportunities that need to be explored. Recognizing the issues raised by the Palestinian colleagues in session 1, she stressed that PEACE could be the place for developing international links, where different universities can design what would be their priorities.

There was a need to clarify the meaning and demands of international cooperation, taking it further than independent bilateral agreements.

Professor Oywind Wistrom from Vestfold University College, Norway, presented his contribution from two distinct roles: as the representative of the College, and as a representative of UNESCO, since he had been working for some time for the UNESCO Office in Ramallah, helping in particular with UNESCO's action in the field of education in Gaza. He considered the educational system in the West Bank and Gaza and the complications posed by occupation, and noted that although legally Israel was responsible for education, it did not fulfill that obligation. Instead, the Palestinians assumed this responsibility and what they have achieved was remarkable, as indicated by the increased enrollment rate at all levels of education. There are however many difficulties to overcome for instance with discipline, high dropout rates, etc. But the main difficulty continued to be posed by occupation. As a temporary UNESCO staff member, he identified three main areas in which international cooperation (and consequently PEACE) could bring a contribution: improved management, improved quality of teaching and improved teacher training. He cited cases when a number of approved projects could not be started on time because the Palestinian universities could not find a European university consultant. Better communication and information among PEACE member universities was therefore necessary. Pointing out that UNESCO was trying to build up in-service teacher training in special needs education and in ICT as a pedagogical tool; he invited PEACE member universities to join in these efforts.

Professor Ulrich Eckern of the University of Augsburg offered a concrete example of what European universities could do in the initiative taken by a European Committee for Establishing a Centre of Excellence in Mathematics and Theoretical Physics at Birzeit University. The choice of the field was deliberate, considering that theoretical subjects are easier to set up given present conditions in Palestine. Launched in October 2003, the project was supported by PEACE which helped in particular with securing approval to set up a UNESCO Chair (2006). In 2008, an international conference on modern trends in mathematics and physics was held in Birzeit University, with some 20 participants from outside Palestine. In 2009 there was a summer school for graduate students in mathematics. Another conference was planned for 2012 and it is hoped that it will be well attended, including by American researchers.

Questions and Discussion

These developed the issues raised by the contributors, while also putting forward concrete proposals for action. For example, the potential of PEACE to assist the Teacher Education Project was real and should be used. These comments were reinforced by the President of PEACE who pointed out that the PEACE network could be used to enhance a variety of significant projects which might be linked with the scholarship programme.

It was pointed out that projects are a main way of accessing funding sources, but it is important to assure their sustainability. Another speaker identified the need for a forum to continue this debate, to communicate needs and achievements, and to look for partners in specific areas, stressing the need that it is important to know the expertise of colleagues available through PEACE, especially of experts for the Palestinian Diaspora. This required a reliable data-base which could be actively maintained by the PEACE office based at UNESCO, Paris. It was explained that the proposal does not mean suggesting a new structure. It is aimed at achieving more effective and strategic communication.

The moderator singled out the importance of setting up centers of excellence in specific fields (e.g. agriculture in the south or health and medicine). Professor Barakat noted that the PEACE Programme belongs to all Palestinian universities and that although it is currently focused on its scholarship scheme, the opportunities were there for all universities to build up their bilateral agreements, and to build on the structures already in place through PEACE. The key idea that came out of the discussion was the need to

take full advantage of the PEACE network. The network should improve its visibility and information should be available, so that when a project began or was proposed, everyone should have access to the relevant information.

Session 3: New Initiatives in Support of Palestinian Higher Education and Research

The Session was moderated by **Professor Hassan Dweik**, Vice President of Al Quds University. He presented examples of initiatives taken by universities in various parts of the world in support of their Palestinian counterparts. This has contributed to increasing the number of Palestinian students at European universities, to the development of research in various fields (including nanotechnology) and the setting up of museums for interactive Science and Mathematics. Flemish universities have been particularly active. There were also initiatives, elsewhere, such as the one taken by Toronto University in Canada to offer full access to its library facilities to Palestinian students and faculty members, so that all journals and books can be accessed by them on line. This is an important initiative, but has not yet been followed by any of the European universities. He stressed that there were ample opportunities to initiate new projects and to apply for funds from various sources.

Professor Gianni Vaggi of the University of Pavia presented a new initiative taken by a consortium of Italian universities, with governmental support aimed at enhancing teaching and research at seven Palestinian universities. The overall objective of this integrated program of high level professional training is to help Palestinian universities set up their own graduate programs and contribute to their sustainable development in the medium/long term. It foresees the training of 14 researchers in complete three - year PhD programs, and the organization of a joint multidisciplinary integrated course. The project grew out of the experience gained through the previous project which had led to a multidisciplinary course, involving one Italian and one Palestinian university working together. He said that both he and the University of Pavia had benefitted from its participation in the PEACE Programme.

Professor Fadi Kattan of Bethlehem University talked about the Master program in International Cooperation and Development (MICAD) at Bethlehem University, developed with the support of the universities of Pavia and Siena. Born from cooperation between a number of universities which worked together on summer schools and research, the program was aimed at upgrading skills of staff of NGOs in Palestine, an important role in developing human resources in Palestine. Approved as a Tempus project, including a consortium of partner universities, it had a scientific committee and a consulting board made up of NGOs from Italy and Palestine. The trainees come mostly from NGOs, but fresh graduates and public employees were also admitted. It is a part time course, taught in English in modules over two linked weekends. This helped foreign professors as a module could be delivered intensively. Funding has been provided by the Italian Conference of the Catholic Church and by the EU/TEMPUS. It was, however, important to plan how to make the program sustainable after funding stops.

Professor George Miley, of the University of Leiden and Vice President of the International Astronomical Union, presented the activities of the Union. He stressed that Astronomy has important links to development, through technology and skills, science and research, culture and society. The Union is active in promoting the teaching of astronomy at all levels of education, while paying also attention to research and public outreach. IAU contributed to building up research capacity, inspiring young disadvantaged children and building up a feeling that they were citizens of the world. This idea of fostering tolerance and a sense of world citizenship was based on the assumption that nationalism was unimportant when you understood the place of the Earth within the Universe. The International Astronomical Union had expressed its support to promote an astronomy project in Palestine in cooperation with the PEACE Programme.

Dr. Suleiman Baraka of Al Aqsa University outlined such a possible project; aptly entitled “Astronomy for Peace”. He presented a short film, based on his personal initiative of teaching astronomy to young children in Palestine. “A view of the sky”, he said, “through the lenses of a telescope is an unforgettable experience for them: looking up to the sky enables them to see the beauty of the universe, even though they cannot leave their village”. Through astronomy people who are bounded within Gaza can feel free. He expressed his desire to change stereotyped ideas, and to show that the beauty of the sky was for everybody. He asked for support to build up the initiative into a larger scale project aimed at promoting teaching, research and outreach activities in Gaza.

Professor Espen Bjertness, University of Oslo, presented a number of health related projects undertaken by his University, with Norwegian governmental support in the occupied Palestinian territories. Referring to the principles of action established by the World Health Organization (WHO) within the framework of its Health Equity Program, he pointed out that the right to health in Palestine was compromised by the constraints of occupation. However, the dramatic situation of health care in Palestine could be improved through long term training at every level and through small un-bureaucratic projects, which offer also possibilities for research. The projects undertaken by the University of Oslo together with Palestinian researchers had been benefic to both sides. He expressed the hope that more people and more institutions will get involved in PEACE projects and recommended as a possible line of action expanding medical research to solve health care in Palestine, including through a possible PhD program in public health.

Dr. Ruediger Klein, the Executive Director of the European Federation of National Academies of Sciences and Humanities (ALLEA), presented the objectives and the activities of the federation which focuses its action on science policy, science and ethics, intellectual property rights, science education and evaluation. Referring to the recent initiative taken by ALLEA to promote science and research in Palestine, he insisted that while discussions on this issue are useful, what really matters is to move over to concrete action. He recommended setting up small groups of intellectuals getting together and leading the activities and reiterated that ALLEA is open to cooperation with PEACE in this respect.

Professor Kashchandra G. Raghothama of Purdue University, USA, said that there was support for Palestinians at American universities, but there were also difficulties in trying to establish stable links with the Palestinian universities and in arranging for Palestinian students to study at American universities. He highlighted recent activities, especially with Bethlehem University. He noted that American universities did not have the funding opportunities to participate in the PEACE program, but some were keen to be more involved.

Questions and Discussion

The ensuing discussion was brief, as time was limited. One comment referred to the possibility for the American universities to work in groups, for instance with French and Palestinian universities, and then to gradually make such cooperation arrangements more official. Professor Barakat noted that it was more difficult when it comes to practical issues, but that there was an opportunity to exchange ideas, to develop consortiums and to develop bilateral academic cooperation. He suggested the idea of PEACE as a ‘clearing-house; for academic information and exchange in support of this. He commented that the work of PEACE was entirely on voluntary basis and suggested that PEACE conferences should provide an opportunity to present ideas for later practice.

Special session devoted to the Role of Universities in Promoting Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations

The special session was chaired by **Professor W. John Morgan** of the University of Nottingham, and also President of the UK Commission to UNESCO. Welcoming the participants to the special session, he reminded everyone that the acronym of the organization stood for PEACE and stressed the role of dialogue in achieving it. This was not an abstract philosophical question, but one that could contribute fundamentally to conflict resolution and to creating the conditions for a lasting peace. He reminded delegates that universities, as prominent intellectual and cultural leaders of the communities they serve, had a moral responsibility to promote dialogue between civilizations. He welcomed the key-note speaker Professor Federico Mayor, President of the Culture of Peace Foundation, Co-Chair of the UN Alliance for Dialogue among Civilizations, and former Director-General of UNESCO.

Professor Federico Mayor gave an inspiring address on the role of Higher Education in present day society including its key role in promoting dialogue among cultures and civilizations, which was at the heart of UNESCO's mission. He pointed out some essential points of reference: listening, dialogue, expressing oneself. He emphasized that, today, perhaps for the first time in history, there was the possibility of building peace. We have the possibility of action, of being active citizens, not only spectators, while this mobilization of people must be led by the universities. He drew a distinction between revolution and evolution, showing that evolution was better as it did not imply force. He highlighted the need for education if people were to be responsible for themselves and others and to work together to free humanity from living in fear. Academics, he said, must be the mobilizers of society. For example, the academic community had been too silent on matters of public concern, such as bioethics. Such issues were often dealt without the informed advice of the academic community. The university should be a watch tower, looking out for the public good. This meant not only advising when asked, but also anticipating, foreseeing and bringing problems and possible solutions to the public notice.

He concluded by referring to the emergence of a global consciousness, which could lead to important changes in trends. This would ensure that the legacy we provided for the next generations was guided by democratic principles and by dialogue. It meant also a fundamental change from a culture of domination and war to a culture of peace, from a culture of revenge to one of dialogue which would allow us to identify what was just. It was the responsibility of universities to be among the leaders of such a worldwide transition towards such a culture of peace, in which Palestine could develop in conditions of freedom and democratic participation.

Professor Raimondo Cagiano de Azevedo, of the University of Rome 1, *La Sapienza*, reinforced the idea that education was the cornerstone of peace building. In order to achieve that function, it was unavoidable that the first block of the education pillar should be *excellence*. Universities must show this in all aspects of their activity: teaching, research, service to the community and the system as a whole. Explaining the work of the UNESCO Chair at the University of Rome, he stressed the importance of international cooperation, which needed to expand its outreach beyond Europe, an area that was now substantially developed.

Professor Nabil El-Hagggar, Vice President of Université de Lille, emphasized the close relationship between culture and education, pointing out however that historical evidence shows that culture had often been intimately related to barbarism as well, as the Israeli occupation of Palestine showed. Yet, he noted that one cannot overcome barbarism and obtain freedom without culture. The cultural struggle in Palestine was against both the barbarism of the occupation, as well as against Palestine's own inherent barbarisms. Contemporary Palestine needed a culture that prepared its citizens to be open, to reach out to the distant and the other. In this respect, besides creating and imparting knowledge, Palestinian universities must be at the heart of the cultural question and act as a pivot for the democratic ambition.

Dr. Hilligie-van't Land, of the International Association of Universities (IAU) presented the work of the Association and its mission to strengthen Higher Education worldwide. Seven Palestinian universities

were full members of IAU. She emphasized the role of universities to support and enhance dialogue through leadership building and outlined the barriers to dialogue such as lack of peace, lack of government support, lack of communication, and prevalence of competition rather than cooperation. Universities should not only grant degrees, but should also teach the values needed for living in society. The internationalization of universities allows for more opportunities for dialogue. She stressed the importance of getting HE leadership more directly involved. IAU sees its role as facilitator and for maintaining open doors.

Professor Metin Baydar, President of Suleyman Demirel University, Turkey, focused on the changes brought about by the intense internationalization of Higher Education. This required a shift in the way we thought, acted and presented ideas. Higher Education institutions had to assume their responsibilities in forming new mind sets, in training not only professionals but also citizens, and in promoting tolerance and dialogue. Universities had to be socially responsible in order to help form a new generation of global citizens. This involved the need to rethink the content of education. Associations such as IAU could help universities meet these challenges. Dialogue should be based on enrichment through diversity and intercultural communication.

Dr. Irene Hazou, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs at Bethlehem University spoke about the experience of Palestinian universities in engaging in and promoting dialogue. Palestine was isolated and the stereotypical assumptions that exist impeded true dialogue. Stating that knowledge alone, whether of oneself or of the other, was not sufficient for dialogue, she emphasized that, in addition to imparting knowledge, universities in Palestine should help students develop skills, values and attitudes that were necessary to help them unravel the complexities of the situation and prepare them to tell their story well. She outlined some initiatives taken by Bethlehem University in leadership programs, advocacy courses and civic engagement. She pointed out that PEACE was well placed to contribute towards better understanding by engaging in joint research on intercultural dialogue.

Professor Tuomo Melasuo of the Tampere Peace Research Institute, Tampere University, Finland, commented on the intellectual ambience of the Conference. He looked at different understandings of the word “university” noting that a university could provide a first step towards wider cooperation. He acknowledged the serious problems caused by the occupation in Palestine and how that has distorted culture. He observed that, in spite of the large number of students who were in the humanities in the Palestinian universities, there had been no reference to the role and importance of cultural studies. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of academic cooperation with Palestinian universities in promoting intercultural dialogue.

Questions and Discussion

The presentations were followed by a lively discussion on a number of topics, some of which had already been tackled during the previous sessions. Thus, Prof. Frederic Ogee reiterated the importance of distinguishing between competition and competitiveness. He acknowledged the merits of university collaboration, yet the notion of competition between institutions and imposition of world ranking had a detrimental effect on the mutually beneficial cooperation between universities, especially for universities in developing countries. Since these universities would never be able to compete and their countries would lose their best students to high ranking universities, especially if there was a chance for a scholarship.

Mr. Mayor, as well as others in the audience, confirmed their own dislike of ranking systems, which were described as artificial. In fact interaction between universities has shown that universities in the top ranks can learn a lot from developing universities. The IAU representative confirmed that this was also the position of the Association, which had launched debates about the use, misuse and side-effects of ranking,

warning that governments tend to use them for short term political ends. She highlighted the need to keep the debate going on, concentrating on measuring quality and excellence, while being aware that there are areas, such as involvement in inter-cultural dialogue, that are difficult to measure and hence do not appear in any form in the ranking criteria. Other important effects of ranking especially in the UK were mentioned. It was underlined that vice chancellors want to partner with universities that are strong, which poses a danger that could lead universities to neglect their social responsibilities.

The issue of the brain drain was also discussed. Although it represented a serious concern for Palestine, yet the country could not do without the kind of education that high quality universities provide. The Palestinian universities have set arrangements in place that committed recipients of grants to return and serve for a number of years. In order to achieve this, students and alumni of the PEACE Programme needed to be involved more closely.

On the issue of the Palestinian-Israeli academic cooperation, several speakers pointed out that, if academics cannot engage in dialogue then what hope was there for the rest of society? The Palestinian response was that such cooperation did exist in the past but unfortunately did not help move the peace process forward. Israeli academic institutions, even those with links to Palestinian universities do not denounce the actions and hardships perpetrated by the Israeli occupation on Palestinian universities and the education system in general. After the war on Gaza and the silence of the Israeli academia at the atrocities committed there, relations with Israeli universities were severed. It is now up to the politicians to muster the political will and take a clear stand. Otherwise, dialogue between the two peoples is very hard to continue. Mr. Mayor called on the Palestinians to preserve their optimism since in the past agreement had been close. Referring to his personal experience as a participant in peace processes, he pointed out that success has always depended on the ability to keep the contending parties talking about the future rather than dwelling on the past and present. He went further to point out that intra-religious dialogue was as important as inter-religious dialogue and that parties should not have so many asymmetries within themselves. He also hoped that the hand that President Obama has extended to the Muslim world could mark a new beginning.

The view was expressed that, for the Palestinians, Justice, and not dialogue, was the issue. Professor Morgan, referring to a recent publication by Amartya Sen, commented that what counts as justice in a conflict situation can only be achieved through dialogue.

The President of PEACE commented on the importance of looking at universities from a broader perspective. He cited 9/11 and reflected on the role that universities and the university associations should play in the dialogue between cultures and whether they are teaching and learning about the “other”. This was also stressed by the IAU representative, who referred to its role to provide a platform for sharing good practice. She stressed that there are never only two sides but several and hence a multi-perspective approach should be taken when considering the other. Professor Mayor closed the debates by stressing that inter-cultural dialogue requires in the first place intense inter-university dialogue cooperation. It is through their joint work that the universities can design the scenarios for a better future.