

PEACE Programme
8th Session of the General Assembly
Barcelona, 23 November 2010

Report of Activities

This report presents the activities carried out by the PEACE Programme over the three year period that has elapsed since the 7th Session of the General Assembly held in Paris on 5 November 2007). The Steering Committee examined the activity of PEACE at several meetings (especially at its last meeting held at UNESCO in December 2009) and comprehensive reports were sent to the member universities and to the PEACE cooperation partners. For this reason, this report focuses mainly on the main achievements of the Network, while also pointing out the difficulties encountered and possible ways to improve action in the future. The presentation follows the main lines of action of PEACE.

I. HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT AND ACADEMIC MOBILITY

As in the past, activities in these areas were carried out through: *(i) grants for Palestinian students to study abroad, and (ii) faculty exchanges.*

1. The PEACE Scholarship Scheme

The evolution of the number of grants over the last 7 academic years is presented in the Table below:

Academic	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09-	2009/10	2010/11
Number of men/year grants	4	7	17	26	31	29	29
Full grants offered by member universities	2	3	8	17	24	17	19
Grants Supplemented by PEACE contribution	2	4	9	9	7	12	10

As can be seen, after a steady increase, the number of PEACE grantees has stabilized at around 30 for each academic year. This has been possible due to several factors: (a) several PEACE member-universities increased considerably their offers of full grants, (b) PEACE could increase its contribution to covering costs for a larger number of students who had been offered only partial grants: (€35.412,03 in 2006-2007, €21.994,84 in 2008, €26.440 in

2009 and €11.360 in 2010 (until 31 October), and (c) beginning with 2008, 9 PEACE candidates received grants through the Erasmus Mundus ECW project coordinated by VUB.

The number of 30 PEACE grantees per year can and should be maintained in order to meet the staff development needs of the Palestinian universities. For that purpose it is proposed to:

- renew the appeal to the member-universities to offer at least one full grant each, as discussed at the last General Assembly. Bilateral agreements between Palestinian and European universities could also help increase the number of PEACE grants;
- continue efforts to secure the award of Erasmus Mundus ECW grants to PEACE candidates and to submit TEMPUS projects which involve academic exchanges and student and staff mobility;
- use the Academic and Research Programs supported by PEACE to increase the number of grants.

At the same time, we wish to draw attention to the fact that it is high time for PEACE to seriously reconsider the way the Scholarship Scheme is organized and functions in order to turn it into a genuine *instrument for faculty development and capacity building* at Palestinian universities. This requires careful planning of needs by the Palestinian universities advanced contacts between them and the European ones at the level of faculties and Departments, so as to secure the placing of the submitted candidates. Increased use should be made of sandwich studies and if possible, joint degrees, in order to reduce costs.

2. Academic Exchanges

The action of PEACE in this field has been less systematic and less successful. However, many of our European member universities are actively involved in academic exchanges with the Palestinian ones. Exchanges under various other arrangements are also taking place regularly. PEACE could serve a very useful role of coordination by pooling the resources of its member universities so as to increase the impact of action. The task ahead for PEACE is therefore to turn academic exchanges into a *major form of action of PEACE*.

II. ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES AND RESEARCH

PEACE has continued to support the **Academic Projects** already initiated in the past, particularly through setting up **consortia** of member universities, capable to launch, secure funding and implement activities. The selective list below selects is indicative in this respect:

- **Centre of Excellence in Mathematics and Theoretical Physics at Birzeit University, Palestine (ECCE-Birzeit)**. Many of our member universities are active supporters of this major academic undertaking, based on broad international cooperation and support to enhance teaching and research capabilities in these fields. A UNESCO Chair and Network for Mathematics and Theoretical Physics was set up in 2007 with UNESCO support at Birzeit University to serve as a focal point for the Centre. A **Project Workshop** was held on **28-30 July 2008** at Birzeit University.

- **Centre of Advanced Studies and Research in International Cooperation and Development in Palestine (CASR-ICD).** Initiated by the Universities of Pavia and Siena, with support from the Italian Ministry of Higher Education and Research, this project has started with a Master Degree Programme launched initially at the university of Bethlehem. Several grants have been offered to Palestinian students and academic staff within the framework of the project. A new initiative (*Enhancement of the Palestinian University System through an integrated program of high professional training for seven Palestinian universities*) has been initiated by a consortium of Italian universities. The consortium of Italian universities will assist seven Palestinian universities in training or upgrading the training of their academic staff (14 faculty members will obtain their PhD degrees in Italy) and the joint preparation of teaching modules.

- **Teacher Education.** PEACE has tried to associate its member universities to the execution of **UNESCO's major Palestinian Teacher Education Strategy, implemented with the financial support of the European Commission.** It has created a consortium of universities which have expressed interest in taking an active part in various components of the Strategy, especially curriculum development for initial and in service training of teachers and facilitating post graduate studies abroad for specialists in Education. Two PEACE grantees have obtained their PhDs at the University of Nottingham and Granada, respectively and have returned to Palestine. PEACE will continue to work in close cooperation with the UNESCO Ramallah Office and with the people and institutions designated by the Palestinian side for the execution of the Strategy.

- **Open and Distance Learning (ODL) at Palestinian Universities.** Discussions on the launching of this proposed Project – to be carried out with the support of UNESCO- have not led to a well elaborated project yet. However, it can play a very useful role in meeting specific needs and overcoming difficulties encountered by the Palestinian universities at present through (i) assisting Palestinian higher education institutions to cope with the increased demand for access; (ii) enhancing the quality of programmes and developing new ones in priority areas for national development; (iii) surmounting the persistent difficulties created by the repeated closures of institutions and the obstacles to free movement of faculty and students. The project builds on the Avicenna Project, by further developing the capacity of the Avicenna Knowledge Centre at Al Quds Open University, while enhancing infrastructure facilities and service capacities for ODL at the other Palestinian universities. The ultimate goal is to establish a **Virtual Palestinian University**, working in close partnership with the traditional universities and based on strong ties with similar institutions abroad.

Several new initiatives have emerged in preparation of the International PEACE Conference in Barcelona, namely:

- Proposal for cooperation between **PEACE and ALLEA**, the umbrella organization of the European academies to strengthen cooperation in research and higher education between Palestine and Europe.

- Promotion of **teaching and research in Astronomy at Gaza Islamic University.** The International Astronomical Union and several PEACE member universities have expressed their readiness to support the project, starting with the donation of telescopes and other equipment for a space lab.

The discussion of these two initiatives at the Barcelona Conference and at the General Assembly could develop them into successful future projects.

At the same time, PEACE should continue efforts to resume past projects which were interrupted, namely *Water Resources Management* and *Microelectronics and Computer Science*.

The recommendations of the last International PEACE Conference (Paris, 4-5 November 2007) devoted to promoting research at Palestinian universities and of the national follow up Workshop on the same issue held in Nablus in January 2008 could not be turned into clear projects. It is therefore proposed to follow:

- to complete the **national survey of research** in Palestine,
- to elaborate a **Rostrum of Palestinian academics** abroad, by updating existing information collected through the TOKTEN Project for Palestine, with the help of the Palestinian Academy of Science and Technology, of university presidents, Professional Associations, etc.

I. REINFORCEMENT OF THE PEACE PROGRAMME

There have been sustained efforts to reinforce the PEACE Network with regard to membership, activities and links with IGOs, NGOs and universities worldwide. The preparation for the Barcelona Conference and for the present General Assembly Session are a good indication of the positive results obtained.

Membership

The current membership (54 European and 12 Palestinian universities) is certainly an achievement. However, membership should continue to be a major concern for the future. While we have secured a number of very important and actively supporting members (the Polytechnic University of Catalonia and the University of Roma La Sapienza in the first place), we have seen the loss of interest of several other universities. The problem we are facing concerning membership is the loss of interest and even withdrawal of several member universities (the Faculty of Life Science of the University of Copenhagen l'universite libre de Bruxelles).

In mind that the membership fee amount is very reasonable (500 euros for most universities except few have to pay 1000 euros). Prof. Radwan Barakat agreed to follow up this issue with my correspondences with the universities.

PEACE at present has a core of some 25-30 active member-universities - not counting the Palestinian ones - which pay the membership fee regularly, offer PEACE grants, initiate or take part in academic programmes. The other universities - which we continue to list as members because they have not indicated their intention to withdraw - are not active. The question of membership needs to be seriously discussed by the General Assembly.

Relations with UNESCO and the European Commission The Steering Committee and the PEACE Office had paid special attention to reinforcing links and securing the **support of UNESCO** to PEACE activities. Members of the Committee met high level UNESCO officials on several occasions. They asked for such support, while also pointing out the readiness of PEACE to take part in the activities foreseen by UNESCO to enhance capacities for higher learning and research in Palestine. UNESCO's financial contribution to cover costs for the Barcelona Conference is a good indication of its continued support of PEACE activities.

Members of the Steering Committee had talks at relevant units of the **European Commission** in Brussels in order to ascertain possibilities for support to PEACE. This has materialized into financial support for the organization of the Barcelona Conference and for follow up activities.

Links with NGOs of Higher Education Further steps are needed to build up closer links with the major NGOs of higher education, (IAU, the European Association of Universities, the Arab Association of Universities, etc.). Useful links have been continued by PEACE with CICUP (Committee for Interuniversity Cooperation with Universities in Palestine), a very active group of concerned French academics who are committed to developing cooperation with Palestinian universities. Several CICUP members are present at the General Assembly. The possibility to set up links with similar structures BRICUP, BICUP, AIRDUP, etc. are being examined.

The PEACE website It includes a presentation of the PEACE Programme, a more extensive and better structured presentation of its activities and a section devoted to recent news and events of the Network. A special section is devoted to the Higher Education System in Palestine, with the possibility to accede to the websites of the Palestinian universities. The member-universities are invited to provide relevant information regularly, in order to be included in the web-site.

Meetings of the Steering Committee In addition to two regular meetings held in Paris in 2008 and 2009, a successful consultation via internet was organized in March-April 2008. This practice should be continued. The members of the Steering Committee were in constant touch through telephone and Internet communication. Contacts between Committee members and the taking of decisions between meetings were facilitated by the PEACE Office at UNESCO. On each occasion it met in Paris, it had high-level discussions with officials in the UNESCO secretariat. The PEACE Office at UNESCO kept the member-universities informed about their outcome.

Secretariat services The PEACE Programme Office at UNESCO continued to provide useful services to the Network. Professor D. Chitoran has continued to work on a voluntary basis. The Office hired temporary assistance for short periods of time, when needed. The current part-time assistant, Ms. Aïssata Ba, has familiarized herself with the work of the office and is doing an excellent job. The PEACE Office in Palestine has been more active with regard to the Scholarship Scheme and with preparations for the Barcelona Conference,

Conclusions

The 2001-2004 period has been a very challenging one for the PEACE Programme, with many ups and downs, with some achievements, but also with weaknesses and failures. The history of this General Assembly is significant in this respect.

Despite the numerous difficulties encountered, we were encouraged to see not only our member-universities, but also other institutions of higher education in various parts of the world, very much concerned by the harsh conditions imposed on the Palestinian universities. There is a new wave of academic solidarity with the Palestinian universities. It is the task of the PEACE Programme to build on this potential.

The 8th Session of the General Assembly takes place in a positive (although still fragile) climate of hope. It is within this context that the Steering Committee invites the member-universities

and the international academic community to support us in the effort to renew the PEACE Programme, to render it more effective in promoting academic cooperation with the Palestinian universities. We strongly believe that it is also a contribution of the academic community to finding a solution to one of the largest conflicts of our time, a solution that can only be based on the principles of peace, justice and security, allowing the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to live side by side in two independent states.