

Belfast-Jersualem Civil Society Partnership
Visit to Jerusalem
30th November to 6th December 2005

Since the Belfast-Jerusalem Civil Society Partnership's international conference in April 2005 there have been a number of important moves forward in both Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine. Representatives of B-JCSP's member organisations therefore decided to meet on a face-to-face basis on 6th December 2005 in Jerusalem to discuss how civil society could best support these developments.

Work Placements

During the meeting, the Partnership agreed to deliver a programme of work placements for up to 12 Israelis and Palestinians. This would involve participants travelling to Northern Ireland 5th to 12th February 2006 to work in various community-based organisations. Placements will be carefully chosen according to participants' needs, experience and background to include for example, women's rights, housing, interface and community development organisations. It is anticipated that the programme will:

- Provide participants with real practical experience of community building, strengthening civil society and conflict transformation in the Northern Ireland context.
- Enable participants to share and apply their own experience and knowledge with individuals and organisations in Northern Ireland.
- Equip participants with new skills and tools they will be able to apply in their home context.
- Develop participants' understanding of the Northern Ireland conflict and peace process, particularly by exposing participants to the perspectives of different communities involved.

The B-JCSP hopes this programme will increase the capacity and potential of individuals and organisations in both regions to contribute to community building, strengthening civil society and conflict transformation.

Funding

The long-term sustainability of the Partnership was also discussed - particularly in terms of funding. Jack O'Connor, Director of the Special EU Programmes Body Community Initiatives and Kerry McIvor from Belfast Local Strategy Partnership in Northern Ireland were therefore invited to attend the meeting to share their knowledge and expertise regarding potential funding opportunities. During their visit to the region, Jack and Kerry also spent several days working with the Beit Sahour municipality to build their capacity to develop proposals – particularly in relation to the EU Partnership for Peace programme. This invitation followed a visit by Fuad Kokaly, Director-General, PA, Bethlehem Region, and former Mayor of Beit Sahour to Northern Ireland in August 2005. This visit was supported by B-JCSP and involved Fuad speaking to community workers from across the political and religious spectrum in North Belfast about his experience of peacemaking and peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine.