



**Dr. Ibrahim Matar - Coordinator for Palestinian University Students (Palestine) Jerusalem - Rome International Seminar**

**ROLE OF UNIVERSITY COOPERATION FOR PEACE  
AND DEVELOPMENT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO UNIVERSITIES  
IN THE BALKANS AND MIDDLE EAST**

It is relevant to highlight that the current editions of the International Seminar for University cooperation in the Middle East and Balkans evolved from an earlier program on the role of the Universities in cooperation, development and peace. This earlier program was initiated in 2005 as a Masters program in multidisciplinary affairs by the Italian Consulate General in Jerusalem for bilateral educational cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli Universities.

The first encounter between the rectors of 4 Palestinian and 5 Israeli Universities took place in Jerusalem at the Italian Consulate General office in Jerusalem. In this meeting agreement was reached to collaborate on a Masters program to be held in Rome for graduate students from Palestinian and Israeli Universities,

As a follow up to this meeting an agreement for bilateral cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian Universities was signed in Rome to this effect at the rectors office of Rome La Sapienza University.

The Italian Cooperation of the Italian Foreign Ministry funded four editions of the Master program which was under the administration of UNESCO. These four editions went on during the years 2005 to 2014 sponsored by the Italian Cooperation office of the Italian Foreign Ministry.

Altogether 100 students participated in these programs divided equally between Palestinian and Israeli students. The joint sessions for the Masters program were held at La Sapienza University in Rome. Graduation ceremonies for the participating graduate students were held in their respective Universities in Palestine and Israel.

This unique program was successful and achieved its objectives. In a follow up evaluation undertaken by UNESCO indicated that the students who participated in this

program have come out with greater knowledge and understanding of the steps needed to bring about peace in the long standing Israeli Palestinian conflict.

The students were also able to benefit professionally from the multi disciplinary approach of the Masters program in Social Sciences and Humanitarian Affairs. Many of the graduates were able to obtain good jobs with International and local NGOs and government positions in their respective countries. The students were also able to maintain friendly relationship and correspondence between themselves which continue up to this date.

This collaboration between the Universities went on in parallel with the ongoing peace negotiations between the representatives of the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government. The collaboration at the University level was an effective tool to back up at the grassroots level the official government to government negotiations for a resolution of the Palestinian Israeli conflict.

Unfortunately this version of the University bilateral cooperation program ceased in 2014 as a result of the breakdown in negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis.

In order not to lose the momentum and benefits of this program, Prof Massimo Caneva , Director of the International Seminar, in collaboration with the University Roma Tre decided to evolve this program into a new version under the title of a multinational international seminar and to involve students from other Universities in the Middle East and Europe. This version brought graduate students from Middle East countries including, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon together with students from Palestine and Israel.

Over three editions from 2017 to 2019 some 75 graduate students participated in this seminar, from three Universities in Palestine, three Universities in Israel, one University in Jordan, one University in Syria and one University in Lebanon. In addition to a number of students from European Universities.

In this version of the program three editions of the seminar were held in Rome for the years 2017-2019 sponsored by the generous contribution of the Italian Government. The first sessions of the Seminar were jointly held at the Baletti Park hotel in San Martina El Camino, a small village located a few kilometers North of the town of Viterbo, The students then proceeded to Roma Tree for sessions in modules dedicated to three main thematic areas:

Internationalization of human rights  
Global challenges and socio economics responses  
Intercultural dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean perspective

The purpose of these modules is to give the participating graduate students a real opportunity for reflecting and discussing on the opportunities, risks and challenges that globalization process entails.

The aim of the group sessions for students from different countries is to promote exchanges, relations and develop efforts for a culture of peace as a key factor for reaching not only a greater and better understanding between peoples, but also more realistic prospects in terms of educational goals for the formation of new generations of leaders.

After completion in September 2019 of the third edition of this version of the program, participating students from each of the Middle East Universities submitted their evaluation of the program to the Director of the Symposium Prof Massimo Caneva.

In summary, students from the Middle East expressed their positive evaluation of the third edition of the seminar and supported an extension of the Symposium for a fourth edition to be implemented in 2020.

As the Palestinian coordinator for the Palestinian Universities, I consider the symposium a great success, very fruitful and achieving the goals and purpose of the program. In my evaluation I pointed out that the very fact that graduate students from Universities in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel sat together in one room to study and review the role of the Universities in peace and sustainable development is a success in itself.

This is especially true in consideration that these countries are in a State of war with acts of war on a continuous basis particularly between Syria , Lebanon and Israel. The same applies also to ongoing acts of violence between Palestine and Israel in the absence of a credible peace process and a status quo of no peace and no war.

It is for the above reason that I have joined my voice in requesting an extension of a fourth edition for the International seminar for 20/20.

I take this opportunity of writing this short paper to express my gratitude to Prof. Massimo Caneva, the Director of the Symposium, Roma Tre for their administration of the Seminar and the Italian Government for funding the previous Masters editions and the current International Seminars on the role of University cooperation in peace and development in the Middle East and the Balkans.

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