

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Chairwoman, Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs
Room HB-26, The Capitol
Washington, D C. 20515

The Honorable Frank Wolf
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs
241 Cannon Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Wolf:

We write to thank the Subcommittee for its commitment to peace-building programs and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that promote people-to-people coexistence and reconciliation around the world, particularly in the Middle East where efforts to peacefully bring people together is most desperately needed. Last year, in addition to supporting reconciliation programs all around the world, the House approved \$11 million for people-to-people reconciliation and coexistence programs in the Middle East. These funds are helping to make a difference, but these are uncertain times and our continued support is needed. That is we urge you to renew this critical funding in FY 2009.

As we have all long recognized, the Arab-Israeli conflict retains a key role at the heart of U.S. security and foreign policy. NGOs laying the groundwork for peace between Israelis and Palestinians have demonstrated success, which justifies our investment in supporting their work. For this reason, not only did Congress establish addition funding for Middle East coexistence in FY 2008, but provided similar funds through the one-time, successful Wye River People-to-People Exchange Program and USAID worldwide reconciliation funds. These funds have demonstrated the impact of bringing together ordinary Israeli and Palestinian citizens to work jointly on educational programs, business cooperation, sports activities, recreation centers, healthcare initiatives, community development, and inter-religious dialogue. This "track two diplomacy" is a critical U.S. foreign policy tool in improving America's image in the region and laying the groundwork for successful diplomatic efforts. Political agreements may never arrive or endure without the kind of popular support that these grassroots activities cultivate.

In order to support this work, we urge the Subcommittee to renew the \$11 million in funding focused exclusively on people-to-people coexistence and reconciliation in the Arab-Israeli conflict. USAID is already accepting proposals for competitive grants with the FY 2008 funds. Let us ensure this great effort now underway continues. The Middle East has the most robust network of NGOs working on people-to-people coexistence in the world – an efficient infrastructure that only requires a modest amount of support to have substantial, rippling effects. Continuing these Middle East funds is important for focusing resources on the Arab-Israeli conflict without diminishing from funding for other conflict areas around the world.

Help lay the groundwork for peace by continuing funding in the FY 2009 Foreign Operators Appropriations bill for brave and inspiring Israelis and Palestinians of good to reach across conflict lines through "people-to-people" coexistence NGOs. Please feel free to have your staff contact Roberto Valencia with Rep. Jim Moran or Gregg Sheiowitz with Rep. Crowley if we can provide any further information about this request. Many of these NGOs are prepared to testify or present the Subcommittee with information regarding their important work and the great benefit that comes from congressional support for their mission. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,