

**P E A C E**  
**STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**WESTMINSTER UNIVERSITY, LONDON, 24 FEBRUARY 2006**

**Draft Report of the Meeting**

**Attendance.** Seven members of the Committee were present: Manuel Hassassian, Gianni Vaggi, Rami Hamdallah, Annick Suzor-Weiner, Radwan Barakat, Kamalain Shaath, (representing Prof. M. Shubair) and Liesbeth François, (representing Prof. Luc Francois). Ms Monica Margarit mandated Prof. Gianni Vaggi to represent her at the meeting. Also present were Professor Gabi Baramki, honorary member and Dumitru Chitoran, advisor. (See Annex 1: List of Participants).

**Opening Session.** Professor Manuel Hassassian greeted the participants and thanked the University of Westminster for generously hosting it. He declared the meeting open and submitted the draft agenda for approval (Annex 2). It was decided to postpone Item 1 (appointment of the acting president) to the end of the meeting. Professor Hassassian further outlined the purpose of the meeting, thanked the members of the Committee for having made the effort to attend and Professors Baramki and Chitoran for having prepared it well. He addressed special thanks to Professor Kamalain Sha'ath, President of the Islamic University of Gaza who will represent his University as a full member of the Steering Committee and to Ms Liesbeth François for representing the Secretary General of PEACE.

Dr. Colin Matheson, Director of the Office for International Relations extended a warm welcome to the members of the Committee on behalf of the Vice Chancellor of Westminster University. He presented briefly the international activities of the University, which has a very ambitious international program with over 4000 foreign students from some 145 countries. The University has one of the biggest scholarship schemes in the country, which allows it to receive many students from the developing countries. He reiterated the commitment of the University of Westminster to support PEACE and its Scholarship Scheme. The University will offer one full PEACE grant every year and will consider acceptance of other Palestinian students proposed by PEACE on arrangements to be agreed upon on an individual basis.

**Meeting debates**

Under **item 2 of the Agenda (Information on the activities of PEACE since the last session of the General Assembly)** the members of the Committee appreciated that the period that followed the International PEACE Conference and the 6<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly held in Bethlehem in February 2005 marked a gradual but still insufficient renewal of the activities of the Network. The process of renewal needs to be continued and reinforced. There was an exchange of views about recent developments in Palestine in light of the victory of Hamas in the legislative elections. The views expressed by the members of the Committee converged towards the idea that maintaining

international contacts with the Palestinian universities is highly important for the quality of their teaching and research, for the preservation of the values of academic freedom and of their autonomy and for enhancing the contribution of the universities to fostering democracy in Palestinian society. PEACE should therefore pursue its action to promote international academic cooperation with the Palestinian universities. The Palestinian universities rely on international academic solidarity and place many expectations on PEACE to assist them in further developing their international contacts.

Under **Item 3 of the Agenda**, the members of the Committee discussed the Plan of Action of PEACE for the period 2006-2007. Special attention was given to **(sub) Item 3 (a), the PEACE Scholarship Scheme**. Appreciating the progress made in resuming the PEACE Scholarship Scheme since 2004, the Committee examined the situation of current PEACE grantees. The question was raised as to whether those students who have been accepted for studies abroad on bilateral arrangements or through efforts made by members of the Steering Committee should be considered as PEACE grantees, even if PEACE does not contribute to meeting costs. It was agreed that this should be done on a case by case basis and in keeping with the expressed wish of the receiving universities. The case of two PEACE grantees, who had obtained grants but could not benefit from them either because of language difficulties or for visa problems, was discussed and it was decided to take steps to solve their situation as soon as possible.

The Committee proceeded then to a thorough examination of the list of 22 PEACE candidates for the academic year 2006-2007 and considered ways and means to secure the placement of as many of them as possible at member universities. The PEACE Office at UNESCO will continue efforts in this sense. At the same time, members of the Committee were urged to extend their support, which had proved essential in the past. Also, the Palestinian universities were urged to make efforts to place some of their candidates at European and American universities with which they have bilateral agreements. This will have a mutual benefic effect, reinforcing simultaneously the international contacts of the Palestinian universities and PEACE.

It was agreed that the funds currently available in the budget of the Network should be used mainly to support the Scholarship Scheme. At the same time, steps will be taken in order to renew the AGFUND allocation for the Scheme and to secure its continuation on a permanent basis. Professor Munthir Salah, President of the Arab American University of Jenin will be asked to assist.

Under **(sub) Item 3(b)**, Professor Gianni Vaggi presented the latest developments related to the Centre for Advanced Studies and Research in International Cooperation and Development in Palestine (CARS/ICDI Project), stressing that it has good chances to become very successful, based on substantial financial support from Italy. Equally important is the related TEMPUS Project recently approved by the European Commission.

Information was presented then, under **(sub) Item 3(c)** on the Center of Excellence in Mathematics and Theoretical Physics at Birzeit University (ECCE-Birzeit academic

Project), on the basis of the update document prepared by Prof. Ulrich Eckert, University of Augsburg, Germany. While funding is not yet assured for the Project, it has a real potential to take off. UNESCO has promised support. PEACE member universities are willing and ready to assist and to be associated to its implementation.

Under **(sub)Item 3 (c)**, the Committee stressed the need to set in place an up to date, efficient system of Open and Distance Education for Palestinian universities. It was agreed to continue efforts, with the support of UNESCO, to elaborate a special **Avicenna Project for Palestine**, which will be submitted for funding to the EC and to other potential donors. The first task at hand is to involve the Palestinian universities in the project. They should provide information both with regard to their existent potential (equipment, know-how etc.) and their priority needs in this respect. The member universities of PEACE will then be requested to extend their support to the implementation of the project.

Under **Item 4**, the Committee examined and approved the line of action presented in the discussion document concerning relations between PEACE and the European Commission. Consequently, steps will be taken to organize the visit of a PEACE delegation to the European Commission in Brussels to discuss further support for PEACE. At the same time, European member-universities are urged to extend their support in order to make fuller use of the Higher Education programmes of the EC for which the Palestinian universities qualify.

**Item 5** of the Agenda occasioned a thorough discussion on **Cooperation of PEACE with UNESCO**. This referred to the envisage Round Table on Palestinian Higher Education to be convened by UNESCO and to the launching of the UNESCO new initiative, “Academic across Borders” (AAB). It was agreed that PEACE will elaborate and propose an AAB project for Palestine. Matter related to the functioning of the PEACE Office at UNESCO will be taken up by the President of PEACE on the occasion of his projected visit to Paris in April 2006.

Under **Item 6**, of the Agenda, the Committee discussed the situation of the **membership** of PEACE, with special reference to the payment of the **membership fees**. It expressed concern about the fact that several member universities have tended to lose interest in the activities of PEACE and have not paid their membership fee for some time. The current membership of PEACE is presented in Annex 3. Steps will be taken to further clarify the situation of those member-universities which are unclear, while all efforts will be made to extend the membership of PEACE.

Under **Item 7**, the Committee took note of the **financial situation** of PEACE and approved the proposals presented in the discussion document. It agreed to make existing funds in the PEACE budget available in the first place for the Scholarship Scheme. It further approved the purchase of new equipment for the PEACE office in Paris.

Under **Item 8**, the Committee discussed dates and venue of the next General Assembly of PEACE. The following alternative solutions were proposed (in priority order):

- (a) To convene the 7<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly of PEACE in conjunction with the Round Table on Palestinian Higher Education which UNESCO intends to organize in Paris in keeping with recommendations adopted by the joint UNESCO/Palestinian Authority Committee. Linking the two events presents a major advantage because on the one hand it would enable PEACE member universities to also attend the round table and thus reinforce participation in that meeting as well.
- (b) To request one of the Spanish member universities (Barcelona, Granada or Saragossa) to consider hosting the meeting, in recognition of their support of PEACE.
- (c) To consider, as a third alternative, holding the General Assembly at one of the Italian member universities.

At the end of the meeting, the Committee proceeded to the appointment of the **Acting President of PEACE**, as foreseen under Item of the Agenda. Following the appointment of Professor Manuel Hassassian as General Palestinian Delegate to the United Kingdom, the Steering Committee proceeded to necessary changes in the composition of its Bureau as follows:

- Professor Rami Hamdallah, President
- Professor Radwan Barakat, Treasurer

The members of the Committee thanked Professor Hassassian for his inspired leadership of PEACE over the period which he served as its President and wished him success in the important function he had been entrusted with. They congratulated Professors Hamdallah and Barakat on their appointment as President and, respectively, Treasurer of PEACE.

Professor Manuel Hassassian thanked the members of the Committee, as well as Professors Baramki and Chitoran for their cooperation extended to him, while president of PEACE. He stressed that PEACE will always be close to his heart and will try to support it in all possible ways.

Professor Rami Hamdallah thanked the members of the Committee for their confidence in appointing him as president of PEACE and asked for their cooperation and support in order to renew and reinforce its activities.