

**Meeting of the Steering Committee of the PEACE Programme**  
(UNESCO, 2 February 2003)

**Record of the Meeting**

**1. Present were:**

Professor Manuel Hassassian, Chairman, Professor Gianni Vaggi, Vice Chairman, Professor Rami Hamdallah, Treasurer, Professor Radwan Barakat, member. Professor Jaqueline Pommier represented Professor Annick Suzor-Weiner and Dr. R. Vermeulen represented Professor J. Peters. Ms Monica Margarit had informed that other commitments did not allow her to attend, but sent comments and proposals for specific items on the Draft Agenda. Professor Luc Francois had announced participation, but could not finally arrive at the meeting because of the weather conditions. There was no reply to the invitation from Professor E. Jennings.

Mr M. Yakoub attended as an observer of the Permanent Observatory Mission of the Palestinian National Authority. Professor D. Chitoran, advisor to the PEACE Programme Office at UNESCO, assured the secretariat of the meeting.

**Proceedings**

**2. Professor Hassassian** opened the meeting by thanking the members of the Committee who had made the effort to attend. He also expressed thanks to Professors Vaggi, Suzor-Weiner and D. Chitoran for the preparatory work. The draft Agenda was approved as submitted (Annex 1).

Opening the debates on the *Programme of Action of PEACE (Item 1)*, Professor Hassassian pointed out that the severe conditions under which the Palestinian universities have been forced to function over the last few years had rendered it extremely difficult for the PEACE Programme to implement many of the decisions adopted at the last General Assembly (Paris, November 2001). In addition, there were difficulties in communication with member-universities, created by the fact that Ms K. Shomali, who had been seconded by UNESCO to assist the PEACE Programme Office, took her retirement at the end of June 2002. Despite the efforts of the Steering Committee it was not possible to secure the prolongation of her contract, or the secondment of another UNESCO staff member. This created a regrettable hiatus in the activity of the Peace Network, which calls for resolute, immediate action to resume activities.

**3.** Debates concerning the renewal of the Plan of Action of the PEACE Programme covered several items of the Agenda, notably **Item 1 as well as Items 3, 6, 7 and 8**. The following priorities were established:

**4. The scholarship scheme.** The Palestinian universities will send candidates to the Chairman, by the end of February 2003 at the latest. The Palestinian selection committee will examine and approve the candidatures by 15 March 2003. The approved list will be communicated to the PEACE Programme Office at UNESCO, which will circulate it to all European member-universities, by 31 March 2003, asking them to consider accepting at least one applicant for the academic year 2003/2004 and 2004/2005. It is expected to secure at least 20 grants for the next

two academic years. Member-universities will be asked to offer *full grants*, covering, if possible, staying expenses for the Palestinian grantees and exempting them from payment of fees. PEACE will cover travel expenses and will top up the grant by 200 Euros per month, as in the past.

**5. Academic Programmes.** The members of the Committee agreed that urgent action is needed in order to resume the academic programme of PEACE. They identified the following lines for immediate action:

- (i) *Interrupted projects will be resumed* as soon as possible (e.g. project on Mathematics in Economics, initiated by a consortium of French universities, the Pavia/Siena Masters Programme in International Co-operation, Development and Innovation in Palestine, etc);
- (ii) *New projects will be launched*, on a bilateral and multilateral basis, upon the initiative of Palestinian and European member-universities. Turning bilateral projects into multilateral ones will be favoured in order to make full use of the potential of PEACE;
- (iii) *A wide-scale programme aimed at promoting e-learning and distance education technologies and methodologies at Palestinian universities will be launched.* It will be linked to the Avicenna Project developed by UNESCO and approved recently under the EUROMEDIS Initiative of the European Union. Based on the contribution of EU's leading Open Universities and ODL providers, the Avicenna Project aims at accelerating the adoption and best use of ICT-assisted Open Distance Learning (ODL) in 11 Mediterranean non-EU Member States, including Palestine. Talks held by members of the Steering Committee with the Division of Policy Analysis and Operations of the Science Sector of UNESCO indicated that there are excellent prospects to use the potential of the PEACE Programme in order to help put into practice the activities foreseen under the Avicenna Project for the Palestinian universities.
- (iv) The Palestinian universities will set their priorities in teaching, training and research, working in close co-operation among themselves and with the Ministry Education and Higher Education, and will identify those immediate needs which could best be met through PEACE. On that basis, a comprehensive, well-documented Plan of Action of PEACE will be presented to the next General Assembly. Individual projects will be presented on the one hand to PEACE member-universities, to consider associating themselves to implementation, and to the donor community for funding.

**6. Discussions on Item 2** of the Agenda focused on ways and means to secure *increased international support for PEACE*, particularly from UNESCO and the European Union.

Several working meetings were held by members of the Committee with UNESCO Officials (November 2002 and January 2003). A high level delegation of UNESCO, which visited Palestine in December 2002, included on its agenda action related to higher education and research. The Committee took note with great satisfaction of the continued support of UNESCO to the PEACE Programme. UNESCO stresses the potential of the PEACE Network to bring an important contribution to implementing UNESCO's activities in the field of higher education and research in Palestine. It has also renewed its support to the PEACE Programme Office at UNESCO.

**7.** With regard to support from the *European Union*, the members of the Committee stressed the need to speed up sending a mission of the PEACE Network to the European Commission in Brussels to discuss future support. The mission must be very well prepared. It must present clear, convincing projects that stand a real chance for approval. To that end, the Palestinian members of the Committee will undertake intense preparations with all the Palestinian higher education institutions. They will also initiate talks with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and other appropriate Palestinian authorities, bodies and institutions, as well as with the representatives of the EU in Palestine, in order to secure their full support for the mission.

In their turn, the European members will assist in the preparation of projects and will take steps to prepare the ground for the mission, by establishing advanced contacts with the appropriate units and officials in the European Commission. It was agreed to set mid-spring as a tentative date for the mission.

Other potential funding sources will be tapped. Member-universities will be asked to present projects to their national authorities and to other potential donors.

**8.** Under **Item 4**, the Steering Committee approved the following measures concerning the *PEACE Programme Office at UNESCO*:

- The Office will function under the direct supervision of the Executive Bureau of PEACE. Professor Annick Suzor-Weiner will assure direct supervision on behalf of the Steering Committee. Professor D.Chitoran agreed to continue to provide advice and assistance, on a voluntary basis. The Office will hire a part-time secretary to assure the daily functioning of the Office. The secretary will place 15 hours a week at the disposal of the PEACE Programme, according to a flexible programme, to be set with Professors Annick Suzor-Weiner and D. Chitoran. It was agreed that the running expenses of the Office should be kept as low as possible. The part-time secretary will be paid 500 euros per month.

**9.** The members of the Committee renewed their thanks to Ms. Karineh Shomali for her dedicated work to the growth of the PEACE Programme over the period 1996-2002, when she was seconded by UNESCO to assist the programme. They were informed about and approved the contribution paid to her by PEACE for a three months period (July – September 2002), when she continued to work for PEACE following retirement.

**10.** The members of the Committee appreciated the fact that UNESCO has agreed to continue to place office space at the disposal of PEACE in the Division of Science Policy and Operations, The Science Sector. This facilitates resuming activities quickly. They expressed the hope that a permanent solution will be found, to allow the office to function properly, with reinforced and extended activities.

**11.** It was also agreed that proper steps should be taken to set up proper secretariat services of the PEACE Programme in Palestine, as follows:

- Discussions will be continued with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to set up a PEACE secretariat in Ramallah, with due care paid to keep running costs as low as possible;

- Proper secretariats should be set up at the Palestinian universities of the President and the Treasurer of PEACE
- Liaison Officers for PEACE should be appointed at all Palestinian universities, who will be constantly in touch with the Steering Committee and with the Paris office.

**12.** Upon the specific request of Professor Luc Francois, the Secretary-General of the PEACE Programme, the Committee discussed under **Item 8** the situation of the Palestinian student who pursues PhD studies at Gent University at present. The student had been accepted to Gent University on an arrangement outside the PEACE Programme. He has made good academic progress and is strongly recommended by his supervisors. There are difficulties at present to finance the continuation of his studies. The Gent University wishes to use part of the contribution it had made to the Scholarship Scheme of PEACE for that purpose.

The Committee considered that, in view of the good academic progress of the student and given the very active participation and continued support of Gent University to PEACE, including its generous financial contribution, the student should be considered as a PEACE grantee. His studies could, accordingly be financed from the contribution of the University which has not been spent for the Palestinian students who have completed studies there. The Chairman and the Treasurer undertook to clarify the exact figure of the unspent contribution with Professor G. Baramki and to begin payment urgently. Payments should be similar to established practices for PEACE grantees.

**13.** Under **Item 9** (*The Financial Situation of the PEACE Programme*), the Steering Committee discussed steps to launch a large-scale funding campaign for the PEACE programme in the immediate future. The mission to the EU in Brussels will have that goal in mind. Discussions with various units at UNESCO also indicated other potential sources and modalities for funding. In this respect, the Vice President informed that the students of the University of Pavia had agreed on a 1 percent increase of taxes, to be used for grants to foreign students. Such an initiative could be extended to PEACE Programme member-universities, thus providing an invaluable source for the PEACE Programme Scholarship Scheme.

**14.** The members of the Committee took note of the existing accounts of PEACE at the Arab Bank, Paris: a deposit account of 41, 011.55 Euros (on 30 January 2003) a deposit account of \$64,534.79 (on 31 Dec. 2002), a current account of 15,138.75 Euros and another of \$4,459.51. They asked the Chairman and the Treasurer to find out the exact situation of the account(s) of the Programme in Ramallah. They insisted on the need for the Treasurer to take over the management of the finances of PEACE urgently. It is also necessary to continue the practice of submitting the financial situation of PEACE to an external auditor, before it is presented to the next General Assembly of PEACE.

**15.** In order to speed up payment of membership fees, the Committee asked the Treasurer to address a letter to all member-universities, immediately after the meeting, requesting them to pay the 2003 membership fees.

The Steering Committee adopted the following technical decisions with regard to membership fees and other financial matters:

(i) In light of the shift by most EU Member States to the Euro and the significant change in the rate of exchange against the dollar, member-universities will be encouraged to pay the fees in euros. The fees were set at 500, 750 or 1000 euros (2000 euros for associate-collective members) similar to the fees in US dollars.

(ii) Payment orders from the current accounts at the Arab Bank in Paris will be signed by Professor Annick Suzor-Weiner, following instructions and approval by the Chairman and Treasurer.

(iii) Whenever the current accounts reach amounts that are not expected to be spent within reasonable time, transfers to the deposit accounts will be made regularly by the PEACE Office- following approval by the Chairman and Treasurer- so as to earn interest.

**17.** Under **Item 10**, the Members of the Committee discussed the organization of *future meetings of the Steering Committee* and of the next *General Assembly* of PEACE. They agreed that, unless exceptional situations arise, meetings of the Steering Committee should be held via Internet. In fact, Internet (and telephone communication) have proved highly efficient in keeping all Committee members in constant touch, so as to arrive at commonly agreed upon decisions.

The Committee decided to convene the next General Assembly of PEACE in November 2003, in Bethlehem. It is imperative to hold the Assembly in Palestine (the previously scheduled session of 2000 was first postponed for 2001 and then moved to Paris). All efforts should be made to hold it as planned this year. In particular efforts should be made to secure the support of the international organizations that endorse of PEACE. Above all else, it is necessary to begin intensive preparations for the meeting immediately, so as to turn it into a real success and a landmark in the activity of PEACE.

Annex 1  
**Agenda**

1. Renewed Plan of Action of the PEACE Programme for 2003:
  - Priorities identified by the Palestinian universities during the UNESCO Mission in December 2002
  - Projects proposed by member-universities
2. Co-operation with UNESCO and the European Union; Preparation of the visit of a PEACE delegation to Brussels
3. Meeting in Palestine with Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the Rector's Conference and with the representatives of the EU and UNESCO in Palestine..
4. Steps to resume the work of the PEACE Programme Office at UNESCO, in view of the outcomes of the working meeting held at UNESCO on 17 January 2002. (Memberships files, payment, fees, new contacts, securing the services of an intern to provide secretariat support, etc).
5. Solutions for an Office of the PEACE Programme in Palestine, to provide similar technical support
6. Update on the Master's programme in International Co-operation, Development and Innovation in Palestine, carried on between the universities of Birzeit, Nablus, Siena and Pavia.
7. Other ongoing initiatives of university co-operation between EU and Palestinian Universities.
8. Issues concerning the Scholarships Scheme; the situation of the Ph.D. student at Ghent University.
9. The financial situation of the PEACE Programme
10. Miscellaneous (the next General Assembly of PEACE)