



PEACE Programme Steering Committee Meeting

Hebron University, Hebron, Palestine
(June 27-28, 2011)

Report of the meeting

Participation and Quorum

Five members of the Steering Committee attended the meeting: Professors Radwan Barakat, Frederic Ogee, Ibrahim Masri, Espen Bjertness and Imad Hodali.

Professor Salam Agha was not granted a permit from the Israeli authorities in order to travel from Gaza to the West Bank to participate in this meeting.

Professors Morgan, Lodeiro and Vanderborcht were unable to attend due to administrative commitments.

With 5 members present out of 8 of Peace Steering Committee, a quorum was available and the meeting held in accordance with the by-laws of PEACE.

Opening Session

Prof. Barakat, the President of PEACE welcomed the participants on behalf of the President of Hebron University, declared the SC meeting open, and reviewed the agenda of the SC meeting for approval.

Meeting Discussions:

Membership Issues and Concerns

After reviewing the list of Peace European member universities and their situation regarding the membership fee payments for the period 2007-2010, the SC agreed on the importance of contacting those members who stopped paying annual membership fees, and discuss with them how they can reactivate their membership. At the same time the SC agreed that PEACE should continue its activities in recruiting new members in

Europe, and in countries like Turkey where there is a big interest in supporting Palestinian Universities. In this context, an agreement was signed between Istanbul Technical University and Palestine Academy for Science and Technology (PALAST). This was possible through the communication between PEACE and European Academies (ALLEA) in Barcelona. In addition to that and in the same direction, it was agreed that it would be beneficial to explore the possibility of adding memberships from some Arab countries either by having a direct contact with individual universities or through the Arab Universities League (AUL).

It was agreed as well that the PEACE Programme needs to improve its visibility especially in Europe and Palestine. The situation of universities is changing rapidly in Europe, especially in France, Spain and Italy. Professor F. Ogee explained that the French universities often have bilateral cooperation agreements with Palestinian universities in terms of joint academic programmes, and therefore PEACE should clarify its role in networking and the added value it provides in this respect. The importance of involving University Presidents of member universities in supporting PEACE was discussed, and it was clear that PEACE needs to reach out to Presidents and discuss with them the mutual interest in strengthening the programme. The programme needs their support especially in using their PR networks. In addition, the importance of keeping strong ties with international and regional organizations such as UNESCO and the European Commission was confirmed.

Furthermore, it was also agreed that PEACE definitely needs a full-time office assistant at this stage to operate the Paris office of PEACE under the guidance of the President and the Vice President. Professor Ogee proposed to discuss this with Professor John Morgan and Palestine's Ambassador to UNESCO, Dr. Elias Sanbar, to look at ways of approaching UNESCO for financial assistance to support the salary of the office assistant. However, the office assistant job profile has to be identified in terms of university degree, experience and qualifications needed for the post which are directly correlated to the required annual salary budget. The full-time office assistant will surely help implement the ideas and activities approved in the SC meeting such as increasing the visibility of the programme, directing the website into more interactive exchange of information in terms of networking scholarship opportunities available for Palestinian students, faculty exchange and research and sabbatical opportunities. The SC members also agreed on the importance of networking for securing research and teaching electronic resources for the sake of Palestinian Universities especially for those in Gaza because of severe travel difficulties for faculty members in these universities. Members of the SC also discussed Professor Ogée's suggestion to fund faculty exchange activities and support the travel expenses of Palestinian faculty members bearing in mind the financial budget needed for such activities and its effect on the scholarship scheme budget and future. Prof. Ogée insisted on the necessity to support the young Palestinian researchers who have just returned to Palestine after getting a European PhD (often with the help of the PEACE programme), so that they can keep in touch with international research in their field.

Organizational issues and PEACE registration as an NGO in Belgium

Prof. Vanderborgh who was following up the registration issue in Belgium was unable to attend the meeting and did not provide a feedback in this respect. Professor Barakat tried communicating with him several times without success. To continue with the registration it was agreed on following two tracks: the first one involves seeking advice from UNESCO by Professor John Morgan and from the Palestine office at UNESCO (Mr. Elias Sanbar) by Professor Ogee. The second track will be taken by Professor Barakat in which a legal advice from a private attorney in Ramallah needs to be secured before a final decision taken in this respect. The end of the year 2011 has been fixed as a dead line to get a clear picture for the registration of Peace from Ramallah and Paris.

In terms of organizational and administrative matters, it was proposed to reformulate the administrative structure of PEACE and present this amendment to the next General Assembly meeting in November 2012. This amendment will allow more time to be devoted to the administration of the programme and the implementation of its activities more efficiently and more importantly to increase the visibility of the programme. The proposal suggests having two boards:

1. Advisory Board which could be composed of two Palestinian university presidents and two European university presidents, a representative from the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE), a representative from ALLEA, European Universities Association, Arab Universities League (AUL), and possibly other academic associations. This board will meet once a year to draw the policies, evaluate the overall activities, and suggest solutions to difficulties. If approved by the GA meeting, a committee should be formulated to put all the details.
2. Executive Board which could be composed of a General Secretary (possibly a vice president from a Paris University), a Treasurer (a Palestinian university vice president), and a full-time executive officer (recruited in Paris to run the daily activities of the programme office at UNESCO).

Financial Reports

The financial reports have been presented by Prof. I. Al-Masri, the PEACE Treasurer, including the expenses and the incomes of all PEACE bank accounts in Paris and Ramallah.

In addition to that, it was agreed among the SC to renew the contract with the international audit accompany “Pricewaterhouse Coopers” for book keeping and issuing an audit report for the two fiscal years (2010 and 2011).

Scholarship Scheme and Faculty Exchange

The scholarship scheme status and future was discussed in details and it was agreed that PEACE needs to focus on the added value that it should provide in this respect in addition to keep seeking extra funding for running this scheme. This was summarized in two possible tracks:

1. PEACE should evaluate the possibility of providing scholarships on a matching ground in which it can reach agreements with several academic and funding institutions that PEACE will be willing to provide one scholarship (Master or PhD) for a Palestinian student in a joint agreement if the other party agrees to provide another one.
2. PEACE will reach out for academic, diplomatic, and funding agencies such as the French Consulate in Jerusalem, ERASMUS MUNDUS, German DAAD, British Council, and the Palestinian Ministry to investigate the possibility of having joint agreements with these agencies. The French Consulate for example can provide the living expenses of a Palestinian student in France, the French member university can waive tuition expenses and provide accommodation, and PEACE will provide all the travel expenses needed for the student to finish his/her degree in France. This is just an example and can be duplicated or adapted with other European and local partners.

In addition to what has been mentioned, PEACE looks forward in the future that each European member university can earmark one scholarship per year for a Palestinian student, provided suitable and qualified candidates can be identified and proposed by their home universities.

Concerning faculty exchange, it was agreed that PEACE should also investigate the possibility of having joint agreements with European member universities on the ground that the European university may provide accommodation for 1-3 months, the Palestinian university provide living expenses and PEACE may cover the travel expenses.

The possibility of PEACE supporting Palestinian faculty to attend regional and international scientific meetings was discussed. A possible way to support such activity will be to have PEACE ask for conference fee exemptions for Palestinian faculty and students and PEACE can cover the travel expenses. It was finally agreed that a comprehensive guidelines needs to be developed in this respect to specify the selection criteria based on manuscript presentation to the conference, age, and other important factors so that an annual budget can be suggested to the next GA meeting.

PEACE Academic Programmes

PEACE academic programmes and projects have been discussed in this session in details and a brief update to each project has been presented before the committee either by the president or the relevant member in the SC:

The Center of Excellence in Mathematics and Physics in Birzeit University:

The center is considered a success story for PEACE, and the delegation tried to have a meeting with Professor Henry Jagaman, the director but he proved to be out the country during the period of the SC meeting in Palestine. However, Professor Jagaman was kind to send us a brief summary on the center's latest activities which was as follows:

1. Organized a Summer School on "Protein Structure and Dynamics" June 15 – July 30, 2010.
2. Was one of the organizers of The Second Palestinian Conference on Modern Trends in Mathematics and Physics" held at An-Najah National University August 2–4, 2010.
3. Organized a Short Course on "Neutron Scattering in Protein Structure Studies", February 15-28, 2011.
4. Established a Federation Agreement with the International Center for Theoretical Physics in Trieste Italy for 2011-2013.
5. Organized a Summer School on "Semiconductor Devices" July 19 – August 26, 2011.
6. Provided partial support for the costs of research visits of 3 Palestinian scientists to European universities.
7. Sponsored several lectures and seminars in Mathematics and Physics throughout the year.

Professor Jagaman, however, concluded that the lack of funds remains to be a major obstacle in developing the Center's idea and objectives.

The Palestinian Teacher Education Programmes:

Professor Barakat briefed the SC about several projects that are taking place in Palestine in Teachers' Education and funded mainly by the WORLD BANK through the Quality Improvement Fund (QIF) or by the USAID. The SC discussed the role PEACE can play in networking between European member universities and Palestinian universities who obtained grants from QIF. It was mentioned that part of the QIF grants demand that each Palestinian university contract with an international consultant in education, and there were difficulties in locating such expertise. This is an important role PEACE can play in networking between European member universities and relevant Palestinian universities in the field of education, and it's worth mentioning here that this already started in Barcelona by networking some expert universities in Norway and some Palestinian universities.

The Enhancement of the Palestinian Universities System (The Italian project):

The SC looked into the Italian universities project with 7 Palestinian universities that was developed in coordination with PEACE by Prof. Gianni Vaggi from the University of

Pavia. The programme involves 6 Italian universities, and the main activity of the project falls into 3 themes:

- 1- 14 opportunities for faculty exchange
- 2- 14 PhD scholarships (3 years scholarships + one year extension) for the most needed disciplines. A meeting in July 11 already scheduled for an update about the selection of candidates.
- 3- Joint multidisciplinary courses (15 weeks) taken by Palestinian students in Italian universities.

It is worth mentioning that an agreement has been signed and the total budget of the project is 980 K Euros. A copy of the agreement was presented by Professor Barakat. However, it seems more than likely that this programme will be run only once unfortunately, due to a lack of funding.

The Palestinian Virtual University Project (The expansion of the UNESCO Avicenna Virtual Campus project):

Imad Hodali presented the current state of preparation for the project and its future prospects, following the reply of Mr. Walter Erdelen, the Assistant Director-General for Natural Science at UNESCO, to the Palestinian higher education minister's letter in which UNESCO have approved the Avicenna Expansion Project. It's worth mentioning that no reply has been received from the Minister Alami to this letter yet.

Mr. Hodali explained that Al-Quds Open University has contacted the new coordinator Ms. Sonia Abu Ezam, at the UNESCO office in Ramallah for follow up, and she was invited for a meeting to discuss future steps needed to be taken. A meeting was scheduled early July with Sonia Abu Ezam & Ahmed Ganazreh from the UNESCO Ramallah office, to discuss the vision of the project and the ways to move forward.

The Palestinian National Research Education Network:

Imad Hodali briefed the SC members about this project as follows:

The EUMEDCONNECT project is a pioneering initiative to establish and operate an IP-based network in the Mediterranean region. Countries in the Mediterranean region able to benefit from the EUMEDCONNECT project are Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

The EUMEDCONNECT network serves the research and education communities of the Mediterranean region, and is linked to the pan-European GÉANT2 network.

Al-Quds Open University hosted the project since 2005 until this moment, in close coordination with the Ministry of Telecom and Information Technology.

The EUMEDCONNECT project has been followed-up for the first year by the Palestinian Association for the Development of Internet2 (PADI2); the association included representatives from all Palestinian Universities.

The Palestinian government covered the cost of the line and Al-Quds Open University covered all the technical equipments to host the line.

After the cessation of support to the project by the Palestinian government (due to the political development that took place after the Palestinian Election), PADI2 became incapable to follow up its financial responsibilities towards the project, and decided to abandon it.

Al-Quds Open University and Birzeit University have signed a joint agreement to follow up this project in which Al-Quds Open University took care of the technical aspects and Birzeit University took care of the administrative aspects of the project and both universities covered the line fees when necessary.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Telecom and Information Technology and the involvement of the Palestinian Higher Education Council took the decision later to transfer the location of the EUMED line from Al-Quds Open University to Paltel (the Palestinian Telecommunication Company), especially after the establishment of the Palestinian National Research Educational Network (NREN) which links all the Palestinian Universities (<http://www.nren.ps>).

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education established two Committees (administrative and technical) from the Palestinian universities, in order to supervise the NREN and the EUMED Line.

The participating Palestinian universities are committed to cover the cost of the line in case that the government should not be able to do so, and to pay the salaries of the technical staff who will be appointed in the ministry to follow up this network.

Negotiations started with the European Commission regarding the fees of increasing the EUMED line capacity from 45Mbps to 155Mbps, and the participation of Palestine in the third phase of the project (EUMEDCONNECT3) in addition to its participation in the Arab Network (ASRN).

After the presentation, the SC discussed the possibility of PEACE help in funding part of the NREN EUMED line through a third party and the Palestinian universities pay the other part.

The ALLEA (ALL European Academies) project:

Professors Barakat and Bjertness briefed the SC about this initiative as follows:

Following an initiative of the ALLEA Standing Committee on Science and Ethics in support of research and Higher Education in Palestine after a meeting that took place in

Oslo with participation of PEACE, and after the long discussion on this that took place in the PEACE meeting in Barcelona, the Palestinian Academy of Science and Technology (PALAST) hosted a meeting of 13 Palestinian universities in order to discuss the recommendations.

The meeting took place on Wednesday, 25 May 2011, in Ramallah. The participants looked at the documentation produced by the joint ALLEA-Palestinian steering group in support of research and Higher Education in Palestine, and the results of the priorities assessment study collected from Palestinian universities in terms of international cooperation, as well as the recent Istanbul Technical University (ITU)-PALAST agreement.

Furthermore, and in the same meeting the “Palestinian Academic Committee” (PAC) was established with members from all Palestinian Universities and from PALAST, initially with a view to implement the agreement signed by ITU and PALAST for the benefit of all Palestinian universities. Inter alia the following steps will be taken: PALAST will be coordinating the distribution of the ITU online Library-Access to Palestinian universities. The 5 PhD scholarships offered by ITU will follow ITU suggested procedure and application forms in addition to what has been agreed upon with regard to possible interviewing session of the candidates by an assigned committee including a representative from ITU. Each Palestinian university will identify two PhD candidates and ITU will advise how to proceed. Also distance education and video courses could be managed provided that more information regarding ITU facilities and Palestinian facilities are provided. In this sense, each university representative will have the information of the Internet Connection Specification provided to a ITU-IT-Contact. PALAST also briefed PAC about the meeting with colleagues from ITU at Energy Research Center, Euraia Research Center and High Performance Computing Center and the possibility of cooperation.

PAC members also agreed that they will have to modify the list of needs identified. The worksheet will have additional information for each need describing required action which is either a visiting faculty and/or strengthening academic/research capacity need. The list will be updated each academic year and when needed.

In conclusion, PEACE will continue following up and expanding this initiative with ALLEA and explore the possibility of networking for having more of the ITU-PALAST model.

Promotion of teaching and research in astronomy in the Islamic University of Gaza:

Professor Barakat briefed the SC about activities that are taking place in the Gaza strip in astronomy under the coordination of PEACE. He informed the SC that Dr. Suleiman Baraka has already received 4 telescopes, and efforts are done to establish the UNESCO chair in Astronomy and the Palestinian Astronomical Society.

In the UNESCO chair it has been suggested that courses in astrophysics and space science in the Islamic University of Gaza be provided. In addition, and in the same

direction, a proposal for establishing a research unit too was submitted by Dr. Baraka to the French ministry of foreign affairs. Al Maqdisi proposal has been presented to both the cultural attaché of the French consulate in Jerusalem and the Palestinian ministry of education and higher education.

The students Investment funds for Palestine (UK) proposal:

A copy of the project proposal was provided by Professor Barakat. This project proposal has been developed by Mr. Ally Ackbarally, a clinical educator working in the university hospitals of Leicester (UK). The project's objectives was presented according to the proposal in hand but the SC agreed that PEACE needs to have more information and details from Mr. Ackbarally on how the fund will function before deciding the role PEACE can play and if it should network in this respect.

Miscellaneous

The SC also discussed various pressing issues:

1. The case of Mr. Ismail Odeh (Birzeit University PEACE candidate):

Mr. Ismail Odeh finished a Master's programme in Paris and wanted to apply for a PhD grant. He was nominated by Birzeit University as a PEACE candidate. PEACE received a serious message from the student's advisor in Paris saying that he presented a research proposal in his name a big portion of which was actually copied from another laboratory in the department. Birzeit University was urgently notified and asked to cancel his nomination. The SC discussed the case and decided to remove his name from PEACE candidates list for possible scholarships.

2. The accreditation policy of the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education:

Professor Barakat briefed the SC about the policy and the need to update the Ministry list of accredited universities with all Europe member universities in PEACE so that students who obtain graduate degrees in these universities does not have any difficulty accrediting their degrees with the Ministry's department of diploma accreditation after their return to Palestine.

3. PEACE grantees and candidates lists

The SC looked at the updated list of PEACE grantees provided by the programme's office in Paris and agreed that it needs revision. The office needs to keep accurate and updated record of all PEACE grantees every academic semester. This and the situation of PEACE candidates should be followed up on more consistent and regular bases and the information passed regularly to the SC. Palestinian Universities needs to be notified on a regular basis by the office in Palestine with this updated information on the status of grantees and candidates. It should also be made sure that the list contains only PEACE-

supported grantees. Students fully funded by European universities should not be included.

Closing session:

In the closing session it has been decided to generate a solid document with all the outcomes and recommendations adopted by the SC in the meeting. This document is necessary because of the major structural, administrative and strategic changes suggested by the SC and it will be presented to the next GA meeting planned in late 2012.

The main proposals for change or evolution would be following:

a) PEACE Programme administration

- Restructure the PEACE organization, with an Advisory Board and an Executive Board;
- Enlist the support of major Palestinian and European university Presidents;
- Confirm and maintain the support of both the Palestinian Minister of Education and Higher Education, and the Palestinian delegation at UNESCO in Paris;
- Clarify and strengthen the positioning of the PEACE Programme within UNESCO in Paris;
- Find the means of hiring a full-time executive officer;

b) PEACE programme objectives: 3 priority actions

- Support of doctoral students: Redefine and strengthen the Scholarship scheme: focus on PhD students, work in parallel with the priorities of Palestine's research objectives and those of the Palestinian universities (prioritize certain disciplines?), set-up a matching grant system with European universities, provide advice and network;
- Support of faculty:
 - Provide financial (travel) and scientific (network) assistance to Palestinian junior researchers, to help them keep in touch with international science (attendance of conferences, short-term fellowships, etc.)
 - Help bring European faculty to Palestinian universities for capacity building and faculty development, and also to help launch well-structured doctoral programmes in Palestine;
- Support virtual teaching and research programmes: develop and facilitate e-learning exchanges, lobby to obtain free access to e-sources (electronic journals), help set-up networks for the e-training of Palestine's teachers and university faculty

In this respect, it has been decided to have the next GA meeting for 2 days for detailed discussions and debates on the suggested changes, without having an international academic meeting. In addition to the important discussions, it was suggested to celebrate the 20th anniversary in this meeting and have a thank you session for Dr. Dumitru Chitoran who served the programme since its setting-up. The discussion on the next GA meeting and its programme including celebrating the 20th anniversary will be continued in the next SC meeting.

Finally, the President of PEACE at the end of the day thanked the members of the SC who were able to attend this important meeting and dedicate some of their precious time and experience to enrich the discussions on the programme development, and declared the first day's meeting closed.

PEACE SC Meetings in Ramallah (June 28, 2011)

1. Meeting with the Palestinian Minister of Education & Higher Education, Ms. Lamis Alami at 11:00 AM

The following persons from the Ministry attended this meeting:

- HE Ms. Lamis Alami, Minister of Education & Higher Education,
- Dr. Fahoum Shalabi, Assistant Deputy Minister for Higher Education,
- Professor Ali Zeidan, Head of National Research Council and Head of the Quality Improvement Fund (QIF)
- Professor Mohammad Al-Subu, Head of Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC)

The president of PEACE, Professor Barakat thanked the Minister Alami for the time she devoted for meeting the PEACE delegation. He gave a brief historical background on the programme's establishment when there was only the Palestinian Higher Education Council and the important role PEACE played then as a PR body for HE in Palestine especially in communication with Europe HE. He explained that opportunities available for Palestinian Universities in terms of scholarship and faculty exchange were limited at the time when PEACE was established, and this changed dramatically over the years especially after the Oslo agreement which required that PEACE change its way of functioning towards more networking for students and faculty exchange in addition to research electronic infrastructure. Professor Barakat further mentioned that PEACE is considering restructuring its administration by setting up two boards and PEACE would like to have a representative from the Ministry in its advisory board. The Minister intervened and welcomed this idea and even suggested offering the programme an office at the Ministry similar to other academic programmes such as Tempus and FP7.

Professor Barakat continued to say that PEACE appreciates more than ever the support of the Ministry especially that related to UNESCO and the Palestine office in the international organization. In addition to that, Professor Barakat welcomed any suggestions that her Excellency might have concerning the legal status of PEACE and its registration in Palestine or abroad.

The Minister of Education and Higher education after expressing her appreciation for the efforts of the PEACE Programme in supporting Palestinian higher education institutions, elaborated on the following subjects and themes:

Graduate scholarships: where she suggested that PEACE may consider supporting scholarships for Palestinian students in some rare specialties that higher education needs, and she suggested that these specialties be decided jointly between PEACE and the Ministry.

Scientific research: Scientific research status in the Palestinian universities is not satisfactory and there is a need to concentrate on applied research taking into consideration needs of the Palestinian economy and the local community. Part of the problem of research in Palestine is shortage in well trained expertise for doing research and the heavy teaching load of Palestinian faculty members' working at the Palestinian universities. One way to promote scientific research in Palestine may be in establishing PhD programs at the Palestinian universities. The possibility of establishing PhD programs can be implemented jointly with well know European universities that are members in the PEACE network in the context of sandwich programmes and students may obtain their diplomas from both universities. This is a necessity because it is not a secret that Palestinian universities do not have enough full professors to implement such programmes on their own except in very few fields. She also stressed the fact that Palestinian universities must get together in groups to launch and co-pilot those new doctoral programmes. It was inconceivable to run parallel programmes, and the domestic competition among Palestinian universities would be counterproductive. Palestine just doesn't have enough resources to let universities launch such initiatives individually.

Centers of excellence: The Minister mentioned that the Ministry moved seriously in terms of funding and networking for the support of establishing centers of excellence in the various scientific fields. Budgets dedicated for research will be directed to support the activities of such centers rather than be distributed to pioneer researchers employed at the various academic institutions.

University governance: The Minister mentioned that the Palestinian Government is evaluating the university governance and it might reach a conclusion that universities might have to choose between being governmental or private. It is worth mentioning that the majority of Palestinian universities are categorized in the time being as "public" and receive governmental funding but governed by boards of trustees. Clarifying the governance of universities will be important to implement strictly the standards of quality at these universities; most universities however, already established "quality units" that plays an important role in maintaining quality standards according to international and regional benchmarks.

In the area of accreditation and quality standards, Professor Al-Subu elaborated on some regulations that already exist in the Ministry and said it is important to know when Palestinian students are sent abroad to obtain their graduate degrees in Europe.

In conclusion of the meeting, Professor Barakat thanked again the Minister Alami for dedicating a good amount of time for this meeting, and agreed that PEACE will follow up all matters discussed with the Assistant Deputy Minister, Dr. Shalabi and will have meetings with him soon to discuss the details.

2. Meeting Birzeit University President, Prof. Khalil Hindi at 14:00

Professor Khalil Hindi, Birzeit University President in addition to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Professor Adnan Yahya attended the meeting on behalf of Birzeit University.

The president of PEACE Professor Barakat thanked the president of Birzeit University for devoting time for this meeting to discuss cooperation between the university and PEACE. He briefed him about PEACE history reminding that Birzeit University was one of the PEACE founding universities. Professor Barakat gave a brief description of PEACE's future plans and the justification of the need to restructure the programme's administration. He discussed as well the outcomes of the PEACE meeting with the Minister of Education & Higher Education in the same morning and the discussion that took place concerning the legal status of the programme and the possibility of having an office at the Ministry in Ramallah. In addition, Professor Barakat described the importance of having the full support of Palestinian universities presidents and has the presidents involved more actively in using their public relations for supporting the programme which was established for the sake of all Palestinian higher education institutions.

Other issues of mutual interest were discussed in the meeting including the Center of Excellence in Mathematics and Physics at the university which was established under the umbrella of PEACE, and the summer school model for faculty exchange at Birzeit University. PEACE suggested to network between Palestinian universities and member universities in Europe for sending faculty members to Palestine in the summer for teaching some courses and fill the gap in some academic fields. The European faculty member will be offered free accommodation and have his/her living expenses covered by the Palestinian host university since regular tuition fees will be collected from enrolled students, and PEACE can cover the travel expenses of the faculty member in this case.

The President of Birzeit University welcomed the delegation and expressed his full support to the programme, and explained the importance of following up the ideas and suggestions that took place in the meeting and expressed the willingness of Birzeit to get involved more actively in the programme networking activities. Professor Barakat replied positively and promised that PEACE will coordinate its future plans with Birzeit in consistent manner through regular meetings with its administration.

3. Meeting the Head of UNESCO Ramallah Office, Mrs. Louise Haxthausen at 15:30

Mrs. Louise Haxthausen, the Director of the UNESCO Ramallah office and her assistant Ms. Marina Patrier attended the meeting.

The President of PEACE Professor Barakat thanked Mrs. Haxthausen for having time to meet the PEACE delegation. He briefed her about PEACE history and activities and the future plans for restructuring and redefining the role of the programme. Professor Barakat further mentioned that PEACE decided to employ a full-time office assistant in the Paris office at UNESCO to expand its networking activities, and gave summary to the PEACE meetings in Ramallah with the Minister Alami and Birzeit President Hindi.

Mrs. Haxthausen from her side greeted the delegation and agreed to the fact that PEACE needs to be more visible, and welcomed the suggestion to restructure the administration of the programme. She recommended having a meeting between PEACE and a senior assistant DG at UNESCO (possibly Mr. Qian Tang) and discusses the possibility of having PEACE embedded under the Science Sector of UNESCO rather than the Education Sector of the organization. She further suggested having Elias Sanbar, the Ambassador of Palestine at UNESCO join the meeting with the UNESCO seniors. Mrs. Haxthausen asked PEACE to consider having regional countries from the Arab World join the programme such as Qatar for example.

The teacher education programmes were discussed in the meeting and the importance of PEACE a part of these activities. Ms. Patrier proposed to have a meeting with Professor Barakat in Hebron to investigate how PEACE can help networking in the field of teacher education programmes and activities.

Mrs. Haxthausen gave a summary as well on the UNESCO programme with the Palestinian academic institutions on the “Right to Education” in which all the Israeli occupation violations against academic institutions in Palestine are being reported and documented. She invited PEACE to join efforts in strengthening the capacity of Palestinian universities in documentation of such violations and harassments that are taking place against Palestinian students, faculty members, academic infrastructures and other related fields of education.

Finally Mrs. Haxthausen was kind to brief the delegation on UNESCO support to the activities in Gaza in astronomy and looks forward to the final approval on the UNESCO chair in astronomy.

End of Report