

A strong civil society for peace

Context

In a region where life is marked by protracted conflict, HEKS/EPER is keen to foster peace based on justice and respect for human rights. While drastic curtailments of the rights of civilians are one consequence of the conflict, they are also hindering any permanent peace solution. Both within and outside the Israeli-occupied West Bank, there are large population groups whose access to land is limited or who risk dispossession or seeing their homes destroyed. After several wars, the situation in Gaza continues to be very difficult for most of its residents, for despite reconstruction there is a continuing shortage of living space. HEKS/EPER and its Palestinian and Israeli partner organizations are tackling the causes of this discrimination, for example, by promoting a fair planning system and working out alternatives that address the needs of all social groups.

Those most affected are the over two million refugees and internally displaced persons currently living in occupied Palestinian lands and in Israel, as well as the roughly three million Palestinian refugees in surrounding countries. Most of them are descendants of refugees who had to leave their villages in 1948 and 1967 and to this day are still awaiting a permanent resolution of the conflict.

Moreover, in both Israel and occupied Palestine, civil society organizations and human rights defenders have been coming under growing pressure in recent years. HEKS/EPER and its partners are working to counter restrictions on the freedoms of assembly and opinion, and are helping to protect the affected civilians through networking, international accompaniment and targeted information work.





Vision

Observance of international law is indispensable to any lasting resolution of the conflict. HEKS/EPER operates on the premise that the only possible basis for sustainable development is a long-term resolution of the conflict that ends systematic discrimination and guarantees both Palestinians and Israelis the right to self-determination and statehood.

HEKS/EPER supports and fosters peaceful methods of tackling injustice and discrimination and condemns all violence against civilians, whether directed at Israelis or Palestinians. HEKS/EPER is convinced that the currently widespread «Us or them» mentality must be overcome on both sides. Respecting the rights of Palestinians does not mean violating the rights of Israelis. The right of self-determination of Palestinians can be recognized without denying the right of self-determination of the Jewish people. HEKS/EPER respects and recognizes the right to exist and the right of self-determination of both peoples.

Objectives, priorities, activities

HEKS/EPER is striving to help bring about conflict transformation that is lasting and founded on international law. Under the Open Forum project, HEKS/EPER is strengthening civil society organizations that are working for justice and peace by non-violent means. In its work, HEKS/EPER focuses on access to land, which also encompasses matters such as reasonable housing conditions, the rights of refugees or freedom of action for civil society organizations. The Open Forum serves as a platform for devising fair alternatives to unfair practices, so that access to land as well as participation in public life are guaranteed for all.

- 1. Strengthen and protect affected communities:** HEKS/EPER and its partners support self-organization by villages and communities facing restrictions on their access to land or threatened with expropriation and the destruction of their houses. Courses and educational campaigns are organized to enable target groups to learn about their rights and articulate and stand up for their needs. To that end they form alliances with local and international partners. HEKS/EPER and its partners are contributing to the protection of the civilian population, for example through the presence of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI).
- 2. Informing and showing Israeli, Palestinian and international civil society that living together on the basis of equal rights is possible:** Because ever more areas are being sealed off, there is less and less direct contact between Israelis and Palestinians. In Israel, many people have no idea of what everyday life is like in the occupied areas and the problems confronting Palestinians on a daily basis. For their part, many Palestinians know Israelis only as soldiers or settlers. The partner organizations build public awareness and provide information about racism and discrimination, they focus discussion on the unresolved refugee problems or the militarization of the society. They formulate human rights-based solutions for discussion in both societies as well as internationally.
- 3. Convincing the responsible authorities and decision-makers about rights-based solutions:** The long-term aim of HEKS/EPER and its partner organizations is also to influence authorities and decision-makers. One import-



ant topic is still the unresolved situation of Palestinian refugees, a topic that is largely taboo, especially in Israel. Without recognition of the unjust nature of the expulsions and the joint formulation of a solution, a lasting peace solution will hardly be possible.

Target groups

People in occupied Palestinian lands and in Israel whose rights are not guaranteed and who are being denied access to land and resources and by extension to prosperity. HEKS/EPER devotes particular attention to refugees, women and young people.

Partnerships, networks, alliances, memberships

HEKS/EPER partner organizations are active in the fields of human rights, the strengthening of local communities and conflict resolution and are well networked among themselves. In the Open Forum framework, HEKS/EPER fosters cross-border cooperation among civilian organizations.

HEKS/EPER is in close contact with other Swiss non-governmental organizations working locally and is involved in the Forum for Human Rights in Israel/Palestine. Besides, HEKS/EPER is responsible for Switzerland's participation in the accompaniment programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) launched by the World Council of Churches. HEKS/EPER coordinates all its activities with other organizations and jointly implements projects with them.

HEKS/EPER on the ground

The HEKS/EPER country office in Jerusalem is responsible for overseeing, coordinating and controlling the programme.

Working approach

The programme relies on the networking of partner organizations, which meet regularly to discuss their work and mutually support one another. At the same time, they are striving jointly towards overcoming the conflict situation. This comprehensive approach could well be a harbinger of genuine social change.

Region:

Palestine/Israel

Programme costs 2018:

CHF 2 635 800.–

HEKS/EPER No.: 360.501

Responsibility:

Kerstin Göller

Contact:

Swiss Church Aid (HEKS/EPER)
Communication
Seminarstrasse 28
8042 Zurich
Switzerland
Phone: +41 44 360 88 10
E-mail: projektdienst@heks.ch
www.heks.ch/english