Address of intentions of the new Chief Executive Officers of the „Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information“ (IPCRI)

Nach 24 Jahren sind Hanna Siniora und Gershon Baskin als Leiter des „Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information“ zum Jahresende 2011 ausgeschieden. Beiden gebührt der große Dank all jener Menschen in Israel, in Palästina und in unseren Breitengraden, die von der nationalen Ebenbürtigkeit beider Völker als Voraussetzung des Friedens zweier Staaten zwischen dem Mittelmeer und dem Jordan überzeugt sind. Wer die Chance hatte, an ihren Veranstaltungen teilzunehmen, die vor allem im Ambassador Hotel in Ost-Jerusalem stattfanden, wird vom politisch-intellektuellen Niveau tief beeindruckt gewesen sein, das sie systematisch von billiger Polemik und üblichen Parteinahmen fernhielt. Es verwundert daher nicht, dass IPCRI von der University of Pennsylvania zu den ersten 30 wichtigsten Think Tanks im Mittleren und Nahen Osten (MENA) gezählt worden ist.

Zum 01. Februar 2012 haben nunmehr von palästinensischer Seite Riman Barakat und von israelischer Seite Dan Goldenblatt die IPCRI-Leitung übernommen. In ihrem ersten „Newsletter“ vom 26. Februar 2012 legen sie ihr Arbeitsprogramm mit sieben Schwerpunkten vor, die unser aller Aufmerksamkeit wert sind.

Reiner Bernstein

Dear IPCRI Friends and Supporters,

We, Riman Barakat and Dan Goldenblatt, are slowly settling into our new positions as co-CEOs at the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information – IPCRI. This is our first and somewhat long newsletter. Out of respect for your time and inboxes, we will stick to a bi-weekly and shorter updates from now onwards.

We have hit the road running so to speak. We have moved offices; received a grant from the USAID on the 1st of February; begun introducing ourselves to our board members, friends and supporters, the diplomatic corps, and other NGOs. We are about to re-launch IPCRI's Strategic Thinking and Analysis Team (STAT) meetings,

address the challenges of the anti-normalization campaigns, as well as draft proposals for new and innovative ideas. All of this, in addition to dealing with the day to day management of IPCRI.

But first a general note: The occupation is entering its 45th year, IPCRI its 24th, the peace process its 21st. With all the millions of dollars and tens of thousands of human hours that have been invested in resolving the conflict, the truth of the matter is that those efforts have failed Palestinian freedom of movement is much worse off today than it was when IPCRI was founded in 1988. The Palestinians have not achieved their legitimate political rights. The 22% of the land promised to the Palestinians during Oslo has only been partially granted. Only 40% of this area is under Palestinian jurisdiction, whereas 60% is categorized as area C, remaining under full Israeli control, allowing for illegal settlements to continuously expand.

According to various survey data, a majority of Israelis and Palestinians support a two state solution, but cast their ballots (at least the Israelis do) in the favor of political parties that don't deliver this end. With each passing day, the implementation of a two state solution seems more difficult to reach or imagine than ever before. When IPCRI was founded there were only few tens of thousands of settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, today there are over 500,000! The economic dependency continues and Israel does little to alleviate it.

With that in mind we are more convinced than ever that IPCRI has a key role to play. We are strategically and uniquely placed amidst a growing gap between Israelis and Palestinians and we are intent to do everything in our power to creatively close this gap.

IPCRI still features high on the international list of think tanks. It has recently been ranked in the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program of the University of Pennsylvania in the top 30 Think Tanks in the

MENA region and, for the first time, also in the top 30 think tanks with the most innovative policy proposals/ideas. We wish to use this strong foundation to continue the important work that Gershon [Baskin] and Hanna [Siniora] and so many of IPCRI friends and supporters have established. We are therefore re-launching IPCRI's Strategic Thinking and Analysis Team (STAT) meetings but this time we are inviting young leaders to the meetings. We hope that with new energies and insights from professional and young leaders, our think tank activities will create stronger impact in both societies. We intend to examine the meaning and effect of the seemingly endless Status Quo (if there can be such a thing), but also examine alternatives, if any, to the two state solution.

Dr. Salam Fayyad , Ehud Barak, Tzipi Livni and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have presented the “one-state solution” alternative mostly as a threat, if no progress on the two-state solution is reached. The reality could be frightening, but we seek to address the different options and the implications attached to them. Before we address those broad but pertinent political questions, however, we feel we must, tackle the more immediate issue of anti-normalization, by presenting both sides of the debate.

Here are some of the projects we are currently working on:

– **Young Leaders Partner for Change** – A two year project funded by USAID. The project will include 300 youth in two 12 month cycles. At the end of each cycle the youth will present 9 community projects planned and executed by joint Jewish-Arab teams in each of the three cities, Lod, Ramle and Tel Aviv-Yafo. **This is the first project that IPCRI has ever undertaken that is not cross border but rather only cross national.**

– **Bi-Narrative Online Museum of the Israeli Palestinian Conflict** – IPCRI has developed a truly unique project that will present the history of the conflict on the internet, in three languages, presenting

both the Jewish and the Arab narrative side by side. This project is gaining a significant amount of interest from international as well as private donors even as the final draft of the project proposal will only be ready by the 15th of February.

– **Women Empowered for Peace –** A project that was financed in 2011 by the US State Department through the Middle East Partnership Initiative – MEPI. This is a very successful and even transformative project that brought women from Israel's periphery together with Palestinian women to determine their own agenda for cooperation. The project's funding has ended but the women are still fully engaged and interested in continuing and expanding the project IPCRI is seeking funding for this project.

– **Attention Bias Modification Treatment** – is an innovative treatment method for children suffering from social anxiety developed at Tel Aviv University with promising success indicators. This treatment is currently being tried out in cooperation with the US National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) in over 10 locations around the world and in Israel. IPCRI is going to facilitate establishing sites in the West Bank and Gaza.

– **Air Quality Monitoring** – IPCRI is developing a cross border project based on innovative and transformative technology developed by an Israeli startup. The technology enables bringing the general public real-time understandable and actionable information about the quality of the air we breathe in a very affordable way.

– **Participatory Democracy Project** – IPCRI has submitted a request for funding from the UN Democracy Fund for a two year project during which an online system enabling voters to receive real-time feedback as to the political parties that best represent their political opinion. This is done by way of political parties

"feeding" their responses on pre-vetted questions into the online tool which are then processed. The voters answer a similar set of questions and the system compares the voters' opinions to that of the party and provides information as to which party is closest to her/his opinion.

– **Visit Israel Palestine** – this is the most recent project we are starting to work on. It is an initiative of bringing "normal" (unengaged or active) Israelis to visit Palestine and inshalla, Palestinians to visit Israel. The most interesting thing about it is that it started off through a meeting that IPCRI hosted nearly 3 years ago whereby a Palestinian and an Israeli who met decided to launch this initiative. During its first year of operation, in 2010, it brought over 1500 Israelis to visit Palestine (none the other way). They did this without an organization. Now, they are interested in launching the initiative in a more structured way and have come to IPCRI to provide the logistical and administrative umbrella for the activities.

We would like to invite you to engage and challenge us with questions, ideas, suggestions, projects, and anything else you think could make us better, more informed, more innovative, more challenged and more challenging.

We are both intent on first doing and then talking (and fundraising). However, if you want to help us out in this new launch, you can click here to donate to IPCRI: http://www.ipcri.org/IPCRI/Donate.html.

More to come soon.

Sincerely yours,
Riman Barakat and Dan Goldenblatt
Co-CEOs of [IPCRI]

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