



Letter to members of ALLMEP from Siach Shalom (Talking Peace) following the issuing of ALLMEP's statement about annexation

To all our Israeli and Palestinian friends and partners in ALLMEP,

As we emerge from lockdown (hopefully for good), this is an opportune moment to express our thanks to ALLMEP and to you all for the important role that you played in our efforts to adapt to the new circumstances that were forced upon us by the Covid 19 crisis. Being members of a supportive community that continued to work together was both morally encouraging and practically helpful. Thank you all.

It seems that we are emerging from the Covid crisis straight into a new one as the prospect of annexation appears on the political horizon. ALLMEP has chosen to issue a statement expressing its opposition to annexation. We understand that this was the expressed expectation of many, if not all, the member organizations. While we see the reasons for this and realize that ALLMEP is not necessarily speaking on behalf of its individual members, it is important to us to share a few general words in writing about why we do not identify with this statement.

Since its inception in 2010, Siach Shalom (Talking Peace) has been working to include the so-called "dissenting" or "spoiler" populations in the peace effort. Our premise was that internal division and the exclusion of dissenters in both Israeli and Palestinian society presents a tangible obstacle to Israeli/Palestinian peace. We also worked with the key intuition that much of the opposition to the peace efforts that began in the early 90s with the Oslo accords was motivated by religion, and that a profound understanding of how religious leaders (non-liberal religious leaders in particular) view peace was necessary in order for them to become effectively engaged in a constructive dialogue process. In our work we sought to develop new and innovative approaches to group dynamic facilitation that would broaden the range of people who can feel comfortable talking about peace together, and made a special effort to bring leaders from the traditional peace camp together with rabbis and other ideological leaders from the settlements. Over the years, both the scale and the scope of our work have expanded to include many new (Israeli and Palestinian) communities. But

the basic principle of bringing together oppositional voices in the dialogue about peace has remained the same. As we face the divisions that the prospect of annexation will inevitably bring, our priority is to protect the integrity of our relationship with all the parties who have given us their trust in the past so that we can continue to bring them together in the future. The relationships and trust that we have built in the last ten years with these communities will likely be a greater contribution to the cause of peace than any rhetorical statement we could make on the issue of annexation. In order to do this however, we must dissociate ourselves from any expressly political statement including the one that ALLMEP has issued.

That said, this is an opportunity to share a few thoughts of our own about the annexation:

1. We believe that peace cannot be achieved unless we build together a sensitive environment of listening in which all the different voices engaged in this conflict can truly speak and genuinely be heard.
2. Neither the annexation nor the cessation of territory—when executed unilaterally-- can advance peace because of the way in which political power is exercised in their execution. Many people in both Israeli and Palestinian society feel that things are forced upon them by those with power who do not listen, consult and respect their feelings, beliefs and needs.
3. We call on all those who hold peace dear to insist that solutions to the conflict cannot be forced upon us and that they must be built upon authentic processes of listening, dialogue and the genuine opening of hearts between people of all opinions and identities that live in the land.
4. However you pray and whatever your beliefs we pray that all of our prayers will bring us closer to the words of the prophet Isaiah, “He who creates the fruit of our lips, Shalom Shalom to whoever is far and to who is nearby the Lord said, I will heal him.” (Isaiah 57,19)

B'Shalom (in peace),

Sharon Leshem Zinger, Alick Isaacs and Avinoam Rosenak