

**Nablus Working Group
August 11, 2016
Meeting Proceedings - Final**

Attendance

Essrea Cherin	Paul Heller
Sara-Jane Cohen	Brenda Mehos
Liz Fox	Joan Nagel
Fred Greene	Rob Schware
Julia Halaby	Marc Soloway

Facilitation

Heather Bergman and Katie Waller

** Meeting summaries are a record of what was said at each meeting. A statement's inclusion does not mean that participants agree to its accuracy or intention. At the request of the Working Group, meeting reports capture all the comments made during meetings without summarizing them. **

<i>All</i>	Submit comments to the final report to Heather in advance of the next meeting on August 31.
<i>Heather</i>	Send out a draft of the final report to all Working Group members.

Follow-up Item: Norway

Joan Nagel and Essrea Cherin reached out to the Sister City contact regarding the state of the Sister City relationship between Stavanger, Norway, and Nablus, as some Working Group members has heard that the City Council has been asked to reassess the relationship. A coordinator of the project responded stating that the request had not gone anywhere. A follow-up email was then sent to a member of the Stavanger City Council who had raised concerns about the relationship with Nablus. Below are the details of the Working Group discussion.

- We received an email back from the City Councilor. We have a letter to share. He told us about the motion before City Council. The issue was raised, and it did not go anywhere. She also included lots of attachments that seem to be historical documents about the purpose of the Sister City relationship. I wanted to get in touch with the councilperson who introduced this idea. I googled him and tried to email him, but it did not work. Then I looked him up on Facebook and sent him a message. I heard back, and he wrote me the following message: "Hi Joan, thanks for contacting me. The result of my proposal ended with my proposal being dismissed from almost the whole city council - unfortunately. I somehow expected it, the anti-Israeli movements in Norway are pretty strong, which would probably be a whole different thing in the US. The only supporters I thought that would be certain to support the proposal were the Christian Democrats - but after a while, they decided not to support it. So it ended with only the Libertarian votes (ours). Do you have any news articles about this case?" The story was picked up by some international news agencies. On his Facebook page, his religion is classified at "atheist." I am also passing around the request that the Stavanger City Councilor submitted to his Mayor asking that the Nablus Sister City relationship be suspended. He was concerned about the map in public places in Nablus that did not show Israel but labeled the entire country as Palestine, as well as Martyrs' Square which memorialized and honored terrorists.
- I would say that, at some point, there was a feeling that we do not know the outcome of the attempt to deauthorize the relationship, but it was an example of the City government

continuing to have to be engaged and embroiled in this issue. It is not that the City approves it and then everything is fine. We cannot make any assumptions. The number of Jews in Norway is smaller and smaller every year. There is a strong anti-Israel sentiment that blossoms along with anti-Semitism.

- I am happy to let this issue lie. The result of discussing the European cities is that there are no major problems. If there are problems, I do not want to let it lie. The question is if the Sister City relationship was doing things that were not good. We can talk to the mayor if necessary. We should produce a report at the end of this process, regardless of the outcome. There are European Sister Cities that seem to be okay. We should include any information that says otherwise, as well.
- The relationship with Dundee, Scotland is not okay. The twinning organization, according to the website, has many activities that are similar to what Essrea has described. However, the website includes links to virulently anti-Israel websites that are heavily political. There are pro-Palestinian and pro-Nablus groups in Dundee. I have had email exchanges with a Jewish man who was born and raised in Dundee and he said the Jewish population has dwindled to only eight people. They moved to Israel 20 years ago because the climate was so unsafe for them. I do not want there to be an assumption that it is all okay because that is not true.
- I will be spending my three minutes talking about the Dundee relationship later in the meeting, so I do not need to address those issues right now.

Media Interaction

A member of the Working Group was contacted by a journalist. The Group members discussed how they interpreted the guidelines outlined in the agreed-upon Protocols document to see if a conversation with the journalist should be avoided or would be allowable. Below are the details of this discussion.

- A journalist from Westword has contacted me about being interviewed for an article she is writing about the Boulder-Nablus issue. I thought we agreed not to talk to the media, so I emailed Heather to be sure. We said Working Group members will not talk to the media about the process and will not give second-hand reports. That is as far as the protocols go. I wanted to bring it up tonight and briefly talk about it. I do not feel comfortable talking to her or anyone until our work is done. It is easy in an interview to step over that line, whatever the line is. I think it is better not to put yourself in that position. I do not see a reason to talk to the media. I do not trust the media on either the right or the left, or even those who tell you they are fair and balanced. My request would be that you would authorize me to say to her that no one will be talking to the media until our work is finished.
- I am afraid it is too late. She has been in touch with me well before this dialogue. She contacted me in April or May. I would not have spoken to her if we had agreed that we would have no interaction with the media. Because of what we agreed to in the protocols, I thought we were allowed to talk about our own experiences, but not the process. My understanding when talking to her was she was interested not just in this dialogue, but in the BNSCP as a whole, its history and activities. She asked me lots of questions. This dialogue was less than five percent of what we discussed. I absolutely followed the agreement we made during the first meeting. I did not discuss any details nor did I mention any of the other participants in the Working Group. I only mentioned my own views and role.
- She contacted me, and I thought I could not talk about anything at all. I understand her article is larger scope than this. She was interested in why the City is doing it this way and other dialogues for disputes in the City.

- It sounds like it is consistent with the protocols we set. You can speak about your perspectives.
- I will decide whether or not to speak with this journalist.
- It is interesting to me that the people on the Board of BNSCP are eager and willing to discuss this dialogue, but those on the other side are more hesitant about how it will be perceived.
- I am hesitant that this will make it a broader, global issue.
- I remember that those who were opposed did not want to talk about the dialogue to the media and those in favor of the application wanted to talk about the project.
- Heather Bergman will not speak with the media.

Review and Discuss Perspectives on BNSCP Commitment Document

At the last meeting, Essrea Cherin presented a document created by the BNSCP Board that outlined its commitments to the Sister City relationship. Working Group members asked for time to review the document and send in feedback to Heather Bergman. The Working Group reviewed and discussed this feedback; below are the details of this conversation.

- This document was created in response to much of the feedback BNSCP has received, including through this dialogue process. We are looking for big-picture feedback, not restating feedback that was already submitted.
- I need to make a comment. I did not understand that something we sent to the facilitator a week ago was going to be cut and pasted into a shared document. Not that I would disavow anything I said, but I did not understand that is how the feedback would be used, and I was very uncomfortable. If I had known it was to be shared with everyone fully and it is easily identifiable, I may have written things differently. I am disappointed.
- I did not understand that the feedback would be shared by what each person said. I thought it would be a distillation of comments.
- I am sorry about that. People also get frustrated when input is summarized. I apologize if it was unclear.
- I am going to come back to this, again and again, tonight. I think that what we are doing here is building trust. I want to believe it. I want to ask what has to be done to be trusted. What do I or the Board need to do to build trust? I realized this whole idea when I was coming back to the mission of the Board. I realized that I could back off on the mission of the Board to make sure the community is good. You are my community, and I want to make sure it is a loving and trusting one. There are consequences, but at some point, we have to give BNSCP another try. Lots of the comments were about mistrust. I think it would be valuable to have a conversation about trust and the development of the shared common ground document. Maybe we can look at the document further to see how we can be more trustful.
- Reading the feedback shows that there is so much distrust. We have tried so hard. We are trying to find common ground, and there is continual language that says we are not okay. It is hard to keep doing this.
- I read the commitment document and then I read the feedback. When I read the first section on purpose, I could hear the gist of those statements. I did not agree with all the details, but I could sense from where that person was coming. My sense is that the organization may have been political four years ago, but the people involved have grown and changed. The Working Group is part of the process. We are trying to find common ground, and the commitment document reveals that. I am convinced that the Sister City project is engaging in a non-political, cultural effort that is people-to-people and not bashing Israel. I am utterly convinced of that. I can see where these people were coming from initially, but that was four years ago. Let us not go back to the past, but rather see where we are right now.

- Actions speak louder than words, and that is true for everyone. I have not seen the BNSCP do things on its own initiative, but rather because it would help their application. I can give you many examples if you want. To me, the commitment document is irrelevant. What would be relevant to me, and I bite my tongue as I say it because it pushes the issue down the road, but if three to five years from now I saw Sister City activities, delegations, speakers, film programs, and web postings that did not have more-than-occasional objectionable content. That would build trust; I hope - a track record. Right now, I see that it is wonderful you are doing yoga and sending footballs. The programs are great, but then other things are happening that make me think, "no." There are problematic things mixed into the good things.
- This is tough, and it is hard. When I first saw this document, my reaction was - where did this come from? Why? This is the same response to you taking our concerns and fixing the application. It is not a question of fixing things, but showing us. There are several items we will discuss tonight that are horrendously objectionable. I appreciate the work you put into it, but I do not know why you did it.
- I put it in my application that I am not associated with anyone. We have to have an opportunity to see the proposal from the Nablus people and be assured that it would not be anti-Israeli propaganda. I wanted to see something in writing that would reflect the whole Board's acknowledgment of that. That is where this request originated. There are people in the community who want to interact with people in Nablus under a Boulder premise. I read the document, and they met the threshold that they will take concrete measures to ensure that this does not become a platform for Israeli bashing. I showed this to my wife, and she was uncomfortable. They are trying to answer some of the objections. Tell me some specific things that they need to change. I mentioned it briefly at the last meeting that official statements have not to be anti-Israel, but could other people post anti-Israeli messages on your website? We went through that. She would be happy if it went away, but she does not want to tell people that they cannot have their Sister City relationship. We must recognize a good faith effort. I still want to see a statement that says you will make sure that nasty statement will not happen on your platforms.
- I want to reiterate the issue of trust again. I am going to say that the work of this group is not to improve the application. I understand your firm opposition, but let us scale back and talk about whom we represent in this community. If someone raised a question about your behavior, I know that you would do anything you could to improve it. I want it to be cast that we are Boulder - we are tolerant, accepting, and willing to hear other people's ideas. We are here to heal the community and talk amongst ourselves. I want to caution us about just talking about making the application successful. We have to be comfortable talking with each other like we would around a dinner table.
- I heard that one thing that is upsetting is that it felt like the document was fixing the concerns that we heard, and I wanted to give you a snippet of how the Board came to this point. We had a Board meeting where we discussed the idea of this document, and multiple times someone recognized that what we were creating are nothing new, but rather our founding principles. They have been guiding our organization for years, and this document formalizes them. We heard from the Group that it would be helpful to have a formal document that was approved by the BNSCP Board. The Board articulated, formalized, and then approved them. There may be a few bullets that were new in this discussion, but these are mainly what have been guiding us for years. It is correct that we are learning as we go. I have never done this before. I have never started a non-profit, and I am figuring things out as I go. We have some people on the Board who have been involved with Dushanbe and Jalapa for years. I value their input quite a bit, and there are Sister City experts amongst us at these meetings. We are learning and growing. We are only five years old and are skinning

our knees still. This dialogue has helped us to learn and grow. I hear that you may not feel heard and acknowledged, but we are listening to the concerns, and we are working to address them in a way that will appease you. What would you like us to do or say that will help address your concerns? Finally, I want to mention one thing that stood out to me as I reflected on the dialogue. I have heard two messages. One is that BNSCP should not be political and should not make political statements. I agree with this. On the other hand, I have heard that there is a concern about when people talk about their experiences in Nablus, there must be a context for the stories. To me, the context of why there is an occupation varies tremendously across a myriad of perspectives. I have been involved in the Middle East for some years, and I can be certain that there are thousands of perspectives. The “why” is political. So on one hand we are to stay out of politics, and on the other you are disappointed that we are not? How would you suggest we walk the line between these concerns?

- The facts of the occupation and that there are multiple explanations for why there is an occupation are the perfect reasons or explanations of why there should not be a Sister City relationship. You cannot touch Palestinian stuff, such as daily life and activities, without talking about the occupation. Unless you say that you will not talk about the occupation at all and only partake in specific cultural activities, there should be no relationship. People will have to come back and not discuss the difficult or challenging stuff. Without context, Palestinians are victims. When you start explaining the background, that is what is political. Keeping talking to whomever and doing whatever you want, or censor people. People can speak to their church or letters to the editor, but under the BNSCP activities, website, or speakers, the experiences cannot be discussed. To me, the answer is not to have the Sister City relationship. I am going to give you many things that have been happening that, that if they no longer happened and other things did not start happening, could allow me to begin to trust BNSCP. These are examples of a mindset that makes me distrustful. It is not a checklist. I see a mindset by some members of your Board and some people not on the Board but who are supportive, that show me or I infer from their actions that I cannot trust them to understand the line that they should not cross.
- The caution I feel is that if it is an observation versus an interpretation.
- The second meeting, Essrea described Guy Benintendi as a sweet guy or as a teddy bear. He is vicious.
- This is not helpful.
- This is helpful to me because I want it in the record.
- It is an interpretation of someone who talks on behalf of the group.
- He is not part of the group.
- You have repeatedly said in the past years that it is the job of BNSCP to present the Nablus or Palestinian perspective, and others will present the other perspective, whatever that is. I have problems with that. I may be wrong, but that is where trust is challenged.
- For the record, when things are pulled out of context, anything can sound suspicious. What I do say is that like any Sister City, the intention of the BNSCP is to create opportunities for citizens-to-citizen diplomacy, and for people to learn about each other’s lives and cultures. That is what Sister Cities do. This project is in no way different from any other Sister City project in that way. You may have heard it out of context, but that is what the BNSCP believes. We are doing what all other sister cities do.
- The statement was made in a KGNU interview, and I listened to it in full. You were asked about the film program that BNSCP put on a few years ago. It was three or four films, and it was challenged as being very one-sided. You said in that context that it is BNSCP’s job to present the Nablus perspective.

- What I said was it is our job to share what life is like in Palestine.
- I do not think this is moving us along.
- If there are concerns, they are going to show up later. I would rather have us talk about this now. Being new to this process, is that all that you have got - the Guy Benintendi thing?
- What I hear about the document is that some people think it is already in practice, some are saying it is not helpful, and some think it moves us forward.

Suggestion for Mayor-to-Mayor Outreach

At the last meeting, it was suggested that the Mayor of Boulder get in contact with the Mayor of Nablus to discuss the issues that have arisen with the application. The Working Group discussed this suggestion; below are the details of this conversation. The written proposal is attached at the end of this document for reference.

- I am confused by this. We spent a lot of time talking about people-to-people interactions. I thought that is what we were talking about here. I thought that the people-to-people interaction is what is different about Boulder Sister City relationships. Mayor-to-mayor discussions are political. I am confused, and I do not know why we are talking about it.
- I think it is a good idea.
- I had understood that sometimes the mayors could talk amongst themselves. Maybe we should look at what other Sister Cities do. If they do not have interactions between mayors, we should not do it.
- I think that as a Sister City, it arose from an interest in hearing what the City's experience has been. Mayors can talk "mayor talk" to each other about a 30-year Sister City relationship. The mayors could have a more frank discussion about what is going on and could ask questions. If that would feel beneficial, we could recommend it.
- I cannot imagine this would in any way reassure our City Council or us because of what we heard from the Dundee contact and what we have heard about life in Dundee via the internet. Boulder has 10,000 Jewish people, most of whom are very concerned about this. Dundee and Norway have a handful of Jewish people. I am not sure the population of Jewish people in Lille, France. It is different. Having dancer exchanges and pen pals is fine; those activities are not tearing up those communities. There are no Jewish communities to speak out in these other cities. There is a lack of equivalency. I do not think the issue that concerns our Jewish communities are on the radar of the other communities. They are not on the radar of the Nablus mayor.
- The Working Group is looking to find common ground. This recommendation is part of that, and I am in favor of it. There is no harm in the mayors talking to each other. City Council is not obligated to do anything, so it is just a recommendation coming out of the Working Group.
- One thing I would want is that we could provide some input about the probing questions that should be asked.
- I am indifferent. I sense that the idea may have emerged to see if there was an agenda from the Nablus mayor side. For me, if there is, I would not be surprised. That is part of why I express concern, but I am indifferent if that connection happens or not. I think the intent is for this to be people-to-people. I am neutral.
- It is a government decision to make a people-to-people relationship.
- What do you think about providing questions so we could get complete information?
- If it is going to happen, there must be carefully worded questions.
- I do not think it is a good idea.
- Could we have a few people get together and write down questions? Would that help?

- Assuming they are to have a frank discussion, I do not think we need to start another work group to stretch this out. If City Council is interested, they can make the effort. Maybe they want to do it at the end of their process. I just want to make sure if this application is turned down, it is not because we were generally unsettled about Palestinians, Nablus, or Martyrs' Square. I can imagine someone saying that the community is interested, but we are not interested if this is going to be a platform for Israel-bashing. If they are interested, they can do it. I want it to be written that if City Council has concerns about engaging with Nablus, they can pick up the phone.
- We have gone around the table, and some people are for, against, and indifferent. It is not a recommendation if it is just someone's comments in a meeting summary. If we are opposed to dialogue, let us capture the numbers.
- I am concerned because I do not know the mayor, so I do not know if she is naïve or informed about these issues. If she is naïve, the person reaching out must have a deep understanding of the situation.
- *Working Group members were polled regarding their support for mayor-to-mayor discussions between Boulder and Dundee; five members supported the idea, two members thought it was a bad idea, two members were neutral, and one member was unsure.*

Ideas: Individual Actions to Heal the Divide and Increase Understanding

Working Group members were given four minutes to share the following regarding their views of the BNSCP application:

- Clarification of two things they have said that they think have not been understood
- Statement of one thing they think is critical for the group to know or hear regarding this issue
- Actions that they can personally take to help heal the divide that this issue has created in Boulder

Following the individual statements, other members of the Working Group were encouraged to reflect back what they have heard to ensure understanding. Below are the details from this conversation. Reflections from other group members are noted as such.

- This is hard, and it is my first time sitting here. That is the reasons I have said I have no opinion. I have my own responses, but for me, this statement will not be about feeling heard. I have things I want to say, but the context will be different. Maybe I should not have come in so late. I am in an altered state. I want people to know this before I talk.
- It is fine if you go last or do not want to participate.
- This is going to respond to something that someone else brought up. My concern is not about being afraid to engage with Palestinians. I hope that the activities like training yoga teachers and bringing dance groups here continue. I will volunteer to host dancers. I think sending volunteers to Project Hope is good. My concern is giving a City-approved platform to bash Israel. *A member read a statement regarding the Sister City relationship with Dundee, Scotland. It is attached at the end of this document, as is an article that was quoted. The quoted passages are denoted in bold font in the attachment.* At the last meeting a document was distributed with statements from colleagues in Europe who are also Sister Cities or twinned with Nablus. It contained a quote from the chair of the Dundee-Nablus Twinning Association, 'I am not aware of any use of our group for promoting anti-Israel messages or propaganda.' I went to their official website and found many, many instances of its use to promote anti-Israel messages and calls to action for the Boycott, Divest, Sanction Israel

movement. I am passing around a document with direct quotes from that website. My commitment is to talk to people in this group and the broader Boulder community one-on-one to hear their stories.

- I am Jewish, and my daughter is Israeli; I have been working with both sides for years. I do not live in a state of fear. I am engaged in people-to-people exchanges with Nablusians, and it is working charmingly and educationally for both sides. This is an opportunity for Boulder to step up and engage in more formal education, cultural, and cooperative exchanges. People-to-people exchanges have been going on for years. I have years of development experience with the World Bank and USAID. I have already had meetings with people, and I am willing to do that for any group. I am willing to make my expertise available to anyone.
 - *Reflection:* He has had personal experiences working with Palestinians, and he has met with some of us who are working on a sustainability project on the West Bank. He gave us great advice and will continue to be available to share his expertise.
 - *Reflection:* He is Jewish, and his daughter is Israeli.
- For me, the thing I want to clarify is that this is not about being anti-Palestinian, anti-Nablus or anti-anyone. It is a concern, and I have mentioned this each time since it was said, that it is hard to know when you are blind. My concern is anti-Israel messages. It is not just me being protective, but I am concerned it could encourage anti-Semitism. This elevation to a City-sanctioned relationship makes the messaging more concerning. I am not concerned about BNSCP, but the doors it opens to people like the man who sent in the last public comment and those who protest outside of our synagogues on the holiest Jewish day. That is in Boulder. We have had people show up to the Jewish community center with white powder because he was looking at images saying that the attacks on September 11, 2001, were caused by Jews. That stuff is here. It was just put on our Facebook page. You want to stop anti-Semitism. The US State Department created the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism. They have three actions that make up anti-Semitic acts – demonizing Israel, applying double standards to Israel, and delegitimizing Israel. I think an opportunity like this would open a door for others in the community. The anti-Israel existence is the same as anti-Semitism. Critiques of Israel are fair. Israelis critique Israel more than most. It is not about the challenging of the process. The Jewish community has been involved with the Black Lives Matter movement, and then they called us an apartheid state. That is hard for us when our allies call us that. We have all been involved with coexistence movements. Most American Jews want a two-state solution. My message that I want you to understand is what doors could be open, even with the best of intentions. I appreciate the commitments document, and it is concerning how some people may engage in this topic and use it as a vehicle to advance anti-Israel or anti-Semitic behavior. It is tiresome to have to keep thinking about bringing in police to our buildings. I think what I try to do is shed light on these challenges, explore nuances, and be willing to share and listen to a narrative while knowing they are not the same. I will continue to engage in the spirit of greater understanding, which will begin to lead to mutual support.
 - *Reflection:* You made it clear that you are not anti-Palestinian or anti-Nablus. You appreciate that there may be blind spots, but you are concerned that this will open the door to actions that can be anti-Semitic. You shared that there has recently been a slew of anti-Semitic actions and that there are other things happening in Boulder County. I am aware of what happened on your holy day because an interfaith group with which I participate talked about it. The State Department classifies three forms of anti-Semitism - demonizing Israel, applying a double standard to Israel, and delegitimizing Israel.

- When these three actions are combined, it is a red flag that things are moving beyond critiques to anti-Semitism. Being opposed to an Israeli policy does not make you anti-Semitic.
- I want to reflect again, it is horrible that there is anti-Semitism. I want my Jewish friends to feel safe. I did not know there are 10,000 Jewish people in Boulder. I want Boulder to be more diverse. It is not diverse and it never will be because it is so expensive. There are Arabs who live here in the town. When I was going through the paperwork to see who is in favor, I saw a letter from an Arab professor at University of Colorado and he wants City Council to approve the application because he thinks that it would help him be more understood. It would be nice to work towards everyone counting here, and no one feeling threatened. I have been very alarmed with the anti-Muslim sentiment. I think this is something we can do to put our fears aside to work together to make things safe for everyone. We can work to make Palestinians here feel like everything is safe and good for a Nablus Sister City. I had a sinking feeling that when it was voted down, it was because they were not good enough. It made me want to work more. That is why we are here. My commitment is to do more interfaith dialogue. I will participate in the Unity Walk on September 25, 2016. It has been great to make friends who are like-minded so we can get together and talk about how we can make our community better. Our church has had some talks and invited speakers. We have shown people that there is lots of misunderstanding. Lots of people do not know what is going on. I want to help that along.
- I agree that there is lots of concern about the different backlash to the Muslim community. I have spent time with people at the Islamic Center. I am pleased to hear that they feel that Boulder supports them. I am still new in town, so we are just starting to build those connections. I have an appreciation for diversity and having common ground to share.
 - *Reflection:* What I hear you say and what I appreciate is that you stuck your toe into this issue without knowing much, and you are working hard to learn and remain open. Now I will editorialize because I know that is true. I see what you do, and I appreciate it.
- Throughout my adult life, I have been involved in organizations that work on humanitarian projects between different religions. I have been involved with Hadassah, an organization that was nominated for a Nobel peace prize. I have been to Israel 12 times, and I have dialogued with Arab and Israeli doctors who work together side by side. I have worked in a cancer ward where I have been an Israeli mother and a Palestinian mother console each other while their two bald-headed children play together and share a room. Also, my family came here to flee persecution in Europe, and many family members died in the Holocaust. Israel is important to me, and my volunteer activities reflect that. I am concerned that the Nablus project presents a one-sided narrative. The activities I have been involved in are helping all people, not just one people. We cannot have it both ways. We cannot avoid talking about the problems in the area and detail them in personal stories. We cannot say that this is not political and then ask the mayors to communicate with each other. We cannot say that this is not political and then allow anyone to post on the BNSCP website. It has to be one way or the other. I actively participate in this group, and I try hard to listen to everyone. I think BNSCP should continue their work, but I do not think it should have City Council approval. City Council represents all of Boulder. Should City Council approve the proposal when only one of the people in the region is represented and the views of the Jewish community be ignored; I am very concerned. City Council should reject the application. I will be at the Unity Walk on September 25.
- I can see this point, and maybe there is nothing to be done. Maybe engaging with Palestinians under the name of Boulder is not ever okay. There has never been a Sister City

with this much opposition. It does not take good reasons to turn it down, but rather the opposition of people who feel strongly.

- *Reflection:* I heard that you have had a lifelong commitment to the region for many reasons stemming from your family history. You have a strong connection to Israel and a high appreciation for Israel. You have done a lot of quite remarkable work in reaching out to people who have different views and serving all populations in the region in a humanitarian capacity. It sounds like you have dedicated your adult life to serving people in that capacity. I also heard that you are concerned or fearful that a Sister City relationship with Nablus or how BNSCP has been handling it comes across as one-sided. You appreciate our activities, but with City Council approval, it is like ignoring significant concerns of a large portion of Boulder.
- I am struggling that I will not be coherent. I have a measurement in my body that I start shaking when I realized how much this has impacted my life and when I realized how much I have inherited this issue. I want to run, and I am in that space because of statements saying that we cannot talk about Palestine, and it is going to be political. I need this group to hear and for City Council to read that Palestinian identity is separate from Israel. I need to live separate as an individual that does not always have to be attached to Israel. I appreciate not making this about Israel. How can we make this not about Israel? I wish I could take you all to Nablus, and you would get fed way too much. I hear the fear, and I know that fear. That is why I heard it - loss of home and country and of belonging. I know you think the activities are groovy, but they cannot be under Boulder. If that is true, where do I belong? We have people who live here who are from Nablus. How can we make this about the people and each other? How can we take that risk and take that leap? I think that is very Jewish to take risks and to be willing to try. Give it a try. I know there is a long history of politicizing, and there are many messages that feel threatening to your group and your sanctuary. We are never going to get past it if we do not take a leap. I feel like I am trapped. I am being told not to be political, but it is political. It feels like there is nothing that can be done to give you a willingness to make you want to try it. I hear the fear, and I want to engage in group therapy about our fears. Let us move on and try to be friends. Let us not generalize them, as was mentioned earlier. The previous weeks were hard when all those letters that came in against the application, especially when they were saying that there are nice Palestinians, but Palestinians are terrorists and that their children fight in the Israeli Defense Force. I was called a terrorist for the first time when I was ten. Palestinian and terrorism cannot be equated any longer. The best way to realize that is to say we accept you and we want to be in a friendship with you. I feel that there has been a lot of wounding. I feel wounded, and I know you do. My commitment is to see how we can come together. I have been doing dialogues since 2006. After ten years, maybe it does not work, but I will never stop. I will continue in dialogue and in relating. It was brought to my attention about how inhospitable Europe is to Jews. I did not realize how threatened you all feel and how scary it must be. I know it, I feel it, and I connect with it. How can we join in not letting that be the case? I do not know how to make the commitment. I may show up in your synagogue, or we can all have dinner again.
 - *Reflection:* I hear a tremendous amount of pain and issues of loss and belonging. I hear a plea to separate Palestine from politics and Palestinians from terrorists. So many people and the way in which you hear comments from the Jewish community is a dismissal. I feel that. I hear a plea to take a risk and a leap to move beyond the current paradigms.
- I never wanted my Jewish identity to be, and it has never been, defined from a place of fear, scarcity, or the things we are discussing. I am European. It is terrifying that that Labour Party, which I have always supported, is now full of anti-Semitic people. All my left-wing

Jewish friends could not vote as they wanted. It is frightening to see that. Friends from France and other European countries see that it is not safe. It is a demonization of Israel. As I referred to in my letter, I was in Lithuania, and I saw the places where my family was shot by collaborators. I do not want that to be my identity, but it is. Part of the narrative is that Jewish are trained to be suspicious and have fear. It is so bemusing to me; I have planted olive trees and spent time in Ramallah, Hebron, and Bethlehem. I have friends who are Palestinian activists. We are involved in Olive Branch. We work at coexistence projects that relate to all people. I feel committed to that. I also have two close friends who were killed in a bombing. They were 19-year-old university students. This is part of a painful and complex narrative. My primary concern is our community in Boulder. I, of course, support dialogue and coexistence, but I cannot deny the fear I have as a European who has witnessed so much hatred. If this becomes a Sister City project, I am scared. I do not want to feel like that, but I do. It is my reality. If I say I am a Zionist, people make assumptions that I am a racist, and I hate Palestinians; that is not my truth. My truth is that I love Israel and want it to be a homeland where we can live in peace. I am committed in any possible way for dialogue and dinners. I know Palestinian hospitality. I am committed to maintaining and developing the relationship with the Islamic Center, which we have hosted in the past. I will participate in the Unity Walk. I want to have a real dialogue.

- *Reflection:* I heard you say that this whole thing is very complex narrative. You feel much of this because you are a British citizen. The Labour Party is turning against Israel, and you can keenly sense the anti-Israeli sentiment. You have a family connection to the Holocaust and Israel. You are engaged in whatever you can do to be involved in the process and the dialogue. Your greatest concern is that if this is an official relationship, your fears will be continued and live out in the Boulder community.
- I did say at the first meeting, and I was genuine and naïve, let us try to make this not about Israel. This is clearly entirely about Israel. Everyone loves Palestinians, but it feels threatening to have an individual group that is going to do the lefty work. I am offended by the Cuba Sister City relationship. We do not have a big Cuba community in Boulder, but I understand why the relationship would be upsetting. I listen to this, and it is about Israel, and that is understandable. There is a big enough group of people that we can say no without unanimous support. I think this could be an opportunity. It is a risk to open the door; in Boulder, it is a small risk. Maybe we could have a six-month review. It is a small risk. If the risk is true and some of the things that are encouraged by Dundee are realized here, end the relationship. It is a small risk, and the people have been working for years. There is only one Palestinian here, but I am sure there are others in Boulder. There are people who want to participate who are not outside agitators. Do you want to go on the record that given the small risk and the desire of people to represent Boulder, you are against the relationship? I have taken your commitments document and given it to Israeli and Jewish friends, and it is hard for people to say it is unreasonable. Some have even said that this is an opportunity for the Jewish community. Anti-Semitism is not running rampant here. The risk is small, and support from the Jewish community could temper the anti-Semitism. You will have lots of people walking around town, especially younger people, questioning why their elders feel it is so essential to shut things down. My wife wants BNSCP and the application just to go away, but she is not going to stand up and actively advocate against it.
 - *Reflection:* You said that the risk to Israel or the Jewish community is small if the application is approved. It gives the opportunity to do things that further this relationship, and does not give the bad guys the opportunity to say “look at what the bad guys did.” Risks can be minimized with monitoring.

- If something goes bad, the program can be shut down.
 - *Reflection:* I heard you say that some Jewish activists would feel betrayed by their elders.
- Most of my friends only attend synagogue for large holidays. The reality is that there are more Jews in favor of the application than Palestinians in the area. I do not buy the fact that the Boulder Jewish community is under great threat by allowing BNSCP to do their thing.
- I do not love everything that the Israeli government, or individual Israelis, do. I have said this here and elsewhere. But I never hear the BNSCP or its supporters offer any criticism of anything going on in Nablus (except by Israelis). No criticism of attacks on Joseph's Tomb; no criticism of the glorification of murderers; no criticism or even acknowledgement of the many documented human rights abuses in Nablus; no criticism of either the PA, which the people there hate, or Hamas, which is not much better and which hates me; and absolutely no history or context to help explain why Nablusis today are living under a very burdensome occupation. BNSCP may explain this ringing silence as being part of the "non-political" mandate of Sister Cities. However, I consider it implicit approval. After all, they have no reservations about describing the consequences of the occupation, which is certainly political. For this reason, I cannot trust BNSCP. I think they and others will use approval of their application to validate the mission that Essrea has stated repeatedly: to tell only the Nablusi-as-victim story. I still don't understand why Boulder and Nablus need to be sister cities, given the tremendous divisiveness the issue is causing in Boulder and the fact that the good work that BNSCP does can continue with or without City approval. It is not our City Council's job to take an action that will help people thousands of miles away feel better, if that action tears up our city, as it is doing. I can continue my work with SIPP, supporting Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs and Palestinians who are working on common environmental challenges, without Boulder's official involvement, and BNSCP can continue its people-to-people work in Nablus *and* in Boulder without our City's official seal of approval. I do not believe that BNSCP is anti-Semitic. However, there is a huge increase in anti-Semitism around the world, and here in the US, and a formal sister-city relationship between Boulder and Nablus will unfortunately fuel this very scary and troubling trend. Anti-Israel sentiment and mis-characterization of Israeli actions by its detractors are encouraging this broader trend of anti-Semitism. I can't *speak* for the Jewish community, but I see a real fear in my community, not of Palestinians or other Arabs, but of the rise of this terrible hatred by Americans against my people, and our homeland, Israel. Michael Rabb's email to us is a particularly vile example of this, but it is not unique. I strongly believe that approving this Sister City application will be seen as a victory of Palestine *against* Israel and will encourage the Israel-haters and the Jew-haters. BNSCP may see this as unfair, and it is unfair, but I see it as a sad reality. I commit to participating in the Unity Walk, in the dialogues that are currently underway and continuing to work through Sustainable Israel-Palestinian Projects (SIPP) on building relationships and improving the environment. Whether or not the application is approved, I will follow and attend activities that BNSCP brings to Boulder, and hopefully be thrilled and delighted. If not, I will say something.
 - *Reflection:* I heard that you do not love everything about Israel. There are things that you feel are worthy of criticism, but you feel some concern or frustration that you have never heard from someone in BNSCP speaking about the negatives of Nablus. You have never heard BNSCP criticize things in Nablus. You listed things you have not heard us refer to or things that are not offered with context when they do occur. BNSCP maybe show the Nablusis in a victim light, and in your view, it begs context to explain why the occupation is happening. This was interpreted by you as BNSCP not wanting to point out the negatives and implicitly supporting the poor choices in

Nablus by Nablusis. It ends up that we are telling a victim story at the exclusion of offering different perspectives. I heard that you could continue to do the work you do, and we could continue without the approval of City Council. Why create this tremendous divisiveness in the community and tear the community apart? Why do this when we do not have to? You can do your work, and we can do our work. BNSCP does not need City Council approval. BNSCP is not anti-Semitic as a group, but you are worried that the presence or approval or the application will fuel scary or unwanted trends of hatred towards your community. If City Council approves the application, it could contribute to the trend, and it does not feel safe to you.

- The only thing I would edit is when you said that I was disappointed or noted that the BNSCP does not comment on poor choices or behaviors by Nablusis. I would not use those words. Those words trivialize the kinds of things that happen in Nablus and are documented. I have never heard a word from anyone speaking on behalf of BNSCP challenging or criticizing any of those serious actions.
- I have heard divisiveness mentioned multiple times, and I have been involved in this from the very beginning. There are times when there has been heat in the community because of this project, only when BNSCP went before City Council. Before and after the City Council hearing, there was no heat, disruption, or evidence of divisiveness with which the community was struggling. The divisiveness is around City Council approval only, which is the crux of the concerns I keep hearing. We keep hearing that what we are doing is great, but City Council approval is the problem. We can test this out; that is the beauty of these things. If it proves to be divisive, I want to hear what is not working. This process has been so beneficial because it is an opportunity to talk about what the concerns are and we can respond. We put our heads together to problem solve. It is a very small risk. I understand that the trust is not there. People keep coming to me and telling me that you have been telling them many false and unkind things about me. I pick up that you do not trust me. You do not have to trust me. I am one of 13 on the Board. My voice is overridden just as much as anyone else's; I am not the final decision maker. BNSCP can continue to build a track record. We are doing the best we can. We are taking to heart the concerns we have heard, and we want to hear things we have missed. What do you need to see from us that will make it better? Even after City Council approval, keep letting us know. My commitment is that my door is always open, and my phone is always on. Members of City Council have come to me and said that their friends are concerned about our proposal and asked if I would talk to them. I always say I would be more than happy to talk with them. City Council members have been bringing people to me to ask questions, and I am interested in continuing those interactions. My door is always open. I am committed to not just having a conversation but actually hearing what is being said. I would like to acknowledge what was said, about people with concerns to feel heard.
 - *Reflection:* I heard you say that when you talk about divisiveness, there has been no heat or problems except around City Council approval. Since you have been involved in BNSCP, it has been an amicable process. I have also heard you say that we could just give it a try and then stop if it does not work. I heard you acknowledge that it is a risk, and there is a lack of trust. You are not the only person, and your group is trying to build a track record. You are always open to how you can improve. Your door is always open, and you are always there for dialoguing as much as you can to acknowledge others concerns.

Reflecting on Public Comment to Date

Working Group members took the time to reflect on the public comment that has been received so far throughout the process. Below are the details of this discussion.

- I want to be clear that I found the behavior of the person who came last week to be offensive. I found the letter aggressive and not in the spirit of cooperation. I want to be connected to you, and it was not in the spirit of connection. I may have said his earlier, but some of the earlier letters, particularly those about kids fighting for freedom with the Israeli Defense Force, said some bad things. That was so offensive to me, and I needed to say that. Also, the last letter was offensive, as well.
- I did read the letters that all came in at the same time, and they were hard to read, but when I reflected on them, I realized that I used to have thoughts like that in my younger days. I used to feel similarly because that is what I knew to be true. When I was younger, that is what I learned in the environment in which I was raised. In my 20s, I had the good fortune to travel to the Middle East and spent several months in the region. Those months blew my mind as a 20-something. It blew my mind because I realized then that I had been carrying around these beliefs in my head that I did not question. When I was in Palestine, there was a dissonance going on inside of me, and I was very scared. I kept thinking that they were out to harm me, and they were tricking me. I was there long enough and met hundreds of amazing people that my beliefs started to slip away. That is part of my inspiration for being involved in BNSCP. That experience helped me grow. It helped me transform my life. I am thankful I was planted there. That is why I think Sister Cities are so valuable. When you get your information from the media or the internet, it is not the same as meeting people face-to-face. To those people who write these letters, come with me to Nablus and you will have an amazing trip.
- The last letter that was received was vile. Some of the previous ones were vile. I am sorry for all of those. They are hurtful and judgmental. We told people they could send in comments, and they did, but that does not mean that we have to like them or validate them.
- I know that this group and other people working with BNSCP have distanced themselves from people who are more radical, but there are people who have not distanced themselves from him. They protested outside my synagogue. I am so concerned. I know you have distanced yourself from the man who wrote the last letter, but he is in support of this project.
- Were you able to read the last letter that came in?
- I did not have a chance to read it.
- I am concerned you did not read the letter. I want you to go on the record and tell us what you think about the letter.
- I read the letter and can certainly agree with what you all shared. The man is not expressing himself delicately. I think he has an abrasive style and wants to make more enemies than friends.
- I want to hear if you condemn the letter. Do you condemn this letter?

Next Steps

The Working Group discussed if they were going to meet again, and if so, what should be discussed at future meetings. Below are the details of this discussion.

- We need to meet again, and I think we should spend the first half of the meeting updating the common ground document. There is more nuanced material that can be added. The second half of the meeting should focus on creating a final report.
- I do not think our work is done. I want to meet again, and I would like a different agenda. I have heard the opponents say that they want to engage and bring people together. I want us

to engage in a project right here to bring us together. We could pick something to do as a group. We have to come together.

- The one thing that strikes me about having another meeting is working together to put together a report for City Council. I do not know if we can do it in this form; perhaps it needs a different process.
- I am not excited about continuing because I do not think we are moving to a place of consensus. I cannot speak for everyone, but I think most of the people in this room still have the same positions. We have all learned, listened, grown, become more sensitive. I do not think it will be productive to devote time to a final report because I do not think we will agree to it more successfully than anything else. City Council should continue to read the detailed summaries.
- I think we have done our work. We are not going to reach a consensus. We can just give City Council the summaries. I do not think we are going to have a moment where we agree on a recommendation. I would say no more meetings.
- I agree about no more meetings. I think there is no consensus on a final report. A working group is different from a dialogue group. There were lots of things shared today that were great. I think working on a report together will raise new challenges. If people make commitments to move forward in dialogue, that is different than what the Working Group is doing. What I find challenging about the additional commitments, I think they were worthwhile.
- I am happy to have a final meeting. I would say that we need a final report, not because it reflects agreement, but there are a number of reasons the application could be turned down, and there are additional things about which we could talk. I do not think the final report is a recommendation, but a report detailing the concerns that were addressed and the documents that were created. I think a report is necessary to share the major things we discussed. I cannot imagine City Council will read through all the summaries. We need to talk about what is going to be in the report.
- I think we owe it to City Council to report about what we have discussed. I think we did a great job on the common ground document. If I were a City Council member, the common ground document would be useful as a snapshot of common ground that was achieved. I think we owe another meeting to City Council and the citizens of Boulder.
- I think we still need to address one thing that we were tasked with by City Council – to imagine the application passing and not. I need to know what we are doing to do if this is rejected to heal the wounding that will happen in the Palestinian community in Boulder. It is not insignificant. The level of rejection of a community needs to be discussed.
- I feel that we have explored and done what City Council asks us to do. I think we have shared everything. I cannot think of us coming to a final report. If the facilitators want to write a summary and have the Working Group react, that would be okay. I think we have all shared, listened, and experienced pain. We have gone as far as we can go.
- I will write a short, high-level summary about what things we discussed. We will send it via email, and we will then submit to City Council to share what the group did. There will be hurt feelings regardless.
- I think I really hear you. I understand that if the application is approved, there will be very bad, hurt, scared, and angry feelings in Jewish communities. If it is rejected, there will be the same things in a wider community, not just Palestinians. That is the one thing I would be interested in giving more time to address. How do we advise City Council about how to advertise and explain whatever they do? I worry about that. Someone will be really hurt. City Council will welcome ideas of ameliorating hurt feelings.

- I think we need to meet one more time to work on what we have to tell City Council. I think it would be helpful for our sake. It does not feel finished to me. There have been lots of requests to the BNSCP. I feel there are people here who have significant power in the community who are opposed to this. Maybe the letters that went out made things more divisive. To heal the community, is it possible that this is not as destructive as we thought. Maybe opponents could send a reconciling letter that asks people to give the program a chance if City Council approved the application. It could explain what happened here because many people will not read the meeting summaries and will not know what we discussed.
- I support another meeting. We would review a report and address messaging.
- Having missed all the other meetings, I would certainly be willing to come. Even if it is not officially part of the group, we should still come.
- We could have an optional meeting that gives people the opportunity to mull over the possibility of attending a final meeting. Maybe those who thought there is no need will change their mind.
- You can come if you want, and we will be reviewing the report.
- If you are producing a summary and we have individual contributions, we should make sure it is accurate; that should take place at the next meeting. BNSCP could always just start a petition drive if the application gets turned down again.
- I do not like the idea of an optional meeting, but if the Group meets again, I will come. I hope you will all be here.

The Panel agreed to the following next steps:

- Heather Bergman will draft a final report and send it to all Working Group members in advance of the next meeting.
- Comments should be submitted before the last meeting on August 31, 2016.
- The last meeting will focus on making changes to the final report, discussing how the final report will be used, and brainstorming ideas of how to heal the community after the City Council decision.

Proposal for Mayor to Mayor Dialogue
from Paul Heller

At our last meeting we learned that a number of European cities have satisfying sister city relationships with Nablus. Dundee, Scotland has been partnered for 30 years based on a formal agreement between the Lord Provost of Dundee and the mayor of Nablus.

Here in Boulder a few folks have said any Palestinian town is unacceptable for a sister city relationship. Or that some towns might be OK, but Nablus is off limits. If city council is concerned about the suitability of Nablus then there is a great opportunity for a frank dialogue directly with the mayor of Nablus.

I'd like to propose that our workgroup recommend that city council engage in such dialogue. It could be between the mayor of Nablus and the city manager, mayor, or other council member. Perhaps council would prefer to first talk with the Lord Provost of Dundee or the mayor of Stavanger, Norway.

If council were to undertake this in the next month then the results of dialogue could inform our final report. So let's discuss and see if enough of us can agree on a simple recommendation to council.

Dundee-Nablus Twinning Association Website

At the last meeting, Essrea distributed a document with statements from colleagues in Europe who are also Sistered or twinned with Nablus. It contains the following quote from Mike Whitehead, Dundee-Nablus Sister City Chair:

“I am not aware of any use of our group for promoting anti-Israel messages or propaganda.”

I went to the official Dundee-Nablus Twinning Association website: Dundee-Nablus.org.uk. Mike Whitehead is listed as the “Convener” and posted a column at this website so it is the one with which he is associated.

This is what I found. From the home page of the Dundee-Nablus Twinning Association, I clicked on the first item under first heading of News: Experiences of Nablus

Here is that article in its entirety:

Mary McGregor and Nick Steff visited Nablus in October 2015 with other members of DNTA. They told a DNTA meeting about their experiences and feelings.

Mary: Thank you for giving us this opportunity to share our Nablus trip with you. We are conscious that we are speaking to a group, many of whom have had a greater experience of Nablus and Palestine than we have. I have been a supporter of the Palestinian cause since I joined The Friends of Palestine Society in 1975. I have also shown my active political support throughout my adult life but this was my first visit.

Nick: I have visited Palestine 3 times. Firstly in 1983 when doing some travelling, then in 2012 on an Olive Tree Planting project, but this was my first trip to Nablus, too. So we hope that for those of you who have been, this will trigger very happy memories and for those of you who haven't visited, we will give you an incentive to go.

Mary: **The trip started for us in Jerusalem. And although we won't spend much time on this, we want to mention a couple of things. First of all when we arrived, the tension was palpable. You will remember that last October when we were there, there was talk of a 3rd intifada. Israeli soldiers were everywhere, all over the old city. On our first morning there, when we were eating breakfast, we were told that a Palestinian woman had been shot by a settler round the corner from where we were sitting. We later found out that the settler had tried to pull the woman's hijab off. When she resisted by hitting him with her handbag, he shot her. She was subsequently charged with assault!** This certainly made me a bit nervous as we started off on our sight-seeing day in Jerusalem.

Nick: During our day, we managed to get access to Haram Al Sharif (the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock). As we approached, the door of the Al Aqsa mosque, we heard women chanting slogans. We went up to speak to them and it turned out that one of them was Nour, who had studied at the Al Maktoum institute, in Dundee for 3 years.

Nick: For the rest of the day, she gave us a tour of her city, including the Mount of Olives, Silwan and other areas of Jerusalem we would not have got to. She ended up taking us for tea. This hospitality was overwhelming and just showed the Dundee connections very clearly.

Mary: Our trip to the West Bank was the first time that I became aware of the extent of the occupation and the reality of the illegal settlements. Settlements is really the wrong term. **The Israeli settlers are building cities and towns and encroaching negatively on every aspect of Palestinian life; whether it be harassment at checkpoints to interfering with the olive harvest. We'll return to this later.**

We travelled by public transport through the West Bank via Ramallah to Nablus. The contrast between Jerusalem and Nablus was very obvious. It felt much calmer and we felt that we were with friends. We had only been in Nablus 5 minutes and were walking to the hotel when someone recognised Mike.

Mary: Despite the sound of gunfire at night time and the call to prayer in the morning, we felt safe and relaxed in Nablus.

The photograph of the bullet hole in the hotel is iconic now. Used to symbolise a sophisticated, educated, population who continue despite occupation and continuing violence.

We were in no sense an official delegation from DNTA but we wanted to take greetings from DNTA and the citizens of our city. What amazing comradeship and hospitality we experienced in the process.

Nick: Day one

In Nablus we met up with Rami who acted as our main host for our trip.

Nick: He and his family were incredible.

Tour of the historic old city

Nick: Rami, together with his younger brother, Ahmed, gave us a tour of the old city. It showed us this vibrant world where people defy the occupation by just being.

Mary: Everywhere there were symbols of the occupation and resistance. The price for some families was very high indeed.

Mary: People resist by living their lives as best they can, given the terrible trials of the occupation.

Mary: People exist through artistic expression.

We found this to be true at Naseer Arafat's soap factory, which has been transformed into a cultural centre.

Mary: Traumatized children painting on doors to exorcise their demons.

Nick: **Too much blood seen by people too young to comprehend why they and their families are vilified and murdered by the Zionist state of Israel.** At his centre, young children learn to play the piano taught for free by volunteers. His family's soap factory converted into a place of creativity and hope. Many of you will have met Naseer when he visited Dundee just after our return in October last year.

Mary: Naseer arranged for us to meet with the Mayor of Nablus. We explained we were not a formal deputation but he was very clear that he wanted the twinning to be strengthened particularly via the school twinning, so he extended an open invitation to Dundee's Lord Provost. A city under occupation is one where balancing the ways to resist is no easy task. There are many who are angry with the Palestinian Authority. Frustration leads to people joining a variety of political organisations including Hamas.

Nick: Solidarity is shown through the international volunteers at Project Hope where we met up with Greta who has been sponsored by DNTA. She has been teaching young people in Nablus.

Mary: Nablus town is so lovely and warm and welcoming, it is easy to forget that many people live on the fringes in large refugee camps where work is scarce, poverty rife and resistance takes a different form.

At one point, we were caught up in a flare up at the Hawara Checkpoint just outside Nablus city. The car we were travelling in, along with others going through the check point, was used by Palestinian youths to hide behind as they threw stones at the Israeli soldiers, who responded with tear gas, rubber bullets and later live ammunition. Over the days we were in Nablus, large numbers of youths were taken to hospital with injuries. A dangerous game of cat and mouse played out. A seemingly futile way to resist yet if you are a Palestinian youth disenfranchised economically, politically, socially - what else do you do to say "I am here and I will exist. I will not bend to your will". I found their courage inspirational and heartbreaking all at the same time.

Nick: Growing olives is another form of resistance. I am sure you know the importance of olive growing and not just as an economic commodity but as a way of resisting encroaching settlements. We went to Yanoun, a very small village several miles from Nablus, that is surrounded by ever-encroaching Israeli settlements. The villagers there are frequently harassed by settlers. We went to look at some building work that had been funded by FONSA and also to meet with the Ecumenical Accompaniers who are based in Yanoun, whose presence tries to minimise the behaviour of the Israeli settlers.

Again the Dundee connections were there. One of the EA's was a young woman from Sweden who had visited community projects in the Hilltown area of Dundee. Another EA had studied at St Andrew's University.

Nick: Later that day, after we had left there, was an incident where the settlers had come into the village.....

But just the determination to keep going, supported by the EAs, is a direct way to resist the occupation which requires a whole load of bravery.

Nick: We were then picked up from Yanoun by Rafiq: A young man who some of you may have met when he stayed in Dundee for several months with Rami. His family live in a small town several miles from Yanoun, where he is a teacher.

Nick: We went out with him and the rest of his family to their olive grove to help them harvest their olives.

Schools in Nablus

Mary: We visited a girls' school in Nablus and were blown away by what we encountered.

Mary: The young women and girls gave us an extremely proficient presentation in English on the history of Nablus. The girls answered questions with a maturity and political awareness seldom found in pupils of the same age in Scottish schools.

We then visited the classrooms and had a tour of the school. What a place. You could feel the mutual respect and indeed love between all who were working there. The girls told us they were the "Freedom Fighters of tomorrow". At that we held our breath as they began to elaborate, "We will be the human rights lawyer, the teachers, and the doctors." They were determined to fight for their land and their people but in a different way. Again many ways to resist.

Mary: They danced the Dabka for us and we could have stayed there all day, filled with their optimism and enthusiasm.

Mary: They were truly amazing as were the staff. We could see how frustrated they were that the twinning link with schools in Dundee had not gone further.

Nick: This was echoed when we went to the boys' school. They were happy to see visitors but I think they would have preferred to be talking to people their own age exchanging experiences.

Nick: However at the end we promised to take back their concern that the schools twinning has not gone further and we know Mike has been pursuing this.

Mary: Another friend of Dundee that some of you may know is Hadi. We spent a fabulous evening with him and his family discussing politics of course but also philosophy, literature and culture. We were entertained by his children singing traditional Palestinian songs longing for return which were deeply moving and touched our hearts.

Mary: So our trip to Nablus ended.

We returned to Jerusalem via Bethlehem and got caught up in the periphery of more tear gas and stone throwing. A week earlier a young boy had been killed at the Aida refugee camp where the Lajee dancers who have visited Dundee twice come from.

We worked our way back to the airport for an early morning flight home amongst rising tensions in the city.

Trip over - how did we feel?

Put it this way I would go back in a heartbeat to do something useful. I loved Nablus. I particularly loved the old town and the smells of lemons and spices and flowers. Most of all I loved the people. I never felt unsafe when we were with our hosts. Our welfare was their utmost concern. Their bravery and tenacity was incredible. Anyone who hasn't been should go. They want us there but most of all they want the link with Dundee to be real, not just visitors but friends in their situation.

There are many ways to resist and the twinning is one of them.

Footnotes

This is based on a talk given by Mary and Nick to DNTA members in June 2016. The opinions expressed are personal and may not reflect those of DNTA.

We appreciate the work that Mary and Nick put into their talk and presentation.

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From the home page, I clicked on one of the headings at the top: About Us and then clicked on Links and then clicked on Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign. I clicked on three of the rolling graphics at the top of the page and the following appeared:

Scottish PSC Statement, 17 November 2015

Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (SPSC) has been committed to campaigning for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) of Israel since the call was launched from Palestine in 2005. Even before that call SPSC had worked to defeat the bases of support for Israel in Scotland, for example, by campaigning vigorously and successfully against the racist JNF and by protesting Israeli football and cricket teams visiting Scotland.

The growth, proven effectiveness and future potential of the BDS movement has led the Israeli Government to finance and train anti-BDS personnel worldwide and in Scotland. A new tactic being used by the Israeli Embassy in London is to send invitations to and open 'dialogue' with individuals holding pro-Palestine positions whom the apartheid regime believes it can detach from others it considers 'extreme', i.e. committed to BDS.

We have seen attempts in Scotland to urge some individuals to attend or otherwise open relations with the Israeli Embassy. SPSC condemns in the strongest terms attempts at normalisation with the Israeli Embassy or other Israeli State agents. Dealing with Israeli State bodies is a red line for SPSC and would be counter to our successful actions aimed at isolating the state that dispossesses, tortures and massacres the Palestinian people.

The Palestinians are fighting for their freedom, indeed for their survival, against a genocidal regime. Those who urge Palestine supporters to attend the Israeli Embassy are, whether knowingly or unknowingly, doing the work of the Israeli State. This core position is non-negotiable, and only by responding strategically in Scotland to the Palestinian call for BDS have we been able to contribute to the international developments that have led JK Rowling, Boris Johnson and many others to attack the BDS movement, and have led many pro-Israel groups to move from public derision to alarm.

SPSC reaffirms our commitment to the BDS Call and therefore our opposition to normalisation. We also recognise that the efforts of the Israeli government demonstrate a degree of desperation on the part of the Zionist State faced with the palpable momentum of an increasingly organised international campaign of BDS.

“Both within the Israeli community and around the world, there exists a great deal of discomfort and confusion about the tactics and intentions of anti-normalisation work. Many people find the BDS campaign, among others, to be “imbalanced” or overly punitive; many believe the Palestinians should “dialogue” with the Israelis about what’s happening in the oPt, because the problem is just a lack of information and mutual understanding; many believe that only a “positive” approach will do, and BDS doesn’t qualify.

“Unfortunately, these claims are not only patronizing and ineffectual, but also irrelevant.”

And this:

The Confederation of the Friends of Israel Scotland has announced a provocative all-day event during the world's biggest arts event, the Edinburgh Festival & Fringe; on Wed 17 August at Central Hall at Tollcross, Embassy-funded Friends of Israel and StandWithUs are organising a 'Shalom Festival' to promote Israeli 'democracy and tolerance of minorities'.

The primary Israeli aim is to reverse the achievements of BDS campaigners over many years in Scotland that has seen defeat for efforts by the Israeli Embassy to insert Israeli State-promoted groups into Scottish cultural events. Will you help us to defend this record and, from August 13th to 17th, send a loud message to beleaguered Palestine (and around the world) that Israeli State-sponsored pseudo-cultural events cannot be held, or can only go ahead in the face of popular outrage?

The dispossession of the Palestinian people continues, with its attendant brutality – killings punctuated by periodic massacre, mass kidnapping, torture and the destruction of Palestinian homes and farms, the denial of water and the barbaric siege of Gaza. Israel's war on Palestinian culture is not the least of its crimes; the promotion at this time of 'Brand Israel' as a part of the Edinburgh Fringe is an outrage and we ask you to join us in our opposition. PACBI (the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel) has issued an international call to support this initiative.

SPSC will arrange for local hosts to provide solidarity accommodation for those joining us from outside the city to campaign.

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And this:

PROTEST 'Brand Israel' Event at Edinburgh Festival, 17th August 2016

The so-called 'International Shalom Festival Gala Concert' is nothing more than an explicit attempt to whitewash the crimes of a state, in this case the state of Israel. Edinburgh Festival Fringe should not be helping to promote an event that is openly being promoted by its sponsors as state propaganda, propaganda for a state that stands accused by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the United Nations and other bodies of war crimes and possible crimes against humanity.

The event is organised by the Confederation of Friends of Israel Scotland (CoFIS) and StandWithUs UK who partner with the Israeli Embassy to counter advocacy and campaigning work in support of Palestinian rights. StandWithUs UK helped to establish and launch CoFIS, assistance that included financial contributions. CoFIS is officially affiliated to StandWithUs UK. [1] StandWithUs UK is a branch of US-based StandWithUs [2], an organisation that is known to have close relations with Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs [3], receives funding from the Israeli government and disseminates propaganda on its behalf [4]. Their partnership with the Israeli government [5] aims to whitewash Israel's ongoing violations of Palestinian rights and the brutal military blockades of Gaza and occupation of Palestinian territories, as part of the 'Brand Israel' project [6]. Another important Israeli government partner in the 'Brand Israel' project is Israel21c [7], an exhibitor and participant of the event promoted by Edinburgh Festival Fringe. A key objective of both CoFIS and StandWithUs is to counter the success [8] of the international movement that supports Palestinian rights through active campaigns for the boycott, divestment and sanctions against the state of Israel and complicit institutions (BDS). The BDS Call from Palestinian civil society was made in 2005 [9], after decades of confiscations of Palestinian land, home demolitions, imprisonment of political activists and of Palestinian children, military attacks

on Gaza and occupation of the West Bank, alongside the failure of international diplomacy and of any effective mechanism to end Israel's violations of international and human rights law. In March 2016 the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) wrote to Edinburgh Fringe Festival calling on you "to reject funding from, and cooperation with, the Israeli government and its complicit institutions". We ask that you heed this call and refuse to promote the CoFIS and StandWithUs 'Brand Israel' event.
While repressing Palestinian culture, Israel has unabashedly used culture to whitewash its regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid.

In 2005, as a response to the nascent boycott movement, the Israeli Foreign Ministry launched the "Brand Israel" campaign that instrumentalizes culture and academia in the service of Israel's propaganda agenda. Soon after the campaign was launched, Nissim Ben-Sheetrit, a deputy director general of the Israeli foreign ministry said, "We are seeing culture as a hasbara [propaganda] tool of the first rank, and I do not differentiate between hasbara and culture."

In 2009, Arye Mekel of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs admitted, "We will send well-known novelists and writers overseas, theater companies, exhibits . . . This way you show Israel's prettier face, so we are not thought of purely in the context of war."

Brand Israel initiatives seek to distract from Israel's systematic violations of UN resolutions and international law. Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people include: denying millions of Palestinian refugees their inherent and UN-stipulated right to return to their homes of origin; the ongoing ethnic cleansing of Palestinian communities in Jerusalem, the Naqab (Negev) and the Jordan Valley; building illegal colonies on occupied Palestinian land; and continuing the medieval siege of 1.8 million Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip.

PACBI, Open Letter to Edinburgh International Festival and Festival Fringe: Keep your Festivals Apartheid Free! Do not whitewash Israel's crimes, March 2016,
<http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=2774>