
**SISTER CITIES INTERNATIONAL SIGNS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING TO CREATE
U.S.-JORDAN VALLEY SISTER CITY PARTNERSHIPS**

WASHINGTON, DC – Sister Cities International joined [EcoPeace Middle East](#), [Citizen Diplomacy Initiatives](#) (CDI), and Israeli and Jordanian municipal officials on October 17, 2014 to discuss environmental peace-building, the mutual benefits of cross-border cooperation in the midst of conflict, and the role of American citizen diplomats in Middle East grassroots peace-making. The panel “Building Peace over Water in the Lower Jordan Valley: a Sister Cities Coalition” held at the [Wilson Center](#) was part of the NewSecurityBeat Environmental Change and Security Program.

During the event, SCI, EcoPeace Middle East, and CDI, signed a Memorandum of Understanding to connect Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian communities with U.S. cities to create multilateral sister city relationships. The initiative will aim to bring together youth, adults, and municipal representatives from all four communities to cooperate on water resources management and sustainable development. It will build on the success of EcoPeace Middle East's Good Water Neighbors project that builds dialogue and partnership between cross-border communities sharing a common water source, promoting environmental awareness and peace building in the region.

The “Building Peace” panel discussion started with Roger-Mark De Souza, Director of Population, Environmental Security and Resilience, Wilson Center, welcoming attendees. Melissa Brown, Director, Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, U.S. Agency for International Development gave opening remarks. Gidon Bromberg, Israeli Director, EcoPeace Middle East shared the importance of understanding the water realities and restrictions on each side of the water crisis in the Lower Jordan Valley and how it effects Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian communities. Nader Al-Khateeb, Palestinian Director, EcoPeace Middle East spoke on the importance of trans-boundary agreements in making a true difference to multiple communities. The two directors were joined by municipal officials from Jordan and Israel. Mayor Ali El-Delki of Muaz Bin Jabal, Jordan, emphasized how problems are not solved by only signing peace treaties, people on the ground need to get involved in order to build bridges of trust. Yossi Vardi, Head, Jordan Valley Regional Council (Israel), explained how he is looking for more partnerships to benefit all three parts of the Lower Jordan River Valley to rehabilitate the environment and their relationships.

SCI Vice President, Adam Kaplan, discussed how sister cities relationships can be used to engage in non-political, cultural, educational, and other people-to-people exchanges to achieve understanding and strong, sustainable relationships. Steve Kalishman of CDI and the Gainesville Sister Cities Program, gave examples of how a tri-lateral sister cities partnership between Gainesville, Florida, Kfar Saba, Israel, and Qalqilya, Palestinian Territories has helped to create peace and mutual understanding between historically tumultuous communities.

For more information on the MoU or the event, please contact Megha Swamy at mswamy@sister-cities.org.

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About Sister Cities International

Founded by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956, Sister Cities International serves as the national membership organization for over 500 individual sister cities, counties, and states across the United States with relationships in 2,000 communities in 140 countries. This sister city network unites tens of thousands of citizen diplomats and volunteers who work tirelessly to promote peace and understanding through programs and projects focusing on arts and culture, youth and education, economic and sustainable development, and humanitarian assistance.

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