

Local governments work together to build peace in the Middle East

Peter Knip, Director, VNG International, Association of Netherlands Municipalities

The Municipal Alliance for Peace in the Middle East (MAP), established in June 2005, is a cooperative development and peacebuilding framework of the national municipal associations of Israel (Union of Local Authorities in Israel — ULAI) and the Palestinian Territories (Association of Palestinian Local Authorities — APLA), and international partners. The MAP has been endorsed by 31 Israeli and Palestinian mayors, numerous municipal representatives from 17 countries, and other national and international organizations including the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), the United Nations Development Programme, United Cities and Local Governments, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. The international arm of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International) mediates in this process, provides technical assistance and facilitates bilateral meetings.

The rise to power of Hamas on the local and national level in the Palestinian Territories has affected the willingness of the international donor community to fund the MAP.

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Nonetheless, despite this and the escalation in conflict in mid-2006, there are still municipal leaders, both Palestinian and Israeli, who want to proceed in trilateral projects.

The MAP is aimed at promoting, facilitating and implementing trilateral local initiatives by Palestinian, Israeli and third-country municipalities. The program's overall objective is to support peace, dialogue and mutual understanding among Israeli and Palestinian citizens through practical, on-the-ground projects. This bottom-up approach could be characterized as “peace through development,” and is yet another example of how the security-development nexus expresses itself at the municipal level.

Though deep controversies exist regarding the causes of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, Israeli and Palestinian mayors face many concrete, practical problems in their municipalities that are similar and which give them common ground. Within the APLA, the ULAI and the group of involved mayors, there is a widespread view that only palpable and visible projects in their communities can convince their citizens that cooperation is worthwhile and that dialogue contributes to peace in their territories. As a result, the program aims, through local projects, to mobilize local political leaders, civil society, business