



**IN TRANSFORMATION
INITIATIVE**

The Palestinian National Project: Building Unity to Achieve a Common Goal



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the following analysis is to document In Transformation Initiative's (ITI) involvement in the Palestinian national project, assess the engagement strategies employed, determine which guiding principles from the South African peace and reconciliation process were shared, and identify the lessons that can be learnt from ITI's approach within a pre-transition phase country context such as Palestine. Much of the case study is based on internal documentation from ITI and the Institute of Palestine and South Africa (IPSA).¹ Relevant literature from the field of peacebuilding and mediation was used to support lessons emerging from the case study data. Interviews were also conducted with four ITI directors and two members from partner organisations involved in the Palestine project.

The Palestine political discourse has been fragmented and unstable for many years. Palestinian political parties and factions appear to be undermined by external forces and alliances that adversely affect the Palestinian people and their struggle for liberation from Israeli occupation. Additionally, continued conflict between the main political parties – Fatah and Hamas – and the political and geographic separation between the West Bank and Gaza have compounded their political fragmentation while exacerbating their inability to effectively govern their constituencies. Consequently, public confidence in traditional Palestinian governance structures continues to decline, confronting Palestinian institutions and the Palestinian National Authority (PA) with an unprecedented crisis of legitimacy.

ITI's involvement in the Palestine national project took place between 2015 and 2017, in partnership with two non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – Beyond Conflict and IPSA. The aim was to engage the major Palestinian political parties, political organisations and civil society in a comprehensive national dialogue to gain consensus on common political goals and support the development of a Palestinian national project. Moreover, it was hoped to achieve some semblance of trust between Fatah and Hamas in order to establish cooperation in formulating a joint agreement on a proposal towards achieving peace between Israel and Palestine.

ITI leveraged South Africa's historic relationship of solidarity with Palestine, as well as the political capital and experience of its directors such as Roelf Meyer and Ebrahim Ebrahim, to share the South African transition experience with the different stakeholders. This was carried out through two dialogue events hosted in Cape Town, South Africa in 2016, during which ITI was able to facilitate dialogue sessions between the different political groups and civil society leaders. Several workshops and learning experiences were also hosted by ITI and IPSA in South Africa, and there were numerous



engagements with stakeholders and key political figures in Palestine, Israel and Qatar.

Several lessons can be learnt from ITI's approach in the Palestine initiative.

- Accessing and analysing the context of a conflict is vital to identify areas where assistance is needed.
- Effectively sharing South Africa's transition experience and the principles of trust, inclusivity and ownership in negotiating a reconciliation and a peaceful resolution to a conflict can help stakeholders to look beyond their different political agendas towards a common goal.
- Direct contact with top leadership in a conflict situation facilitates timely and informed decision-making and adoption of recommendations for peacebuilding.
- Emphasizing the principles of inclusivity and unity supports stakeholders in the reconstruction of a political discourse.
- Using dialogue as a means to facilitate engagements between stakeholders provides opportunities to build trust, support reconciliation, consolidate objectives towards developing a national agenda and bridge the disconnect between civil society and political leadership.
- Hosting delegations in South Africa has a transformative effect on participants when engaging with key individuals involved in the South African transition process.
- Facilitating workshops and knowledge-building experiences helps to support capacity-building efforts among participants.
- ITI's successful approach is personality driven, and the strategic way it employs the political capital and experience of its directors is a unique and characterising aspect of the organisation



Facilitating
workshops helps
to support capacity-
building efforts

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this case study is to assess ITI's approach in a pre-transition phase country like Palestine, towards establishing a dialogue framework and sharing guiding principles emerging from the South African transition experience. This analysis will serve to document the engagement strategies employed, gain insight from the impact of ITI's approach within this context, and determine the lesson that can be learnt from ITI's experience.

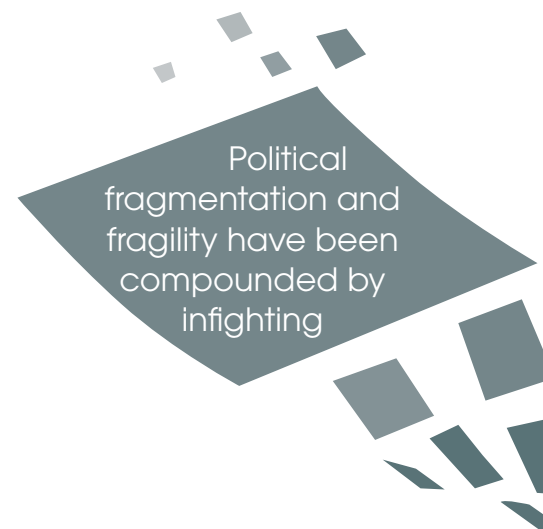
The case study will be shared with practitioners in the field of peacebuilding to provide opportunities for reflection and dialogue around peaceful resolutions of conflict. The analysis of ITI's approach during the Palestine national project will also bring value to ITI's own work by ensuring internal reflection. The case study assessment is based on ITI and IPSA's internal documents, project reports and annual reviews. Moreover, several interviews were conducted with members of the ITI directorate,² as well as two members³ of the partner organisations involved in informing, organising and facilitating the Palestine intervention. Independent research was conducted on the context of the Palestinian conflict and political discourse; stakeholders and participants involved in the project; and publicly available literature on peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Political fragmentation and fragility have been compounded by continued infighting between Fatah and Hamas and the political and geographic separation between the West Bank and Gaza. Additionally, public confidence in traditional Palestinian governance structures continues to decline, confronting Palestinian institutions and the Palestinian National Authority (PA) with an unprecedented crisis of legitimacy.⁴

While the Palestinian liberation movement remains united around a vision of ending the Israeli occupation, it is currently in disarray over how to achieve this following the failure of the Oslo peace process launched in 1993. Owing to the strained Palestinian political climate and a lack of successful discourse between political parties, leaders have not been able to achieve a stable and sustainable future for the people of Palestine.

ITI was involved in the Palestine national project from 2015 to 2017, in partnership with Boston-based NGO Beyond Conflict⁵ and IPSA, led by Dr Anis Daraghma. The aim was to engage major Palestinian political parties, political organisations and civil society in a comprehensive national dialogue.

ITI's involvement in the Palestinian project occurred against the backdrop of the protracted and complex conflict between Hamas and the Palestinian leadership. The conflict was in part perpetuated by a divisive and historical suspicion that Palestinians behind the Green Line and those participating in the Palestinian government were in fact sell-outs. As a result, previous



efforts to bring together the political leadership from both sides were futile. ITI also entered into the partnership with Beyond Conflict and IPSA at a time (2015–2016) when there was a wave of violence committed by Palestinians against Israelis. These acts of violence, which included stabbings and shootings, were committed by members of civil society and by ordinary citizens. This was indicative of a larger distrust in the political parties at the time. The political parties were losing the confidence of their constituencies. Civil society organisations and communities at large were also losing confidence in the negotiations taking place between the Palestinians and Israelis.

The overarching goal in the internal Palestine project was to achieve some semblance of trust between Fatah and Hamas towards establishing cooperation in formulating a joint agreement on a proposal for achieving peace between Israel and Palestine. In this regard, ITI drew up a roadmap to unite the different Palestinian political factions. That involved speaking to Palestinian groupings behind the Green Line (Palestinian/Israelis), the leadership of Hamas in exile and within the West Bank, those participating in the Palestinian government, the Fatah leadership and various civil society organisations. After meeting the different political factions individually, ITI was able to bring them together. Some members of the Fatah and Hamas leadership were meeting for the first time in decades.

A potential risk in the implementation of this project was the animosity and distrust between the various political factions. This was a symptom of the historical power struggle and fractured power dynamics within the Palestinian political sphere.⁶ Moreover, the deep-rooted mistrust between Hamas and Fatah presented a significant challenge to ITI in convincing both groups of the need for reconciliation and Palestinian unity to be developed through inclusive dialogue within the broader scope of the Palestinian political arena. Therefore, it was never guaranteed that these groups would agree to come together and engage with one another in direct discussions, which posed a risk to the overarching project goal.

ITI and IPSA mitigated this risk by engaging in extensive scoping visits and trust-building meetings with the various political parties and civil society organisations. The different factions were brought to the dialogue table through leveraging the longstanding relationship of trust between Palestine and South Africa, making ITI an ideal facilitating organisation. There are also historical factors that made ITI a suitable facilitator. The credibility of South Africa, especially the African National Congress (ANC) among the people of Palestine is an important factor. The South African affiliation with the Palestinian cause was also an important factor. In addition, the South African negotiated settlement is well respected across many countries, including in Palestine.



Additionally, ITI's credibility is owing to the political capital of persons such as Ebrahim Ebrahim⁷ a former Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation and political activist. Ebrahim Ebrahim commands great respect among the Palestinians. Roelf Meyer⁸ who was the Chief Negotiator during the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) talks also played a major role in building the trust that ITI enjoyed among the Palestinian participants. This was an important factor that secured the engagement of the different political factions in the first successful dialogue engagement in Cape Town in April 2016.

Another challenge to the initiative was the increasing dissonance between civil society and these leadership groupings regarding the demands and patterns of social movements and society's behaviours. This disenfranchisement of local Palestinians within leadership groupings was reflected in a wave of stabbing attacks against Israelis that began in early October 2015⁹ and lasting into the first half of 2016, known as the 'Intifada of the Individuals' by Israelis or *Habba* (outburst) by Palestinians. These attacks illustrated the loss of confidence in Palestinian leaders in terms of liberation and governance. In this, ITI saw an opportunity to create awareness among political leaders of the valuable contribution that civil society can make in a peace process, as was the case in the South African experience.



Another challenge was the increasing dissonance between civil society and leadership groups

LESSONS LEARNT

The South African experience is characterised by several fundamental principles and processes that contributed to the successful end of apartheid and transition to democracy.¹⁰ Today, these fundamental principles and processes serve as a valuable model. The lessons learnt from the successes and missteps made during the South African process are relevant to many countries experiencing conflict and searching for a peaceful, democratic transformation.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF ITI

ITI's approach to peacemaking initiatives and political transitions is premised on three foundational principles that stem from the South African transition experience, namely trust, inclusivity and ownership.¹¹ Throughout all its interventions, ITI ensures that the importance and application of these principles within a peace process are effectively communicated to participants. Therefore, ITI undertakes all its projects on a principle-based approach.

Principle-Based Approach

In the field of peace and mediation, numerous methods are often employed within negotiation and reconciliation processes.¹² Approaches to peace processes tend to be based on a technocratic template¹³ and do not necessarily take local political and social contexts into consideration. Yet evidence from peacebuilding interventions in Africa and globally has demonstrated that many peace negotiation processes result in fragile, temporary solutions that cannot be sustained.¹⁴ ITI's experience in the field of peacemaking has shown that these processes often fail or stall owing to a lack of trust between participants, the exclusion of stakeholders and a lack of ownership of the process. Therefore, the assessment of the Palestine national project as a case study demonstrates the lessons learnt from ITI's involvement in this context and the implementation of its principle-based approach.

Sharing the South African Transition Experience

The South African experience is almost universally referenced as an example of a successful transition which, despite the fragility and seeming intractability of the conflict, managed to attain a peaceful passage into democracy.¹⁵ Sharing this experience with stakeholders and leaders currently engaged in similar processes can provide lessons on practical programmes of action that can be implemented by employing supporting mechanisms such as inclusivity and broadening of the dialogue.

ITI's reflection on and sharing of lessons learnt from the South African experience during the Palestine engagements emphasized the following:¹⁶



The South African experience is referenced as an example of a successful transition

- The South African experience demonstrates the need for stakeholders to engage with each other in an inclusive process to achieve momentum towards the central goal of achieving national liberation and an equal society for all
- Nation building and social cohesion is an unavoidable necessity after the years of inter-Palestinian conflict
- Self-determination is achieved through diligence and commitment to the negotiation process
- Building state institutions and structures that oversee the upholding of democratic practices and good governance is vital in supporting peace
- Developing a constitution is a two-stage process – a consensus on the foundational principles must first be reached among all stakeholders, and only thereafter can the new constitution be written. This process requires inclusive participation
- The constitution should provide the framework for unifying and consolidating a nation. The creation of a constitutional court in South Africa was vital with regard to the interpretation, protection and enforcement of constitutional legislation
- Sufficient consensus among all participating groups must be achieved
- Constitutional, electoral and security sector reform is essential to the creation of a stable and democratic new deal for the Palestinian society

Fostering Trust between Participants in the Palestine Initiative

The process of building trust among stakeholders often faces the dilemma that stakeholders cannot enter a negotiation process without some degree of mutual trust. However, in order to build trust they need to be open to engaging with one another.¹⁷ Facilitators often need to develop an effective approach that can ensure the participation of all stakeholders and present themselves as a viable and trustworthy partner to support the conflict's resolution.

ITI's involvement in a peacemaking initiative has always been by invitation, which can be ascribed to the credibility and experience of the ITI directorate. Notably, the participation of Ebrahim Ebrahim made a huge impact as he is well respected in Palestine. Roelf Meyer also played an important role as he was able to share the mindset of those in power to create a better understanding of the conflict and intervention initiative. Collectively, the ITI directorate is able to communicate and implement this principle by engaging in pre-engagement consultations with all participants, while emphasizing the neutrality of the organisation by communicating with all stakeholders in a transparent manner.

In the context of Palestine, ITI was able to foster trust between itself and different political groups by following a transparent consultative process.



This ensured that it engaged with all parties at every possible opportunity, building trust in its commitment to confer openly with all involved. The different groups commented that they respected the way the South African negotiated settlement was conducted. In the same vein they commented that ITI was neutral in its engagement with them and did not make any judgements about their positions. This was a significant point as the sensitivity of the conflict in Palestine has left many actors feeling judged and disenfranchised. By being recognised as a credible facilitator, ITI could better negotiate the participation of different stakeholders in developing a collective national plan for the future of Palestine. ITI ensured that the basis was laid for the formation of trust among the different groups by promoting practices that enabled the factions to relate to each other on some level.

Supporting trust within the Palestinian political context was challenging owing to the ideological and philosophical differences among the groups regarding the functioning and structure of the Palestinian state. That said, ITI and its supporting partners engendered significant shifts by creating a dialogue platform and environment conducive to building some semblance of trust. Taking delegations to South Africa for talks and to learn about the South African negotiated settlement from some of the people involved in the process worked very well in this regard. Additionally, ITI's support for reconciliation between political factions was vital in uniting the parties around a common cause and goal beyond their ideological differences, ultimately supporting collaboration on developing a Palestinian national project.



Supporting trust was challenging owing to the ideological and philosophical differences

Promoting Inclusivity in the Palestine National Project

John Paul Lederach¹⁸ explains that more substantive inclusion in peace processes requires involving more sectors of society to 'engage the public imagination' and changing citizens' perceptions of the legitimacy, quality and character of the process.¹⁹ Emphasis on the principle of inclusivity supports ownership of the negotiation process by broader sectors of the political discourse. While an inclusive process may also create opportunities for clashes or impasses during negotiations, owing to competing ideologies or agendas, it also provides an opportunity for peace practitioners to find alternative and innovative means of resolving the conflict.

The ITI team's pre-engagement consultations ensured broad participation from the various political factions and civil society organisations to promote unity in the Palestinian discourse by emphasizing the principles of representation, pluralism and democratic decision-making. Following the invitation to participate in the Palestine peace project and the subsequent preparations, including scoping visits, ITI developed a sense of who the key players to the conflict were. However, ITI relied on local institutions and leadership to make sure that all the significant players were involved from the outset. As a result, representatives of political parties and fronts outside of the

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and beyond could also take place in the dialogue forums to articulate their positions on the national agenda.

Dr Anis Daraghma commented that the philosophy of 'Ubuntu' was an important lesson that Palestine took away from the intervention, because it showed 'that no one should be excluded, that there is a place for everyone at the table'.²⁰

One of the significant consultative discussions ITI held in terms of mobilising civil society participation was a meeting with Fadwa Barghouti, the wife of jailed Fatah leader and key Palestinian political figure Marwan Barghouti.²¹ Fadwa Barghouti²² continues to play a major role within Palestinian civil society as head of the Women's Union for Social Work, a group that works to increase the participation of women in the Palestinian resistance movement. This meeting was important to solidify ITI's credibility among Palestinian civil society and in relation to the Palestinian cause.

ITI's approach of emphasizing the fundamental principle of inclusivity thus had a significant impact in supporting the Palestinian national project. This approach resulted in the broadening of the stakeholders' involved in the project, and created unity among the political factions and other players in the political discourse.

Emphasizing Ownership over the Process of Developing the Palestine National Project

ITI's approach to peacemaking is based on the foundational principle of local ownership. Agreements and solutions between opposing parties must evolve locally and cannot be prescribed by external actors. This ensures that stakeholders do not feel forced to accept processes or implement solutions that are not viable within their own unique context.

In the Palestine initiative, ITI developed a framework and agenda for the dialogue engagements by consulting with all the participating groups during pre-engagement meetings. The framework gave structure and guidance to the process without dictating specific outcomes, concessions or solutions. Consulting with the participating groups before the active engagements took place helped to inspire them to take ownership of the process from the beginning. ITI provided the platform for dialogue, while enabling Palestinian stakeholders to exercise autonomy in working through the points of contestation and developing appropriate solutions.

LESSONS LEARNT FROM APPROACHES INFORMED BY ITI'S GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following approaches were successfully applied by ITI during the Palestine initiative. These are all informed by the foundational principles of trust, inclusivity and ownership, stemming from the South African transition experience.



High-Level Access

Engaging with high-level leadership plays an important role in any conflict negotiations. Political leaders have immense decision-making power and often determine the success or failure of a negotiation, reconciliation or transition process, based on the willingness to engage with opposition groups. Therefore, access to high-level leadership is important in persuading stakeholders to first come to the dialogue table, and then carry out the processes needed to positively change the peace and democratic course of a nation. This focus on engaging with top political leaders does not ignore other role players in the political discourse.

One of ITI's approaches to peacebuilding is thus focused on engaging with top leadership. ITI does this through leveraging its international network of leaders in the political sphere, civil society, academia, business etc. to identify the stakeholders that will be influential in affecting positive change in a conflict. In most cases this network of contacts gives ITI direct access to leaders in the peace process.

In this case, ITI used its connection with eminent Palestinian political scientist Dr Khalil Shikaki²³ to identify centres of power in the Palestinian political landscape. This led to identifying participants closely affiliated with President Mahmoud Abbas, political prisoner Marwan Barghouti and exiled leader Mohammed Dahlan.²⁴ As a result, the first convening dialogue events saw the participation of 25 general secretaries of the major political parties and influential groups in Palestine. These represented the six territories of the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem and the diaspora in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.²⁵

ITI's ability to leverage the connections between South African and Palestinian political parties, as well as the network of access provided through Dr Anis Daraghma and IPSA, helped it to engage successfully with the different factions. It also secured their trust and cooperation in participating in a collective dialogue discussion, which would eventually take place in April 2016 in Cape Town.



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One of ITI's
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Scoping Visits

The purpose of the scoping visits is to access the conflict context, gain a better understanding of political and social dynamics, and consult with key stakeholders involved in the conflict or negotiation process. This process also aims to support the development of suitable approaches to address the conflict. As approaches to peacebuilding evolve with changing contexts, it is becoming evident that a successful peace process must be sensitive to the political, social and economic dynamics of a society. This should also inform the implementation of governance, transitional justice and institutional reform initiatives within that particular context.²⁷ Through ITI's experience in peacebuilding, it recognises the need for solutions that cater to the specific conflict, as opposed to applying static and inflexible template-based approaches.

In the Palestine initiative, numerous scoping visits were conducted with key political leaders to secure their commitment and to develop an agenda for the dialogues that were to follow. These consultations took place in both Palestine and surrounding countries, including Qatar. During the scoping visits the agenda for the first proposed dialogue session was thoroughly discussed and edited following consultations with high-ranking representatives and political groups from the Green Line, Hamas and Fatah, including senior official and now Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh.²⁸ This ensured that all participants agreed to engage in the dialogue activities under a common mandate and framework of basic objectives. Some of the initial focus areas for the first discussion included issues such as obstacles to peace; the reconciliation struggle between Fatah, Hamas and other groups; lack of inclusive national institutions; crisis of confidence; the current state of the PLO; the lack of national reconciliation; the absent voice of Palestine's refugees; and the differences between Hamas and Fatah's goals, strategies and policies. These discussions were aimed at deepening the understanding of the conflict context in Palestine based on the experiences and interpretations of the participants; underscoring the need for national unity; and the need to begin to view national reconciliation as a possible outcome of an inclusive political dialogue.

ITI was able to follow an intense and transparent consultative process. This ensured that it engaged with all parties involved at every possible opportunity, building trust in its commitment to confer openly with everyone involved. ITI also used this approach to ensure transparency, fostering trust with those it engages with.

Building Bridges through Dialogue

Dialogue projects can take many shapes and forms depending on the needs and objectives of the context in which they are applied. There are several different dialogue projects underway in peacebuilding, including grassroots dialogue and interpersonal reconciliation; dialogue projects combined



with capacity building; dialogues aimed at institution building, networking and practical project development; and dialogues used as pre-negotiation initiatives.²⁹ These different forms of dialogue projects can be aimed at engaging with local communities, specific sections of society, different ethnic or religious groupings, or political leadership and governments. All are designed to ultimately influence, resolve or settle conflicts.

ITI as an organisation believes that dialogue used to build relationships between stakeholders is vital to secure lasting solutions to conflicts. ITI is committed to promoting the institutionalisation of a culture of dialogue across various contextual challenges and among a variety of societal stakeholders.³⁰ Therefore, ITI often adapts its approach to dialogue in response to the context of the participating parties. Given the need to develop trust among leadership in the Palestinian conflict, ITI largely used dialogue as a pre-negotiation initiative. However, dialogue was also used to encourage institution building and networking as well as reconciliation.

IPSA and ITI's involvement in the Palestine initiative sought to facilitate and support discussions on the need for a comprehensive national dialogue to reach consensus on common political goals and establish the foundations of a meaningful partnership between the various political and ideological streams.³¹ ITI was able to achieve significant impact with its support of the Palestine national project by successfully bringing together all major Palestinian factions in one place to talk about their national project, for the first time since 1992. This was also the first time that the political parties of the Green Line (Israel) discussed national matters with the PLO and Hamas. Through its facilitation, ITI provided a platform similar to that of the dialogue processes used during South Africa's own negotiations aimed at supporting the establishing of a process and environment conducive to improving intra-Palestinian unity.

The two dialogue events hosted by ITI and IPSA in South Africa, as well as numerous visits and engagements with the different Palestinian leadership groups, played a crucial role in building trust and convincing all role players of the importance of open and robust dialogue. These dialogue events were well-structured with expert presenters, some of whom were involved in the South African negotiated settlement. The delegates were also able to meet and discuss informally with each other in ways that **had never done** while in Palestine. Therefore, being in South Africa presented a neutral context which created space for genuine engagement. Ultimately, this interaction helped to reduce mistrust among the delegates.

The lack of communication between governments (Gaza and West Bank), civil society and the broader citizenry, including those in the occupied territories and diaspora, received greater attention during the second round of dialogue discussions hosted in South Africa. Learning from the South African experience, ITI emphasized that open lines of communication



between political leaders and social/civil society organisations were vital in mobilising constituencies towards a national agenda. This enables different parties to engage and keep their constituencies informed of any developments; as well as solicit their feedback and input into the on-going peace process. Recognising the youth as a key constituency for mobilising society and developing mass organisations based on defined agendas with clear political priorities were also key components highlighted by ITI.

Additionally, ITI's approach to the dialogues allowed participants to develop their own solutions and find consensus on issues and strategies. Some of the outcomes of the dialogue sessions facilitated by ITI and IPSA included creating awareness of the importance of formulating both a political and an economic programme towards national unity; increasing participation and representation of all the political parties in Palestine; and working towards building a new political system in Palestine aimed at partnership and, ultimately, national unity.

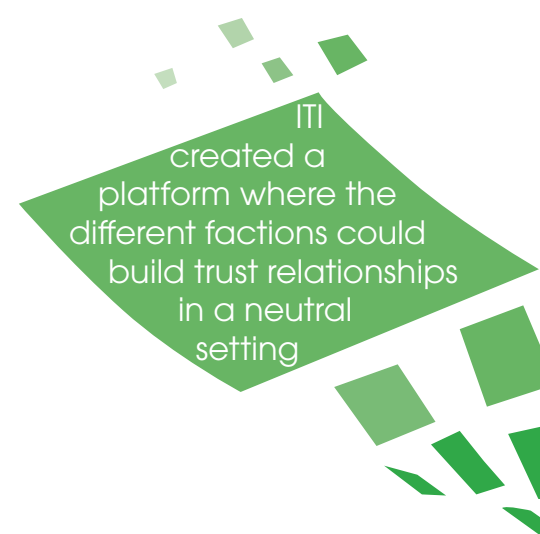
Although no public resolutions were taken or implemented in an official capacity owing to the private nature of the dialogue sessions, ITI's facilitation and organisation of the broader engagement dialogues enabled the Palestinians and South Africa to gain greater clarification and understanding of the Palestinian national project, while supporting the renewal of trust among the Palestinian leadership. This laid the groundwork for possible future engagements.

Hosting Delegations in South Africa

One of ITI's organisational objectives is providing opportunities for leaders and groups from conflict areas to visit South Africa and engage with individuals directly involved in the South African peace and transformation process.

Holding the meetings in a neutral environment not only removes participants from a conflict-ridden geographical context but also places them in a setting where they can interact with each other one on one should they choose to do so. Two breakaway dialogue sessions in South Africa were held over a five-day period in 2016.³² During this time ITI created a platform where the different factions could build trust relationships in a safe and neutral setting, exchanging ideologies, hearing grievances and altering perceptions of each other.

A major outcome of ITI's involvement in the Palestinian national project is that ITI was approached to help deal with the sensitive Fatah/Hamas split. This was a direct outcome of its emphasis on unity and the Palestinians' realisation of the importance thereof. Therefore, hosting the dialogue engagements in South Africa with its long history of Palestinian solidarity, as opposed to Qatar or Egypt, for example, proved crucial.



Additionally, during both the first round (3–5 April 2016) and the second round (25–28 July 2016) of dialogue events hosted in the Western Cape, participants from political parties (PLO, the Green Line and Hamas) and civil society organisations (including youth and women organisations) could engage with prominent South African participants.³³ This included members of the ITI directorate,³⁴ Judge Albie Sachs,³⁵ Ebrahim Rasool,³⁶ Ambassador Mohammed Dangor,³⁷ Pravin Gordhan³⁸ and Ambassador Ashraf Suliman.³⁹ One of the key lessons that emerged from hosting these delegations is that face-to-face conversations and listening to the objectives and constraints of different groups was very useful in reducing mistrust.

During August and November 2016 IPSA, represented by Dr Anis Daraghma, and ITI visited Ramallah and Tel Aviv and engaged in about a dozen meetings with leaders from Fatah, Jihad, the Green Line and civil society organisations from the West Bank. The purpose of the visits was to maintain the relationships built with the different stakeholders, obtain feedback on the engagements in South Africa and consult with them regarding possible future steps to be taken in these dialogues.

Additionally, third and fourth rounds of dialogue were scheduled to take place in South Africa in July 2017 and March 2018. However, these proposed activities did not take place because of various factors, including scheduling issues in the organisation of the 2017 dialogues; the Cairo reconciliation talks between Fatah and Hamas being hosted and facilitated by the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in October 2017; and the dramatic shift in the geo-political configuration in the region following the outcome of the 2016 United States (US) presidential elections. The effect of these factors on ITI and IPSA's involvement in the Palestine initiative will further be discussed under the limitation section of the report.

Capacity-Building Support

Capacity-building processes at a basic level focus on helping countries to identify capacity assets and constraints that impact the functioning of institutions of governance, security and transitional justice.⁴⁰ Capacity building also focuses on supporting development at all levels of society and includes institutional development, community development and economic development.

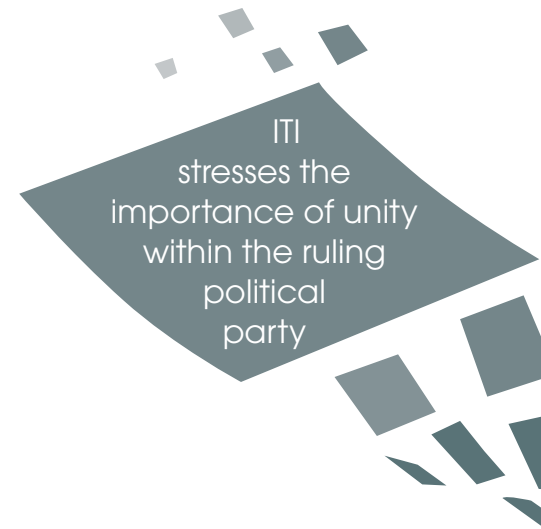
ITI believes that sustainable peacebuilding and strengthening of democratic states need to be framed around functional democratic institutions that have the necessary capacity to deliver on their directives. When supported and designed correctly, these institutions can promote democratic practices and encourage peace.⁴¹ ITI recognises that support in terms of capacity building and institutional development will differ in each country and therefore its assistance will depend on the context of the initiative. What remains important is to support the country stakeholders



in each project to build sufficient capacity to ensure the functioning of these institutions.

Moreover, referencing the South African experience, ITI stresses the importance of unity within the ruling political party, as this provides the strength and stability needed for successful transitioning into democracy and promoting coherent policies. This enabled the Palestinian leaders to focus on unifying both the PLO and the Palestinian people towards a common national vision and purpose. ITI also underlines the importance of unified policies and leadership in combatting the marginalisation of other political parties, such as those in the Green Line, as well as the separation from civil society organisations, eroding the link between communities and political parties.

Campaigns and process like these need the correct structure and political will to be successful in a context like Palestine. Consequently, the ITI facilitated dialogues, including workshops, aimed at communicating possible frameworks and multi-party strategic plans to integrate youth into political participation. Some suggestions to this end included reactivating the youth frameworks that form part of the PLO, so preparing to transfer political ownership and responsibility from one generation to the next.



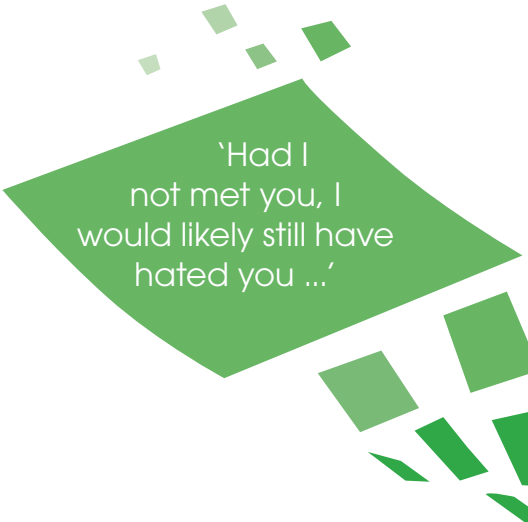
MOMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION

Narratives play a vital role, not only in constructing the political world as it is in the present but also in recalling what it once was and how it could be in the future. Recalling and sharing stories are one of the key vehicles through which to articulate the complexity of politics, specifically political change.⁴² In order to attempt to get a measurable response from participants engaging in dialogue discussions or peace-making processes, interviews were conducted with members of ITI and partner organisations that were involved in the internal Palestine initiative.

ITI director Mohammed Bhabha⁴³ recalled a statement made by a female civil society member from Palestine following a joint dialogue session between representatives from civil society and members of the major political parties in Cape Town. She recalled how her perception of Osama Hamdan,⁴⁴ a high-ranking representative of Hamas, had changed after observing him during the joint discussion sessions, stating something to the effect of: 'Had I not met you, I would likely still have hated you and in some ways I almost trusted the Israelis more than you.' By engaging in these discussions she was able to witness how Hamdan expressed himself and interacted with the other dialogue participants in a more transparent setting. She indicated that prior to these dialogue engagements, her perceptions of him were based exclusively on his association with Hamas and its religious ideology, which for her generated feelings of animosity, distrust and aversion. This shift in perception would likely not have been possible had she not had the opportunity to engage with him and other political leaders at this level and within this setting.

Another key moment recalled by both Mohammed Bhabha and Dr Anis Daraghma⁴⁵ took place during one of the first engagements hosted in Cape Town by ITI and IPSA. During an intimate meeting of approximately six participants, including top representatives of Hamas, Fatah, IPSA and the ITI directors, the Palestinian participants began discussing the various issues and obstacles hindering a relationship of trust and cooperation between the major political factions, as well as the idea of Palestinian national identity.

During this conversation, ITI started seeing some semblance of trust forming between the two groups' representatives, as well as a willingness to make a shift in perception. What were crucial in creating this awareness among the participants were the nature of the dialogue, held in a neutral setting that provided privacy, and trust in their South African hosts.



'Had I
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hated you ...'

LIMITATIONS

The political context of the Palestine project was complex and required extensive trust-building engagements with the different stakeholders involved in the political discourse, to secure their participation. Although the first two rounds of dialogue with stakeholders did improve relations between the political parties and civil society organisations, the relationship remained fragile. Upon reflection, the trust relationship between civil society and political leaders in Palestine required more attention, time and nurturing to ensure its longevity. Moreover, encouraging greater political will from leadership regarding this trust relationship was necessary.

The third and fourth rounds of dialogue, which were scheduled to take place in South Africa during July 2017 and March 2018, failed to materialise owing to several factors. The third engagement would have focused on reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah, and in April 2017 the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) joined ITI and IPSA to lead the process. DIRCO would send the invitation letter while ITI and IPSA would facilitate the new reconciliation process.

However, DIRCO failed to timeously extend official invitations to both parties. While ITI extended an invitation to Fatah and Hamas soon afterwards, by that time the groundwork had been laid for the Cairo reconciliation talks in October 2017. Additionally, at this stage in the project, extra funding had to be secured for further engagement activities to take place, which was not obtained.

In March 2018 ITI and IPSA presented proposals to re-engage with the political leaders of the PLO, the Green Line and Islamic movements on the topics of the contemporary Palestinian National Strategy, President Donald Trump's December 2017 decision to declare Jerusalem the capital of Israel, and the Trump administration's 'Deal of the Century'. These seminars would have been hosted in South Africa and Ramallah and would have consisted of political leaders, experts, women and youth leaders and advocates.

However, following the dramatic shift in the geo-political configuration in the region, as well as the challenges presented by these events, the follow-up engagements could not take place. Furthermore, the US' designation of Hamas as a 'foreign terrorist organisation' and its approach towards the organisation as part of the 'Deal of the Century' essentially criminalised Hamas and limited the NA's ability to engage with it. Consequently, this affected the momentum towards a united Palestinian people.



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CONCLUSION

The Palestine initiative provides many points of reflection and lessons that can be learnt from ITI's involvement. ITI's role in this project was focused on building relationships with the major political parties and supporting the development of a Palestinian national project of unity and collaboration. The emphasis on building trust between opposition groups enabled the Palestinian stakeholders to shift their attitude to the peace process from a 'winner-takes-all' approach towards refocusing on a collective national agenda to liberate all Palestinians. Moreover, it also promoted the revitalising of reconciliation and possible future collaboration between Hamas and Fatah.

Promoting an inclusive negotiation process ensured that a diverse group of Palestinians from different spheres of the political discourse engaged with one another on a level never experienced before. This also addressed some of the disconnect between political leaders, social movements and civil society in the Palestinian territories and diaspora. Moreover, the principle of ownership of the process and developing local solutions to fit the context of Palestine was effectively transferred through ITI's approach to the dialogue engagements. Throughout the initiative ITI was able to leverage the historical relationship between South Africa and Palestine, while maintaining South Africa's neutrality with its transparent and professional attitude to all participants in the process.

ITI successfully hosted two dialogue engagements in South Africa, with one being the first time since 1992 that all major political parties agreed to meet with each other in one location. Not only does this demonstrate the organisation's ability to access high-level leadership and be trusted as a facilitator, but it also showcases the strategic ways in which ITI employs the political capital and experience of its directors. Lastly, the success of ITI's approach, grounded in the South African experience, can be seen in the moments of transformation described and the impact this has had on the Palestinian participants.



ITI was able to leverage the historical relationship between South Africa and Palestine

PROJECT TIMELINE

2015

SEPTEMBER

South Africa

IPSA approaches ITI to be its strategic advisor in a series of dialogue events focused on the future of the Palestine National Project.

OCTOBER

South Africa

Scoping meetings between ITI, key South African political and civil society leaders active in the Palestine process, DIRCO officials and the SA President's Special Envoy to Palestine.

DECEMBER

Ramallah, West Bank; Tel Aviv, Israel; Doha, Qatar

ITI team and IPSA engage with potential participants and key political leaders to motivate their participation in the dialogue project.

2016

3-7 APRIL

Boschendal, Western Cape, South Africa

First dialogue retreat event is held on the future of the Palestine dialogue process with major political party representatives, including Hamas, Fatah and the Green Line.

1 SEPTEMBER

Ramallah, West Bank

Dr Anis Daraghma contracted as project coordinator (6 months) to represent ITI and IPSA in Ramallah.

NOVEMBER

Pretoria, South Africa

Both the South African ambassadors in East Jerusalem and Qatar, as well as Ambassador Mohammed Dangor from DIRCO, meet with the ITI team to discuss the future role of South Africa and ITI in the reconciliation project in Palestine.

24-28 JULY

Boschendal, Western Cape, South Africa

Dialogue retreat on the future of the Palestine National Project with broader range of political parties and civil society representatives.

1-4 NOVEMBER

Ramallah, West Bank and Tel Aviv, Israel

ITI team obtains feedback from the attendees of the July 2016 dialogue retreat; consultations regarding future steps in dialogue process.

NOVEMBER

Washington DC, US

Roelf Meyer briefs relevant state departments on the progress made in the Palestine and Israel-Palestine project.

2017

20-26 AUGUST (PROPOSED ENGAGEMENT)

South Africa

Proposed third dialogue towards Palestinian reconciliation; invitation to Fatah and Hamas does not take place.

18 SEPTEMBER

Ramallah, West Bank

Roelf Meyer and Ambassador Ashraf Suliman meet leaders of Fatah who were part of the Egyptian talks that took place in early September 2017, as well as members of the diplomatic community, to discuss the Egyptian-facilitated process.

28 SEPTEMBER

South Africa

Briefing session with the Egyptian ambassador to South Africa; agreement is reached on possible role of ITI and SA to support Egyptian reconciliation process.

2018

16-21 APRIL (PROPOSED ENGAGEMENT)

South Africa

Proposed dialogue workshop between Fatah, Hamas and the Green Line towards reconciliation does not take place.

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ENDNOTES

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- 5 Beyond Conflict (BC) is a global non-profit organisation dedicated to supporting conflict stakeholders and actors in their efforts to achieve sustainable peace through peacebuilding and conflict transformation. BC works to promote positive social change by applying real-world experience and insights from brain and behavioural science. See <https://beyondconflictint.org/>
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