

Peacebuilding across the Israeli/Palestinian Border through Environmental Education

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ABSTRACT

Limited access to sufficient, safe water is a major cause of conflict in the Middle East. In Israel and Palestine, environmental education can play an important role in peacebuilding. This effort promotes peace in areas of conflict by finding a common ground to solve environmental issues that affect all people in the region. This talk will describe such activities in the cultural basin of the Kidron Valley/Wadi El Nar. The Kidron Valley/Wadi Nar begins near the Jerusalem neighborhood of Meah Shaarim, passes through the Arab neighborhood of Silwan and continues through the Judean Desert to the Dead Sea. Some of the Middle East's most famous cultural, religious and historic sites are found in the valley, however, unchecked development, neglect, and population increase, have had major health, environmental, and economic consequences. Today, the Kidron Valley serves as a conduit for raw sewage and a depository of solid waste, because, absent a peace treaty between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, there is no waste water treatment plant for East Jerusalem and for the towns along the river valley.

This situation has provided opportunities for grass roots environmental peacebuilding activities throughout the physical and cultural basin of the Kidron. These range from collaborative ecological studies carried out at the university level, to water harvesting activities at the elementary school level. The work involves cooperation among a number of local universities, towns, non-profit groups, the international Long Term Socio-ecological Research Program, Engineers without Borders and the Water Resources Action Project, Inc. (WRAP), an American, non-profit organization based in Washington, DC and Albuquerque, NM. WRAP has developed cross-border and cross-cultural environmental peacebuilding programs and activities for youth, with a focus on water resources. In a network of 8 middle and high schools, WRAP has supported a number of environmental projects relevant to cross-border issues including 1) maximizing water collection and use with rainwater harvesting systems, 2) grey water testing and utilization, and 3) water pollution in the Kidron Valley. The activities supported by WRAP and its partners are an important part of the schools' science literacy programs as described in this talk.