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Create 'ministries of peace' in every country

By GERSHON BASKIN

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I am writing from Tokyo, where I am attending a summit meeting of the "Global Alliance for Ministries and Departments of Peace." The aim of this global alliance is to foster the creation of governmental departments or ministries for peace throughout the world. This is the third Global Summit. In the years since its creation only Nepal has actually moved forward with the establishment of a Ministry of Peace. There are about 20 countries being represented at the summit including a representative from Palestine. In the US Legislation for a Ministry of Peace has been tabled in the House of Representatives with 64 Members of Congress sponsoring the legislation.

The basic idea of having a Ministry of Peace is to work strategically toward the creation and the advancement of a culture of peace within the country and between a given country and its neighbors. A Ministry of Peace aims at enlarging the "tool box" of resources at the disposal of governments for dealing with conflicts, internal and external, and at enabling governments to develop alternative policies to the use of force. A Ministry of Peace would also be extremely useful in areas where there are ongoing peace processes especially when those peace processes emerge into peace agreements.

MANY OBSERVERS note the difficulty that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Mahmoud Abbas are facing in their negotiations for a permanent status declaration of principles. Even once that declaration is reached and the key issues are bridged into an agreement, the main challenges lie ahead of us. The most difficult part of any peace process is the successful and positive implementation of peace agreements. Here we Israelis and Palestinians have failed miserably.

When the Oslo agreements were first negotiated, prime minister Yitzhak Rabin instructed the IDF and the security services to be charged with implementing the agreements vis-à-vis the newly created Palestinian Authority. The generals in the general staff were very honest with the prime minister; they, in effect, told him: "We don't know how to implement peace agreements. If you want us to prepare the army for war or for any possible breakdown of the peace process, we are good at that, but we do not know how to implement peace agreements."

Unfortunately Rabin did not listen, mainly because he had so little trust in his fellow politicians. In the end, the military and security services on both sides were the main implementing bodies of the peace process (which failed). This is the tendency in places where the struggle, like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is so heavily laden with acute violence.

IMPLEMENTING new peace agreements with the Palestinians will require extreme caution, sensitivity and a lot of strategic planning. It is essential that the implementation of any future agreements become "civilized," in other words, that the governmental ministries, other than defense, become directly involved in building cooperation and understanding. During the "good days" of the Oslo process, I was invited to a meeting in the Ministry of Finance to plan for an upcoming meeting between the economic ministries

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of Israel, Jordan and the PA. There were representatives there from all of the Israeli economic ministries. The meeting was also attended by senior representatives of the Ministry of Defense and the IDF. I was quite shocked when at the end of the meeting, the military representatives, who were silent during the meeting, took the floor to summarize the discussion.

I HAVE already written to Olmert, to Abbas and to other senior Israeli and Palestinian officials recommending that should they be successful in reaching agreement on a Declaration of Principles that they will bring to Washington in November, that it include, on both sides, the establishment of a Ministry of Peace in Israel and in the PA. The main task of these Ministries would be to coordinate the implementation of any agreements and the coordination of a "peace directive" that would be issued by both governments asserting that all efforts should be immediately undertaken to make peace into a reality.

Every single government ministry should devise a plan to build peace with its counterpart. The Ministries of Peace on both sides would serve as a coordinating body for the advancement of all of the peace-building activities that would be launched. The Ministries of Peace would also serve as a clearing house of knowledge, research, evaluation and collective know-how in the advancement of peace.

The Ministries of Peace would also play a significant role in advancing a public peace process bringing the reality of peace into every Israeli and Palestinian home and school. A major effort to build peace from the bottom-up based on people-to-people contacts, supported by the two governments and the international community would help to make the agreements tangible and substantive to Israeli and Palestinian citizens.

THE CREATION of the Ministries of Peace could immediately benefit a Minister currently serving in each government. In Palestine, Dr. Riad Malki, the current Minister of Information has been a long time peace activist who headed the Palestinian democracy and peace building NGO Panorama. Dr. Malki also served as the Palestinian Chairman of the Palestinian-Israeli Peace NGO Forum prior to being drafted into the government by PA Prime Minister Salaam Fayad. He is a perfect candidate to be the first minister for peace in Palestine. In Israel, Ami Ayalon, who brings with him the experience from the military but also the experience of being a peace activist through his People's Voice Campaign would be the perfect candidate from within the Israeli government.

Peace is more than agreements. Peace must be translated into reality. This does not happen on its own. A decisive and determined set of actions must be taken by both sides that are proactive and constructive must be employed. The establishment of two Ministries of Peace, one in Israel and one in Palestine, would be further proof that both sides were serious about making peace.

The writer is co-Ceo of the Israel/Palestine Center for Research & Information.

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14. Gershon, you're in the right place at the right time
Boris Celsler - Canada (09/26/2007 04:14)

13. ministry of peace
dan kaplan - usa (09/25/2007 20:17)

12. MINISTRY OF SNOWMEN
joel joseph - England. (09/25/2007 19:53)

11. SOMEONE'S CRYING BASKIN, KUMBAYA
abe - usa (09/25/2007 18:06)

10. We need a UN and a League of Nations
Ken Besig - Israel (09/25/2007 13:25)

9. Disappointing Column
Rob Barnett - USA (09/25/2007 12:48)

8. Why Not a Ministry of Love?
JonathanInTelAviv - Israel (09/25/2007 12:36)

7. How about a Ministry of Common Sense?
JB - (09/25/2007 12:23)

6. Minipax
Elfrida Ullfsen - (09/25/2007 11:55)

5. To #1, Dr Frosch, "Dr" Baskin received his "PhD" from the never accredited, now defunct "Greenwich University." Please use quotation marks, i.e. "Dr"
trnyc - (09/25/2007 11:21)

4. More Leftist psycho-babble

OS - Israel (09/25/2007 09:56)

3. This is an old idea

Richard Prager - (09/25/2007 09:45)

2. MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE

Y. Kreminsky - Israel (09/25/2007 08:24)

1. Nice trip

Dr. Robert Frosch - (09/25/2007 07:43)

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