



Civilizations Exchange & Cooperation Foundation

Building Bridges Program Report **Jordan, Syria, and Egypt** **September 13 - 27, 2003**



PARTICIPANTS

Clergy, Professors, Interfaith and Community Activists

GOALS AND OUTCOME OF PROGRAM

As we developed this program, we laid out our goals of not only visiting historic and religious sites valued by people of various cultures and faith traditions, but more importantly building a foundation to establish relationships by involving the delegation in face-to-face dialogue. We felt this would aid in facilitating mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's culture and religious background between people from America and the Muslim World. We also wanted to enable the delegation to gain insight into the reasons for the rise of Anti-American sentiment and provide a platform for exchanging views and perspectives.

The delegation returned from the Building Bridges Program, bringing with them views from abroad and personal experiences to share. The realization that it is more crucial than ever before to reach out in search of paths leading to peace and understanding through interaction and discussion has become a reality for many of them. Not only did they enjoy the biblical and historical sights of the land of ancient civilizations, the cradle of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, but they also participated in official receptions and numerous meetings.

SCHEDULED MEETINGS

In each country we met with:

➤ **Religious Leaders of the Abrahamic Faiths**

- Minister of Al Awqaf (Islamic Affairs), Dr. Ahmed Hilayel - *Jordan*
- Patriarch of Antioch for the Greek Orthodox, Patriarch Ignatius Hazeem the 4th - *Syria*
- Grand Mufti of Syria, Sheikh Ahmed Kuftaro - *Syria*
- Abu Noor Islamic Foundation - *Syria*
- Grand Mufti of Egypt, Dr. Ahmad Al Tayeb - *Egypt*
- Seminar and Dialogue with the Young Muslim Association - *Egypt*
- YMCA Representatives - *Egypt*

They shared their experiences of the centuries long religious tolerance in the region and discussed their thoughts on why opposite impressions exist in the world.

JORDAN:



Dr. Ahmed Hilayel



Minister of Al Awqaf

SYRIA



Patriarch Ignatius Hazeem the 4th Patriarch of Antioch for the Greek Orthodox Community



Rev. David Parks-Ramage,
Minister of Parish Life at the
First Congregational Church
of Berkeley, CA, spoke to the
community at Abu Noor
Mosque following the Friday
Sermon of the Grand Mufti,
Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro.



Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro



Grand Mufti of Syria

EGYPT



Dr. Ahmad Al Tayeb



Grand Mufti of Egypt



Muslim Youth Association & YMCA

➤ Politicians and Government Officials

- Foreign Ministry, Mr. Rashid Uraiqtat - *Jordan*
- President of the Syrian Parliament, Dr. Issam Al Jamal - *Syria*
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Bouthaina Sha'aban - *Syria*
- Seminar and Reception by Ms. Elizabeth Thornhill, Cultural Attaché, Embassy of the United States of America in Cairo - *Egypt*
- League of Arab States, Dr. Kamal Abul Magd - *Egypt*

They talked about many policies of the region, the obstacles to the peace process, and the Arab-Israeli Struggle.

JORDAN



Mr. Uraiqtat



Reception at Jordanian Border

SYRIA



Dr. Bouthaina Sha'aban



Foreign Ministry



Dr. Issam Al Jamal

EGYPT



Dr. Kamal Abul Magd



League of Arab States

➤ Academics and Professors

- Former Judge of the Supreme Court, Dr. Mohamad Abu Hassan - *Jordan*
- President of Al Albayt University, Dr. Sulaiman Al Boudur - *Jordan*
- President of Damascus University, Dr. Hani Murtada - *Syria*
- The Library of Alexandria, Dr. Kamal Khalifa - *Egypt*
- President of Al Azhar University, Dr. Umar Hashem - *Egypt*

They hosted events in religious and secular universities in order to interact with faculty and students.

JORDAN



Dr. Sulaiman Al Boudur



Dr. Mohamad Abu Hassan

SYRIA



Dr. Hani Murtada

EGYPT



Administration of Al Azhar University

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

We visited the following sites:

Jordan

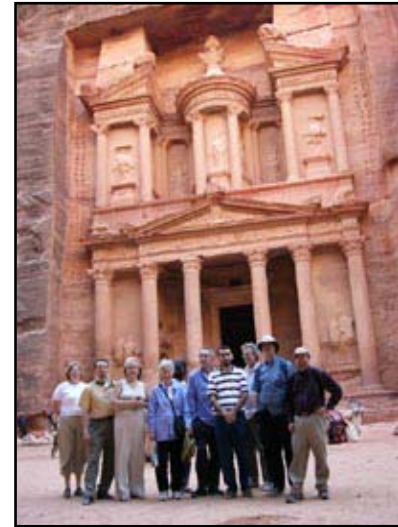
- Amman
- Petra
- The Dead Sea
- Mt. Nebo
- Greek Orthodox Church
- The Roman Amphitheater



Mt. Nebo



Facing the Holy Land



Petra



Making bread



Mosaic Map of the Holy Land



Amman Roman Amphitheatre

Syria

- Damascus
- Old City and Market
- Umayyad Mosque
- Abu Al Noor Mosque & Islamic Foundation
- Church of Ananias
- Ma'lula
- St. Sergius Church
- Monastery
- Memorial of St. Paul's Conversion



Umayyad Mosque



Dinner - 1200 years old house



Whirling Dervishes



St. Paul's Conversion

Egypt

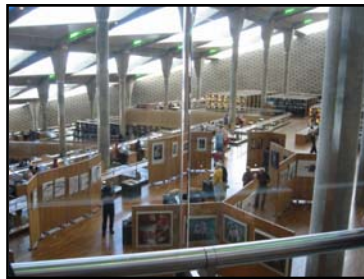
- Cairo
- Alexandria
- The Library of Alexandria
- The Great Pyramids
- National Museum
- Mediterranean
- Citadel
- The Church of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus



The Pyramids



Cairo



Library of Alexandria



Egyptian Museum



Egyptian Museum



Christian Minister w/his family



Cruise on the Nile

ACCOMMODATIONS

- The Bristol Hotel in Amman, Jordan
- Al Fardoss Hotel in Damascus, Syria
- Al Gezira Sheraton Hotel in Cairo, Egypt, which overlooks the Nile River.



Bristol Hotel - Amman



Al Gezira Sheraton Hotel - Cairo

TESTIMONIALS

Dr. Barbara McHugh holds a Ph. D in Religion and Literature from the Graduate Theological Union of Berkeley. She stated: *"I found the trip beneficial for many reasons. I feel I have a much*



Dr. McHugh surrounded by a Syrian Family

better understanding of the genuine concerns of people in places we visited, and I have a much greater appreciation of the diversity and complexity of the area. More importantly, I saw the kinds of misunderstandings that can arise out of ignorance and/or fear. (For example, I fear that few Americans have any comprehension of the outrage that Muslims have when their religion is denigrated. Blasphemy in America is such a casual thing that many people have lost all sense of what it means to religious people)."

When asked about the meetings, she wrote: *"Also, I felt that many of the people I talked to felt that nobody in the West was listening to them. I think the most informative and interesting meetings were in Syria, in particular, the one with Bouthaina Sha'aban. She not only covered the Palestinian problem; she had a lot to say about other issues as well. I learned far more about the position of women in the Middle East from her than anyone else."*

Due to the rigorous schedule of events and activities, we have jokingly suggested that the members of the first delegation are the pioneers of our program and went through the *"Building Bridges Boot Camp."* Dr. McHugh also thought, *"People needed more free time. Not only to relax and digest what they've learned, but also to bond with the countries; to wander in the streets and form their own relationships with people and places. This sort of emotional attachment to a country is what energizes people to continue building bridges after they return home."*

Many of the other members of the delegation indicated that they would enjoy participating in a program where people were brought here from the Middle East.

Dr. McHugh wrote: *"In the future, I'd like to see other kinds of groups participate in the Building Bridges Program – such as artists, historians, scientists, or ecologists. Or, rather than specialists per se, perhaps the groups could consist of people interested in certain aspects of culture – including cuisine – and meet people with corresponding interests."*

Another member of the delegation, Rev. Paul Tunkle, Rector of the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, thought as he was flying home: *"I was grateful for the whole experience, and my learning was quantum in scope. It will take me months to process all that we experienced."*

William H. Coffin wrote, *"This journey was a life-changing experience for me. Building Bridges provided me with the opportunity to meet and interact with people of a very different culture and religion, and discover that they weren't really so different after all. I prepared carefully for the trip, yet I was continually surprised. No matter how much you think you know about the Middle East and the Arab world, a trip like this opens your eyes in totally unexpected ways."*

One of the surprises was the friendliness of the people we met, whether in meetings or on the street. People were willing and even eager to talk with us. We were also impressed by the women, who were frank and articulate. We encountered many viewpoints, from moderate to fairly extreme, often communicated with great eloquence.

This trip was exhausting at times, with long meetings filled with impassioned dialogue. But I wouldn't change a minute of it. It was often moving, sometimes challenging, but always fascinating. For anyone interested in other cultures and peoples, CECF is doing something absolutely unique and vital. CECF is right at the cutting edge of intercultural dialogue for our times."

After returning home, Mr. Coffin created his own web-site of the Building Bridges Experience - <http://www.eclipsoid.com/bridges>.