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Israelis and Palestinians sign 'peace agreement'

• By MAAVAN JAFFE-HOFFMAN

A peace agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians was signed Thursday – at least in a simulation.

Ninety Israeli, Palestinian and 11th grade Eastern Mediterranean International Boarding School (EMIS) students from 21 countries – including Rwanda, Indonesia, Poland, Guatemala, Brazil, China, Vietnam, Armenia, America, Italy, Spain, Russia, Ukraine, Afghanistan and Hungary – participated on Wednesday and Thursday in marathon “peace talks” at HaKfar HaYarok, a youth village in located in southern Ramat HaSharon region.

“It was exhausting,” said Israeli Itai Kali Levy, age 16.

He described hours of back and forth around the negotiating table.

“We revisited the same points over and over and sometimes there were unintentional escalations, but we got through it,” he said. “It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

The simulation was divided into two tracks. The first track was meant to establish nego-

tiations to arrive at an agreement, while the second track helped the students explore and develop new ideas and principles, be creative and think out-of-the-box. Negotiations ran from 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday until 11 a.m. on Thursday, with small breaks.

The peace talks simulation is the culmination of an intensive course and workshop in peace mediation and conflict resolution that the students have taken over the past few months.

There were three negotiating tables and three different agreements.

This is the third year of what has become an annual program run by the Leon Charney Resolution Center, named for the late Leon Charney, a prominent lawyer, author, broadcaster and former adviser to, among others, President Jimmy Carter, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and President Ezer Weizman. Charney played an important role in the Camp David Peace Accords, which led to the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. The student negotiations are modeled after Charney’s methods, according to



NINETY STUDENTS from around the world take part in a ‘peace-process’ simulation. (Courtesy)

his wife Tzili Charney, who founded the center.

The Charney center runs simulations at regular intervals across the country, but the negotiations with EMIS are unique because students come from all over the world to live and study together. Dr. Sapir Handelman, who facilitated

the simulation, said having the international school students around the table brings more creative ideas that the Israeli and Palestinians often cannot think of because they live the conflict every day.

The idea, he explained, is that “without people there is no peace; the leadership has problems.”

He said the students dealt with key issues, such as the status of Jerusalem, refugees and borders.

“The idea is not to demean each other and not to hash out historical debates,” Handelman explained. “For example, the refugee problem has

to be solved. But we don’t have to hash out whether the Palestinians were deported or if they left. We cannot judge the truth.”

Ultimately, both the Israeli and Palestinian students begin to see the world more through each other’s eyes, he added.

Next Monday, the Charney center will carry out the largest ever Israeli-Palestinian congress of students to be held in the region. Some 100 Israeli and Palestinian university students and 50 Israeli and Palestinian high school students will negotiate trust-building measures at the Students House at University of Haifa. That simulation will be held in cooperation Minds of Peace. Students will either be enrolled at the university, at the Ort Binyamina high school, or at one of several schools throughout the West Bank.

Handelman said that the EMIS and Haifa University simulations are important steps toward what he hopes will be the establishment of an Israeli-Palestinian Public Negotiating Congress, a peace-making institution – one for adults and one for students –

that will come together a few times a year in dialogue, especially when there are escalations, to help reach solutions.

Charney said that she does not expect overnight results – “it is a process.” She hopes that when the students grow up, they become responsible citizens, voters and ultimately game-changers.

“I don’t expect it to affect everything right away, it will take a generation if not more,” she said. “But we don’t lose hope. There is always a thin line between reality and hope.”

“But It is important to keep the dialogue open and never fall asleep,” she continued.

Kristen Hanania, 17 from Ramallah, said she believes this work will make a difference. She said she will bring what she learned back to her family and try to open their minds, too.

“In school in Palestine, they teach you the Palestinian perspective and we don’t get the Israeli perspective,” Hanania said. “Now, I can go back and tell my parents and friends something new, something that they need to know. It is pretty educational.”