I. Background

Following a previous initiative in the Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), where the World Health Organization (WHO) worked with European decentralized entities (principally municipalities) with the objective of promoting development and reconciliation, WHO is now interested in undertaking a similar initiative in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and in Israel.

Decentralized cooperation refers to systematic cooperation links between local communities in donor countries and local communities in countries that needs support. The objective of these links is to create and/or consolidate long-term cultural, technical and economic partnerships between local communities as a tool to promote human development and peace. In this context, “local communities” refers to a decentralized politico-administrative level of a country, e.g. a municipality, or groups of towns, which answers to a local administrative body such as province, county or department. They include the political administration (mayor, city councilors, etc) and the population.

Decentralized cooperation sets up a grassroot partnership between institutions and civil societies of two entities, which allows interventions to be “tailor-made” to meet the local population’s needs. It can both meet requirements of humanitarian assistance in emergency settings and long-term development objectives. Its aim is to work on common interests and needs – rather than on the positions and opinions of the different parties in conflict – which plays a role in promoting conflict resolution, peace-building and a “culture of exchange”.

In order to avoid fragmentation and to insure conformity to national policies, these partnerships should be coordinated and advised by a UN Agency. WHO has been present in the region for more than 50 years, working together with UNRWA, with the Palestinian Ministry of Health and being in permanent contact with the Israeli Ministry of Health through the Regional Office for Europe.

II. Objectives

The project addresses the severe health and social needs of the Palestinian population as well as those of the Israeli population as assessed by WHO and other health agencies in the region. At the same time, it will contribute to breaking the isolation the population of the region is facing and to promote dialogue and receptiveness among the Palestinian and Israeli people.
This partnership will focus on the concrete needs of the municipalities of the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel in terms of strengthening the health and social situation, in particular those resulting from the emergency situation, and contributing to reweave the social fabric. Social and health condition of vulnerable groups as well as primary health care and public health needs will especially be addressed. At the end of the project, the collaboration between all the twin cities will continue, insuring the sustainability of the initiative.

The specific objectives of the project are:
1. to promote health and social interventions according to the specific needs of the local population;
2. to set up a network of twin cities between Europe, the oPt and Israel and promote exchanges;
3. to promote the links between Israeli and Palestinian municipalities through cooperation in the health and social fields.

III. Activities

Under the umbrella of WHO, the project proposes to set up partnerships of decentralized cooperation between European cities, municipalities of the occupied Palestinian territory and municipalities of Israel, thus creating a triangle of cooperation and exchange in the health and social fields. The cities of Barcelona, Geneva, Hamar (Norway), Brussels, The Hague, Torino and Lyon are the European municipalities participating to the project.

**TRIANGULAR PARTNERSHIP UNDER WHO COORDINATION**

*The development of partnerships will start with each city according to their emergency needs.*

In a first phase of the project, 8 European cities will be connected, through twinning or other cooperation mechanisms, to 8 Palestinian and 8 Israeli municipalities. The cities will start exchange activities (beginning with at least a visit from European professionals to the Palestinian city and welcoming Palestinian professionals in the European city). In a second phase, ad hoc projects will be implemented in the twin municipalities of the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel in the health and social fields, especially designed to answer the needs of those localities, both in term of
humanitarian assistance and development. In a third phase, if the evolution of the general situation is favourable, activities of exchange and joint projects will be organized between the Palestinian and the Israeli twin municipalities.

The planned activities are:

1.1. identification and selection of European, Palestinian and Israeli cities: the selection of European cities has already begun and the selection of Israeli and Palestinian cities will be made in collaboration with local partners including ULAI and APLA;

1.2. implementation of twinning agreements between European cities, Palestinian cities, Israeli cities and WHO: facilitated by WHO a memorandum of understanding will be approved by the 3 cities;

2.1. set up of a plan of action for health and social interventions in the Palestinian and Israeli municipalities: this will be done by the working group set up at local level involving all actors and partners;

2.2. organization of exchange activities such as study tours, training initiatives, workshops, etc: Palestinian and Israeli professionals can be invited to Europe and vice versa, European professionals can set up on-the-job trainings, etc;

2.3. implementation of health and social activities in the Palestinian and Israeli municipalities (training, equipment, rehabilitation): ad hoc projects can be set up by the European city with the help of WHO in order to address specific problems of Palestinian and Israeli cities;

3.1. organization of meetings and exchange activities between Palestinian and Israeli municipalities: in a subsequent phase of the project, Israeli and Palestinian municipalities can organize joint meetings, workshops, trainings, etc.

**TASKS OF PARTNERS**

*European cities:*

The European city will set up a committee with representatives of the local Government, health and social institutions and the civil society, who are committed to sustain the project during the planning and implementation phases.

For the planning and the implementation of the partnership, the European cities will be committed to carry out the following activities: 1. employment of a representative (“focal point”) to work at field level in the linked Palestinian and Israeli municipalities for the project duration; 2. support to the participatory planning activities and project implementation with the twin cities; 3. organization and implementation of professional exchanges between the linked communities; 4. undertaking initiatives in the European city to support the activities in the oPt and Israel, including the promotion of partnership networks of health institutions, NGOs, associations; 5. implementation of health and social activities in oPt and Israel under the coordination of WHO, taking into account both emergency and long-term needs.

The European city will co-finance together with WHO: 1. the presence and the activities of its representative in the occupied Palestinian territory and in Israel as well as the exchange activities (e.g. hosting groups of Palestinian and Israeli professionals in study tours and supporting missions of European professionals in oPt and Israel); 2. the operational activities (e.g. health and social initiatives in the oPt and Israel). In addition to the above-mentioned commitments, a further commitment is recommended for a long-term partnership.
### Israeli and Palestinian municipalities:

The Israeli and the Palestinian municipalities will be committed to: 1. actively participate in the participatory planning of the working group set up in each twin local community, comprising local authorities, public institutions, private sector and civil society groups; 2. collaborate in the implementation of the exchange activities; 3. mobilize the available local resources for the health and social activities supported by the European cities.

### WHO:

WHO’s tasks will be mainly to: 1. facilitate the contact and the relationship between the municipalities; 2. provide technical assistance to the local working groups; 3. link the activities at local level with the plans elaborated at national level; 4. coordinate the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project; 5. co-finance, together with the European cities, the presence and activities of the focal points, the exchange activities and the operational activities implemented in the oPt and Israel.

The population of the 8 Palestinian and 8 Israeli cities will directly benefit from this project.