



Registered charity number:SC047090

# **Balfour Project**

SCIO

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

**From 12<sup>th</sup> January 2017**

**to**

**31<sup>st</sup> JANUARY 2018**

## BALFOUR PROJECT



The Trustees have pleasure in presenting their annual report for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018

### Objectives and Activities

The Balfour Project became a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation Charity no. SC047090 on 12th January 2017. Its objects are 'the advancement of education' and 'the advancement of human rights, conflict resolution or reconciliation', by 'a process of education, to advance public understanding of Britain's role in the Middle East in the twentieth century, and thereby to seek to advance reconciliation in Israel and Palestine'.

### Beginnings

For eight years prior to its registration, a few concerned citizens were asking 'How will Britain mark the centenary of the Balfour Declaration?' With the help of historians, theologians, diplomats, British, Palestinian and Israeli individuals, and others, we came to understand how Britain sowed the seeds of conflict in Mandate Palestine, a conflict that continues unabated today. We believe that Britain has a moral duty now to acknowledge this responsibility.

In order to make this acknowledgement, we must continue informing British people about our historic responsibilities, and to this end, we have held day-long conferences in Edinburgh, London, Winchester, Oxford, Durham, Liverpool, and Southwark. We created



a [web site](#) that contains a vast amount of historical information and is read world-wide, and has received up to 40,000 page views a month; we made an 18 minute film '[Britain in Palestine 1917 – 1948](#)', and a 84 page '[Companion Guide](#)' to give much fully referenced information. This film was launched by a cross party group in [Westminster](#)

[Parliament](#) in May 2016.

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### Activities in 2017

The authority of the Project's consultant historians has become well recognised, and they have frequently been requested as speakers throughout Britain. In March 2017 two trustees spoke at the Sabeel 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference in Palestine and Israel, and in Amman to the World Affairs Council and the Jerusalem Forum.

In April 2017 the Balfour Project invited Professor Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of the Mahatma, to give a seminar in the House of Commons, '[Mahatma Gandhi and the Wounds of History: Palestine, India and the British Empire in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century](#)'. He outlined the consequences of British rule in India, likening it to the trauma caused in Palestine, and advised that acknowledging this 'is an issue for the people of Britain as much as for the politicians.'

When Prime Minister Theresa May announced that she would 'mark with pride' the centenary of the Balfour Declaration, members of the Balfour Project wondered if that was the only message which would go to the world from Britain about the 67 words which changed the Middle East so profoundly.

### Achievements and Performance

Accordingly a reflective meeting on ["Britain's Broken Promise – Time for a New Approach"](#) was organized at Central Hall Westminster, close to Parliament. The aim was to acknowledge Britain's historical responsibilities in the region, and to commit ourselves to support Palestinians and Israelis in building a peaceful future based on equal rights for all. Over £25,000 was raised through donations and ticket sales in three months, and many people contributed their time and expertise to the venture.

On the evening of 31st October, more than 1,200 people filled Central Hall Westminster to hear from British leaders – senior politicians from Conservative, Labour, Scottish Nationalist and LibDem parties, Christian, Jewish and Muslim religious leaders, academics and a former UK Consul-General in Jerusalem. Each person attending received a copy of the [Souvenir Programme](#), and the [edited speeches](#) have been published as a booklet.

Former Foreign Secretary Lord David Owen said, "I have no doubt that we did break our promise to the Palestinians. We can recover from that broken promise, but only if there is a fresh approach." And he outlined ideas for that approach. Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry MP said that the next Labour Government would recognize Palestine as a sovereign state if the present government did not.

Arabic and Jewish music by the band 'Chai for All' added to the atmosphere. A letter from [23 prominent Israelis](#) called upon the UK Government to issue "a statement expressing recognition of the State of Palestine without further delay." From around the world people sent [messages of encouragement](#). TV crews filmed the event and broadcast it across the Middle East, and social media carried it widely.

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On the same day, Members of the UK Parliament from four parties launched a [Balfour Centenary Declaration](#). This detailed six steps which the UK could take to help resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict. It has now been signed by 83 Members of Parliament, including four from the Scottish Parliament - and many other public figures.

### Phase Two

The Balfour Project now enters its second year, welcoming two new trustees – [Sir Vincent Fean](#), British Consul General Jerusalem 2010 – 2014, and [Andrew Whitley](#), Policy and Advocacy Director of The Elders, former Director of UNRWA, and Executive Director of Middle East Watch. Reluctantly we had to let Professor Mary Grey retire, after having continued to inspire and inform us since the beginning of the Project.

We are immensely grateful to our Patrons - Rt Hon Tom Brake MP, Rt Revd Christopher Chessun, Bishop of Southwark, Rt Revd Graham James, Bishop of Norwich, Very Revd Dr Andrew McLellan, Rt Revd Declan Lang, Bishop of Clifton, Baroness Morris of Bolton, and Dr Philippa Whitford MP -for their encouragement and wise advice; to the Steering Committee and to all the many people who have generously spoken at our conferences.

Now there is new energy, with new ideas, in the Project.

We will hold a seminar on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2018 in collaboration with Kings College, London University around the anniversary of the creation of Israel and the Nakba, with a focus on Britain's responsibility. This will be a further opportunity for the public to learn about Britain's activities in Palestine during the First World War and throughout the Mandate, and to acknowledge the suffering that followed.

We believe the Balfour Project has offered an approach which can help resolve a conflict for which we as a nation bear much responsibility. Honest acknowledgement with integrity could bring healing to division and conflict, not only in Palestine, but also in other places where suffering has been caused by Britain's involvement.

We accept this is a huge, long-term challenge, to which we continue to be committed.

Monica Spooner, Chair of Trustees until May 2018

8<sup>th</sup> August 2018