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Chairman  
Niwano Peace Foundation

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Rabbis for Human Rights

**Summary of the Activity Report (Fiscal Year Nov 1 2016 – Oct 31 2017)**  
**Olive Trees: Symbols of Peace: Bringing Israelis and Palestinians Together to Promote Tolerance & Defend Human Rights**

**1 . Brief introduction of the organization, and general contents of the granted project.**

Founded in 1988, Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR) is the only rabbinic organization in the region explicitly dedicated to human rights in Israel and occupied territories. Representing over 140 Israeli rabbis and rabbinical students from different streams of Judaism, the work of Rabbis for Human Rights expresses the view that all human beings are created in the image of G-d and that as Jews we are obliged to protest against injustices committed against others. With one foot in the grassroots and the other in the corridors of power, we believe that it is our Jewish obligation to inform the Israeli and Jewish public about human rights violations, and that it is our role to pressure the State institutions to fix these injustices. In a time in which a nationalist and isolationist understanding of Jewish tradition is heard frequently and loudly, Rabbis for Human Rights give expression to the traditional Jewish responsibility for the safety and welfare of the stranger, the different and the weak, the convert, the widow and the orphan.

This project takes place in dozens of villages in the West Bank where Palestinian farmers and landowners have difficulty entering their private agricultural lands and securing their right to work and earn a livelihood. This is because of both unfair restrictions placed on them by the Israeli military, as well as violence and intimidation tactics used by extremist Jewish settlers. Many Palestinian farmers have had their agriculture destroyed by local Jewish extremists from neighboring settlements or illegal outposts. Unfortunately, assaults are not uncommon either. Many Palestinian farmers are therefore afraid to enter their own farmland in areas known for being frequented by violent settlers.

Each year Rabbis for Human Rights staff bring hundreds of Israeli and international volunteers into the field during harvest season from September to November and planting season from January to February to work the lands alongside Palestinian farmers in the spirit of solidarity and partnership. The presence of our staff and volunteers has the very real effect of acting as a deterrent for trouble, inhibiting extremist settlers and making the army more likely to cooperate and abide by Israeli law. By joining Palestinian farmers in their fields and helping them harvest their olives, we not only sow seeds of friendship and peace, but enable the farmers to complete their work safely and less burdened by fear.

**2. Message to society through your achievements and future tasks.**

This project sends a powerful message about the power of solidarity, human compassion and commitment to justice to overcome even the strongest and deepest conflicts. As soon as we open our hearts and are willing to see one another as other human beings deserving of love, compassion and equal rights, all the barriers that uphold injustice and prevent real peace begin to break down. This work enables peoples of all faiths and backgrounds (internationals, Israelis and Palestinians) to meet and work together on agricultural projects where religious faith and/or a commitment to humanistic values manifests its potential for creating peace, understanding, and real acts of human rights defense. In this project, an act so simple as picking an olive becomes a challenge to the current reality on the ground where farmers are unjustly prevented from earning a livelihood. This act is a reminder that peace-making begins with the people, and that by working together under a shared commitment to human dignity we can make a very real and practical difference in the lives of many.

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