Executive Summary

Over two decades, ICAN McGill (formerly The McGill Middle East Program in Civil Society and Peace Building) has built a successful network of nine academic and civil society partners, eleven front-line rights-based community action centres and hundreds of committed professionals and volunteers who advance the Canadian values of democracy, human rights, women’s rights and pluralism while alleviating economic inequality and building resilience among the most disenfranchised and marginalized citizens of the Middle East.

From its academically-linked, professionally managed and volunteer-driven storefront rights-based community practice social work centres in Israel, Palestine and Jordan, ICAN assists more than 120,000 persons a year through a combination of social work, legal aid and community engagement with programs that empower women, girls, youth and involve all poor population groups in processes that improve their lives and mobilize communities to work together to encourage good governance, affect policy and provide support systems that governments are not able to sustain. The centres encourage democracy, combat violence against women, promote food security through community cooperatives, increase access to the rule of law through legal clinics and protect the rights of the elderly and the disabled to live in dignity.

Amid political paralysis and protracted conflict, ICAN provides practical, pragmatic assistance to the human beings most adversely affected by war, displacement, poverty and victimization by empowering them to meet their needs and conquer hopelessness. Through a management structure that includes Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian, Canadian and now Syrian academics and practitioners, the regional culture ICAN has created is premised on the central idea that all people share the same universal rights. These centres operate in some of the poorest neighbourhoods of East and West Jerusalem, Qfar Aqab, Nablus, Beer Sheva, Lod, Sderot, Ofakim and Amman.

ICAN’s core activities focus on population groups routinely excluded from the mainstream of social and economic life—women, girls youth, the poor, the disabled and the elderly. ICAN creates partnerships between these groups, academic institutions, and professionals that promote access, inclusion, and participation. Program activity fosters structured dialogue between civil society and government in each country, mobilizes support for action against poverty and promotes inclusive and empowered societies, linking development and peace building.
The professional capacity to develop and manage these centres is built through the ICAN International Master in Social Work Fellowship program at McGill University. Some 60 fellows, recruited from among individuals in the forefront of civil society and peace building in Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Israel, have graduated this two year MSW. ICAN fellows spend their first year together in Canada in a leading-edge interdisciplinary program that focuses on theory and rights-based community practice as well as in internships in leading Canadian non-governmental organizations that are highly regarded for their work in promoting the rights of the disadvantaged. The Middle Eastern fellows seize the opportunity to forge strategic alliances to promote a regional rights-based culture of civil society, working together across borders. Alumni have gone on to open and operate the ICAN centres, to lead cutting-edge NGOs and government ministries and to launch innovative programs developed through their experience in Canada.

The program’s landmark cross-border cooperation among Israel, Palestine and Jordan, over the course of many years, stands alone in an area defined by conflict and violence. Over the past two decades, ICAN has established an effective network of McGill-trained local professionals who work together despite religious, national and cultural differences to address social, economic, legal and conflict-driven problems. Professional development, program innovation, volunteer training, and joint research are but a few of the many ways in which the ICAN network has advanced a regional rights-based culture on the ground.

A seven-year evaluative study commissioned by CIDA concluded as follows: “Excellent results were achieved in all outcome areas despite the security, political and economic instability experienced by project partners.”

**A Canadian Signature Program Emphasizing a Regional Approach**

Since its inception, ICAN McGill has been premised on the interrelationship of advancing civil society and promoting social justice within countries as a necessary component of advancing peace. The ultimate goal is coexistence based on respect for the universality of rights and nurtured by relationships that are reciprocal and inclusive.

Regional partners have identified the strategic importance of Canada’s leadership as a guiding force to the program’s success. The Government of Canada combines honest political neutrality with a proven Canadian model of practice in a sensitive environment. Today, more than ever, Canadian leadership is vital and instrumental to ICAN’s success.
ICAN makes a meaningful difference in the lives of people in the Middle East in a manner that advances the government of Canada’s priorities, including: the advancement of core Canadian values of respect for universal human rights, women’s rights, inclusion, transparency, and democracy and empowering marginalized communities to access and promote their economic and social rights. From helping women access their property rights in Israel to easing tensions between local residents and Syrian refugees in Jordan to providing psychosocial support and tutoring to children in the Palestinian Territories, ICAN leverages universal human values to solve problems, improve quality of life and foster peaceful coexistence at the grassroots level in one of the world's most perilous regions.

**Current Context**

As **Palestine** struggles to emerge into statehood, it faces considerable challenges. Promoting a healthy civil society where citizens obtain entitlements, access rights and participate fully in self-government is a necessary component of building a stable, democratic society. Social work education is central to this endeavor as are a network of community driven rights-based practice centers to train students, harness the potential of volunteers and empower citizens. As our partnership with An-Najah National University and our rights-based practice centres in East Jerusalem and Nablus have demonstrated, it is crucial to advance an inclusive, human rights-based approach as Palestinians move forward.

This model, which mobilizes university expertise and local professionals and volunteers to empower the disadvantaged, has shown that moving beyond religious and political differences to forge a common purpose is possible. Particularly in Jerusalem, accessing legal rights is prohibitively difficult for Palestinians. There is an urgency to inform and involve citizens, to empower them to access entitlements and be heard.

ICAN proposes to develop an internationally accredited Palestinian school of social work. This institution will extend its existing network of rights-based practice teaching centers to Bethlehem, Jenin, Tul Karem, and Hebron. Two additional centers in Jerusalem neighborhoods will be established to respond to the unique and pressing needs of Arab residents in annexed parts of Jerusalem. Altogether, the Palestinian program will engage 10 000 volunteers in community building programs with direction provided by ICAN graduates.

**Jordan** continues to cope with rising rates of poverty and the new burden of crisis proportions of approximately one million Syrian refugees added to the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees.
ICAN McGill and the Ministry of Planning in Jordan have agreed to work together to promote the inclusion of Syrians in Jordanian economic, social and community life. ICAN’s Jordan initiative will promote community integration through the establishment of a mobile rights center. This center will be staffed by ICAN-trained Jordanian and Syrian graduates. As well, a new rights-based center will be established in the Al Zaatari refugee camp, followed by the development of a full array of services implemented at the Waq3 centre, located in a neighborhood densely populated by Syrian refugees and low-income Jordanians. The Jordanian initiative will have a particular focus on women. A highly successful model of economic empowerment will be adapted to Jordan by the Bedouin women’s collective in Israel.

In light of the massive destruction inside Syria and the repression of democratic civil society institutions, it is urgent to think beyond the ongoing crisis and to plan for a post-conflict Syria with leading-edge academic institutions partnering with civil society organizations to address the enormous scope of need, to build stable institutions, and to train future generations of Syrian professionals dedicated to the democratic rebuilding of their country. As ICAN has proven elsewhere in the region, social work can be an essential vehicle for this transformation.

Social work is a critical component of democratic and civil society. It builds cohesion among citizens and between them and their elected officials and policy makers. Social work will become an indispensable component of rebuilding Syrian society post-Assad and in laying the groundwork for democratic civil society. There is currently no profession of social work in Syria. This proposal seeks to establish the profession by providing graduate education to Syrian nationals who have demonstrated a high level of commitment to the advancement of civil society and democracy in Syria through peaceful means.

In Israel, ICAN launched the first rights-based community practice centre in its network in 1993; pioneering the rights-based approach in the region and helping to move rights away from the realm of religious groups and partisan politics. It has played a pioneering role in innovating new services, influencing government policy and developing the voluntary capacity of low-income residents. Notwithstanding, Israeli citizens have also experienced a reduction in the quality of the education system, increased poverty, internal divisions and hardship. The gap between rich and poor in Israel is the largest among all OECD countries.

ICAN’s approach has taken hold in Israel. It has been adopted by numerous organizations in a diversity of fields. The Jerusalem municipality has now absorbed ICAN activities as part of its social welfare offices mandate. Given these positive developments, ICAN will focus its efforts on the periphery and minority communities. Communities along the south-western border with
Gaza and Egypt have high levels of unemployment and poverty, are victims of violence, and often feel abandoned by state institutions. This is particularly true for the towns of Sderot, Ofakim and Netivot where Sapir Academic College has launched rights-based centers. By doing so, Sapir College has established a model of academic-community partnerships that reach the most isolated and marginal communities. ICAN will assist Sapir College to develop and expand these efforts.

Sapir College will assist ICAN in identifying an academic partner in the peripheral northern communities to establish a similar network. Particular attention will be directed toward the Arab minority in Israel. Sapir College has implemented specific programs to further Bedouin education. Two of the new centers will be based in Arab communities, and a third in the impoverished mixed Arab-Jewish city of Lod.

**ICAN Five-Year Program Goals: 2017 – 2022**

1. To assist the Jordanian government in realizing its Syrian response plan to integrate Syrian refugees into Jordanian economic, social and institutional life through the establishment of mobile and neighbourhood rights-based practice centres in refugee camps and the urban core.
2. To establish the first national, Internationally accredited academic program in social work at An-Najah National University in Nablus with an expanded, national network of rights-based community practice centres.
3. To develop a school of social work and introduce the profession of social work in post-conflict Syria.
4. To expand the Sapir College network of centres in Israel’s peripheral communities.
5. To expand and strengthen the regional ICAN network to advance a shared regional agenda and approach.

**Expected Results**

a. Faculty for Syrian school of social work recruited, trained, and teaching in Jordan.
b. An-Najah National Palestinian School of Social work in operation.
c. 15 new community rights-based practice centres established in Palestine, Israel, and Jordan.
d. Country-wide and regional network expanded and sustained.
e. 1 000 000 residents served.
f. 10 000 volunteers in the field.
g. 44 fellows graduate and assume leadership positions within their home communities.
## Budget Summary

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