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EcoPeace Intern Reflection 2019

Interning at EcoPeace Middle East allowed me to gain a better understanding of Jordan's environmental issues, economic diversity and regional status, making it a central aspect of my study abroad experience. I researched EcoPeace before I came to Jordan and was intrigued by the joint approach of Top Down policy making and Bottom Up constituency building, as I had studied NGOs and the way management styles contribute to their efficacy. Thus, the opportunity to intern for EcoPeace allowed me to see how these approaches are implemented and better understand the work being done. However, the biggest draw of EcoPeace was its focus on environmental peacebuilding. I study Global Water Security and am interested in finding solutions to water scarcity conflicts that will or are arising from climate change, so finding an organization that worked to promote cooperation over shared water resources between historically hostile nations was exciting. As a result, I expected to better understand the peace process and the history of environmentalism and environmental exploitation in the region, and I definitely learned about these issues and much more.

An important lesson I learned at EcoPeace was how interconnected politics and the environment are. I study this in California, which is known for taking and controlling more water than naturally flows through the state, but water allocation in this region has many more layers. So much of current water issues stem from historic water distribution and territorial decisions, adding complex politics to an already dire issue. This means that climate change is making water scarcity worse, but water conflict has existed since water was unequally allocated between the three countries. Therefore, this region and others with similar water situations, are and will be

affected the most by climate change, making cooperation between neighbors and governments vital.

Realizing the complex nature of water rights also made me understand the importance of both policy making and local engagement, since policies and government cooperation are heavily based on political will, which depends on the current political climate. At the time of my internship, there were increased tensions between Jordan and Israel and Palestine and Israel, which highlighted for me how political the issue of water rights is. EcoPeace's policies were waiting for government approval to proceed but under these tensions approval and agreement was unlikely to occur. As I heard about these unfortunate realities in the office, I had the opportunity to go to the Eco Park where I saw an example of constituency building. Seeing the grey water system training allowed me to understand the importance of bottom up work. When the three governments are unwilling to cooperate, EcoPeace can continue to work with local communities to improve their lives and that of the environment. In this way I saw how small efforts can slowly lead to bigger changes, which helped lessen my frustration towards the lack of political action.

Interning at EcoPeace showed me that transboundary water conflicts and national security concerns are not problems to be studied as climate change exacerbates issues, but rather problems that must be dealt with now. As I talked to people and saw more of Jordan, water scarcity was no longer a definition in a textbook but a problem people throughout Jordan experienced daily. Additionally, while I did not get to travel to the Ramallah and Tel Aviv offices, I tried to understand the extent of water scarcity and environmental degradation in these countries and current responses or inaction from the regional and international community towards these issues.

The perseverance and determination of all the EcoPeace employees has inspired me to learn as much as I can about the work EcoPeace does and how foreigners can contribute to these goals, demonstrating how a regional conflict is deeply rooted and reliant on global activities. I greatly admire the work of the EcoPeace staff I spoke with and thank them for their hospitality and eagerness to help me learn. I am excited to hear about future EcoPeace projects and will strive to further the goal of environmental peace building in my studies and career.