

# Avi Schaefer Peace Innovation Prize winning entry at Harvard

Posted on [April 22, 2012](#)

Posted by Avi Peace Prize Winner Joel Braunold

I am really proud to have won The Avi Schaefer Peace Innovation Competition at Harvard – Received Prize from Ambassador Dennis Ross who went on to quote my plan numerous times in his [Forum speech](#).

The prompt for the competition was:

If you had unlimited resources, how would you bridge the gap between Israeli and Palestinian societies? (500 Words)

My winning entry was:

The biggest block to any progress towards peace between Israelis and Palestinians is a systemic lack of trust. The Palestinians are looking for tangible land and they get good intentions instead, the Israelis are looking for an intangible concept of peace, and they do not get the rhetoric that they want from the Palestinians.

This deficit of trust will not be met by just getting to know more on the other side. Rather what needs to happen is each side needs to unilaterally take steps that are in their own self-interest that further the chances of a Two State Solution rather than lessens them.

For Israel they need to start building in the north and south of the country empty villages, complete with schools, to transplant settler communities into. Every political party in Israel accepts that at least 30,000 people are going to have to move, and the settler community fears that they will have nowhere to go, like what happened to those from Gush Katif.

With the current housing shortage, just giving cash to settlers will upset the economic balance and further strain the housing market. Instead these empty communities need to be built. They also need to be connected to the train system in Israel to allow people to continue to commute to the economic centers.

By doing this Israel achieves 5 key things. 1) They demonstrate their commitment to life after the occupation, building the necessary infrastructure. 2) They show that they care about the people that they are exporting. 3) They lengthen Israel's strategic corridor away from just the coastal region through linking the rail network allowing more of their citizens to live elsewhere and still commute. 4) They can rebalance the demographic worries in the North and South without any talk of transfer of Arab citizenship. 5) They can afford this through usage of the Tamers gas field off the cost of Haifa as a major infrastructural investment.

On the Palestinian end, a continuation of building the Palestinian state needs to continue. This infrastructural growth needs to happen alongside political momentum that will be generated by the building of these towns within Green Line Israel. In this way Palestinians will be able to focus on building their state with the knowledge that the land they claim will be under their control. Build Palestine will be the national call.

Both of these steps can happen independent of each other, one hopes that they would happen simultaneously and go some of the way to fill the trust deficit that makes any progress within the peace process impossible.