

## Building Bridges using the Universal Language of Science

Omar S. Harb<sup>1</sup> and Lilach Sheiner<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Biology, University of Pennsylvania USA

<sup>2</sup> Wellcome Centre for Integrative Parasitology, University of Glasgow, UK

Sadly, human history is marred with conflict. Indeed, most manuscripts punctuate their retelling of a history with battles, wars and human strife. The Middle East and Africa have not been spared from this and in recent history exemplify the long-term consequences of colonialism. While people engage in conflict and the ensuing cultural, political, and national separatism, pathogens do not. In addition, social and physical borders may inhibit cross-cultural interactions but do not prevent the spread of disease. Many of the diseases endemic to this area of the world are parasitic in nature resulting in devastating illnesses such as Malaria, Leishmaniasis and Schistosomiasis. To effectively combat these diseases, and to maximize the existing knowledge of parasite biology, there is a need to establish effective lines of scientific communication that is divorced from the political infrastructure. Established in 2016, The Middle East Biology of Parasitism (MeBoP) course was conceived of as a venue where young scientists from across the region can interact with each other while also being exposed to cutting edge knowledge and skills. The course runs over a two-week period during which participants attend morning lecture by eminent parasitologists, engage in laboratory practical experience in the afternoons and get to spend social time together in the evenings. MeBoP has two main objectives:

- To provide high-caliber scientific training covering various aspects of parasitology research from molecular biology to epidemiology to genomics to drug discovery. We believe that it is critical that scientific skills that are well established elsewhere in the world are disseminated to parasite disease-endemic areas where they can be put into practice to solve local issues. We found that the Middle East is a severely underserved region for training courses of this caliber.
- To provide an environment where young scientists from conflicted political areas are given the opportunity to focus on their mutual professional interests and goals, and to promote networking and the building of professional collaborations across these areas.

This talk will describe the current status of MeBoP and future directions and goals.