

ABRAHAM PATH INITIATIVE
SPONSORED BY THE GLOBAL NEGOTIATION PROJECT
AT HARVARD LAW SCHOOL

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The Abraham Path Initiative Hopes to Unite Civilizations

Harvard University, one of the most highly respected universities in the world, is proposing a walking trail of 1,100 Km from Sanliurfa/Harran to Hebron/Al Khalil. The Abraham Path Initiative's goal is to encourage peace in a time of religious and cultural conflict in the Middle East. If the Abraham Path Initiative (API) is successful, Turkey could also benefit economically through increased tourism.

The Initiative is sponsored by Harvard University's Global Negotiation Project, which studies wars, cultural clashes and conflicts. The API is proposing a 1,100-Km walking trail starting in Sanliurfa, where many believe Abraham was born. It will then pass through Harran, where Abraham first heard the call from God to go forth on his pilgrimage, and will continue through Syria, Jordan and Israel. The Path will end at Hebron/Al Khalil, the site of Abraham's tomb.

William Ury directs the Global Negotiation Project at Harvard and the Abraham Path Initiative. He is also the author of "Getting to Yes," a book which has sold over 6 million copies worldwide, including Turkey. Ury pointed out the potential economic growth and tourism potential the Abraham Path could bring to the Middle East, considering the fact that 3 billion descendants of Abraham and are familiar with his story. Ury and a group of API delegates came to Sanliurfa in November of 2006 for an exploratory journey. He described the Abraham Path as the pearls in a necklace.

“The region has huge tourism potential and each point of the Path is like a pearl,” he said, adding that Sanliurfa is the place where civilization was born.

“Sanliurfa, which is a city known as Prophets’ City, has been a point of unity for ages,” Ury continued. “Pilgrimages have passed through Sanliurfa. People walking on the Abraham Path can see beautiful natural places, cultural heritage sites, and holy places along the route.”

The first walk down the Path is planned for 2007. Ury said that the aim of API is to inspire a tourism route following the footsteps of Abraham, and to increase respect and understanding between different religions. There is a negative energy in Middle East, he said. This Path will bring different cultures and religions together through faith tourism. Many people will walk a part or the whole route of the Abraham Path and even more than that will travel the Path in cars or buses.

Ury said the United Nations could potentially designate the Abraham Path as a World Heritage Site, but it is up to the individual nations to pursue that honor. He added that Turkey is a bridge between the West and the East.

“For that reason I want Turkey to play a leading role,” he said. Ury met with Ministers Abdüllatif Sener and Kürsad Tüzmen in Sanliurfa and said he will meet with Abdüllatif Sener again.

An example from Spain

Ury used an example from Spain in order to explain the importance of the Abraham Path Initiative. In 1970, only 50 people walked on the Camino de Compostela, a holy route from the small town of Santiago to South France, he said. But last year 200,000 people walked the Camino. Direct flights now run from New York

City to Santiago.

The Abraham Path Initiative has the potential to be even bigger than the Camino de Compostela because billions of people believe in Abraham. Additionally, non-believers, such as people from Asia, may also want to travel the Abraham Path.

Ury said the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation, as well as NGOs from the United States, Brazil, Turkey, Lebanon, and Syria, are funding the project. The Dalai Lama and former United States president Jimmy Carter are also supporters. The annual budget of API is currently \$300,000.

Ury recalled the words of poet Sinasi who said, “If you want to know somebody well, you should travel with him or her.”