The spacious auditorium of the University of Lausanne (Switzerland) played host to an international meeting of close to two-hundred scholars, writers, journalists and activists from Israel, Palestine and third countries whose common denominator was their conviction in one democratic and secular state in Israel and Palestine to be enjoyed by all occupants of various ethnic, religious and racial background.

This assemblage, which took place on 23-25 June 2004, brought together Israeli, Arab, Muslim and Christian intellectuals from many countries including such far away places like Australia, Canada, and South Africa, to explore a path of peace other than the two-state solution. It was the first international conference on “One Democratic State”, actually an old but little-known idea now re-emerging as a possible contemporary solution. It was previously promoted by prominent Jews (such as Judah Magnes, Martin Buber
and Meron Benvenisti), Palestinians (Naim Khader and Edward Said) and Arabs (Muammer Al-Kaddafi and Ghassan Tueni). It may also be found in various P.L.O. programs.

The general consensus at the Lausanne meeting was that the Partition of 1947, now in operation for 57 years, was not working. It failed, and failed totally and miserably. It brought alienation, violence, massacres, wars, terrorism, and mass migrations. All speakers assessed the past, based on the Partition idea, very critically. They agreed that democracy was the only way out of the present deadlock. They warned against undue emphasis on differences, save the inevitable objective ones such as religion, and accentuated that hopes of unity ought to be preserved and promoted.

Sami Aldeeb was the main initiator of the meeting. Awni Ahmed, the Conference spokesman, stated that this movement might lead, in some future date, to a new state for the Israelis and the Palestinians. Salah Salah described the source of the conflict as “Zionist colonialism” and urged for democratic dialogue between all groups with the purpose of mutually recognizing each other’s rights. Rania Madi emphasized that Partition brought denial of human rights, displacement and on-going bloodshed. Dan Burnstein stressed parallels between the white Americans and the ethnic minorities in the United States, on the one hand and the relationship between the Israelis and the Palestinians, on the other. Exposing the former as a pretense of “superior identity with an imagined privilege”, he shared the view that the latter would continue to suffer discrimination until the arrogant identification is eradicated. Israel Shamir denied the existence of a collective Jewish identity on the territory of what he termed as the “land of the native Palestinians”. Uri Davis warned against any approach of “collective guilt” which he attributed to be a racist posture. Drawing on the initiative of the “Cultural Coffee Shop” in Eastern Jerusalem, Rami Adwan proposed a “people-to-people program” for Arabs and Jews to be adopted as a way of “gradual education” for mutual tolerance and eventual full acceptance. Sammah Jabr dwelled on the need of ample time for the healing of wounds before cohabitation could be envisioned. Adli Da’ana reminded that the one state solution was still an “illusion” for the majority of the peoples involved. Abdel-Alim Mohammed Radwan drew attention to the “power of seemingly utopic visions” in the realization of some future goals. Ginette Hess Skandarani asked how
could we create a state of equality between the two main groups if one of them holds almost all and the other virtually none. Ghada Karmi concentrated mostly on the rights of the Palestinian refugees. Daniel McGowan drew attention to the fact that, while Yad Vashen enjoyed the fame of a worldwide famous museum of the Holocaust, the site of the Deir Yassin massacre, which is in close proximity to the museum, is disregarded for over half a century. Ragheb M. Budabbus summarized Muammar Al-Kaddafi’s recent book, entitled Isratin, several translations of which exist and which stands as the only booklet so far that treats the idea of one democratic state for Arabs and Jews. Mahmoud Musa recounted the history of peace in the conflict area. The author (Türkkaya Ataöv) of this short note on the Lausanne meeting made a statement (the full text of which is adjoined) reminding that the history of Palestine was full of periods of peaceful co-existence of various groups, including the long (1516-1917) Ottoman years and that mutual acceptance, thus, had a rich precedence.

Although Muammar Al-Kaddafi had suggested “Isratin” as a combination of “Israel” and “Filistin” for the name of an amalgamated state, the speakers deferred the question of such designation as a topic for future discussions. They also postponed detailed discussions on the form of one-state government. On the other hand, Ahmed Samih Abdel Raouf Abuali, who proposed a plan of action for the implementation of one democratic state, advocated a federal structure with a shared elected parliament, in addition to local houses of representatives for each group. His basic formula was “one person-one vote in one-state”.

The Lausanne meeting adopted a Declaration stating that this initiative aimed “to remedy the tragic consequences of the forced Partition of the territory in 1948 leading to dispossession, further occupation and chronic conflict beyond the region”. It also aimed “to change the political organization of the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, basing this on the full sovereignty and equality for all the inhabitants and also for the Palestinian refugees since 1948 and their heirs”. Recognizing the difficulties of implementing the one-state solution, the Declaration supported “all efforts to end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and to promote the one-state idea amongst the Israeli and the Palestinian communities”. The Lausanne meeting expects the international
community to assist in these efforts. The participants believe that the "One Democratic State" is the best vehicle for achieving full political, economic and security interests of all the inhabitants of the new envisioned state.