

INTERFAITH ENCOUNTER

Annual Report 2009



אגודת המפגש הבין דתי (ע"ה) **جمعية اللقاء بين الديانات**
INTERFAITH ENCOUNTER ASSOCIATION



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The Interfaith Encounter Association is dedicated to promoting peace in the Middle East through interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural study. We believe that, rather than being a cause of the problem, religion can and should be a source of the solution for conflicts that exist in the region and beyond.

ANNUAL REPORT 2009

Activity Report:

In 2009, our intra-Israel activities continued to expand and have a positive effect on the Holy Land. This past year our ability to reach and transform the lives of children, adults, and communities increased, as our inter-religious encounters grew to 31. We had over 4,000 people who participated in these groups, many on a regular basis, both in Israel proper and the West Bank, discussing issues in respect to their religious beliefs and building inter-communal relations.

General Program

A highlight of 2009 occurred in June with the public launch, together with well-known religious leaders of the *God's Holy Mountain* project, which seeks to dispel the widespread view that the Temple Mount/Harm-esh-Sharif is an intractable source of conflict and replace it with a new, coexistence-based perspective. Furthermore, this year the "*First Annual Interfaith Tolerance Symposium*" organized by IEA, Mishkenot Shaananim, and the Jerusalem Foundation took place, bringing together religious leaders and interfaith activists and fostering many new important ideas about the use of interfaith dialogue as a vehicle for peace.



From the Executive Director:

In 2009 the Interfaith Encounter Association experienced greater growth and success. During this year our groups' activity increased with the introduction of three new groups and one other group that renewed its activity after nearly five years. We also developed additional innovative models for cross-cultural encounters. We continued as well to initiate partnerships across the Holy Land and the world.

During 2009, we successfully organized **160 programs** that included more than **4,000 participants**, from all social sectors. We established and maintained only the second group in the land that brings together, on a regular basis, settlers from Gush Etzion and Palestinians from the Hebron region. We re-launched in January 2009, despite the fighting that took place in Gaza at the time, our Galilee Women's Interfaith Encounter group. By the end of 2009 we had **31 on-going groups** across the country, most of them maintaining regular activities that significantly contribute to building real and sustainable coexistence.

In addition to these ongoing groups, we also managed to organize five Israeli-Palestinian interfaith encounter retreats – one of them leading to the formation of our 30th group: the Circle of Light and Hope, and another leading to the 31st group – in Gush Etzion. Additionally, in 2009 we organized two large events with highly distinguished speakers and hundreds of participants: the launch of our *God's Holy Mountain project* in June and *First Annual Interfaith Tolerance Symposium* – co-organized by the Interfaith Encounter Association, together with Mishkenot Shaananim and the Jerusalem Foundation – in September.

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Nine of the inter-religious encounters which took place in 2009 were organized by the *Karmiel—Majd elKrum* interfaith encounter group, which concentrated on bringing school children together from different communities who would otherwise have had no interaction with one another. Their activities included a joint choir both in Hebrew and in Arabic, having the students come together for family day at the Senior Citizens Home, celebrating an aspect of Hanukkah together, and visiting each other's local communities.

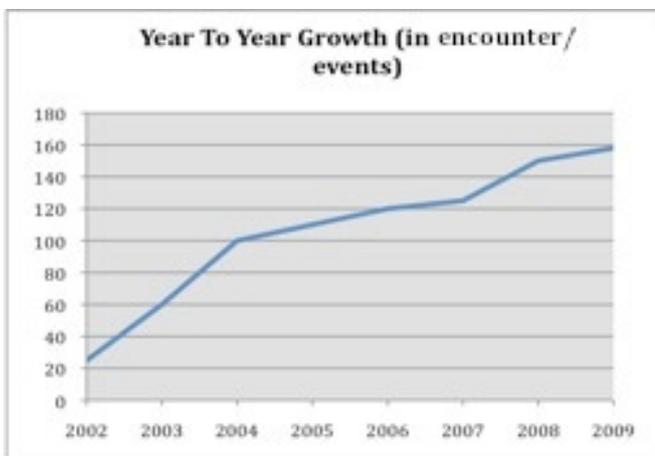
The *Reut Sadaqa* interfaith encounter group visited Yad Vashem together, which made for very a powerful experience for all those who participated. This visit was initiated by a Muslim and brought together Jews, Muslims, and Christians to a memorial for the Holocaust. It was a powerful manifestation of newly-developed bonds between the group's members.

Another group, the *Sawa Rabina* interfaith encounter group, organized an honorary evening for the forty-two retired teachers of their town M'ghar.

This past year another rewarding encounter group was the *Health Equality* interfaith encounter group for healthcare professionals. They held several meetings, which included "Meeting the Cultural Needs of Our Patients," and "Perceptions of Mental Illness and Suicides among Arab Moslems and Jews."

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Since 2002, IEA has gone from having 30 encounters a year to over 160 in 2009!



[Message from the Director, cont. from p.2](#)

The latter included the formation of a joint forum of religious leaders and interfaith practitioners, which we hope to continue to develop. Last but not least, in 2009 we invited Bar Ilan University as an outside, independent academic institution, to work with us in evaluating the effectiveness of our work. The encouraging results are also available in English.

Our programs are growing islands of respectful and friendly inter-communal relations between the various communities of the Holy Land, bringing together a very wide spectrum of participants, most of whom encounter 'the other' for the first time through our programs.

We now feel ready to shift IEA to the next gear and achieve a quantum leap in the process of becoming a significant social and civil movement for change in the pattern of inter-communal relations in the Holy Land. And we invite you to join the many individuals and institutions that partner with us to make this a reality. Together, we expect accelerated growth in the quantity and quality of our programs, and in the diversity of the processes we employ to create sustainable dialog and trust across religious and cultural boundaries.

Our U.S. based Friends of IEA, maintains its tax-exempt status under section 501(c)(3). Any donations sent to **Friends of Interfaith Encounter Association, 832 Lathrop Ave, Forest Park, IL 60130-2039**; or made online (<http://interfaithencounter.wordpress.com/donate/>) are fully tax deductible. We also plan to hold major fundraising events whenever possible. If you are willing to help you are welcome, with our gratitude, to contact the point person of this wonderful group, Bob Halim Johnson, at: halim@interfaith-encounter.org

You are welcome to maintain ongoing contact with us, as we continue these activities in the coming year. You will find our contact information on the end page. We look forward to your feedback and ideas.

Yours,

Yehuda Stolov, Ph.D.
Executive Director

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Also, this last year the *Mother's and Daughter's* encounter group had encouraging and provocative dialogues about the differences in each other's methods of prayer and other facets of one another's religious traditions. Similarly, the *Eilat* interfaith encounter group in 2009 spent a great amount of time discussing Christianity, Druze, Judaism, and Islam in which they focused on fasting, the Torah, and holidays.

The *Arabic and Speaking* group devoted several of its encounters this year on the role of parents, educators, and administrators as well as focusing on the violence committed against children, both in the home and at school.

Furthermore, dozens of other encounters took place this year. Multiple encounters were held in M'ghar, Tel Aviv, and other locations across Israel where conversations took place about the vast array of faiths found in this small region of the world.

Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue

During 2009, the IEA held five Israeli-Palestinian retreats and four on-going groups. At all retreats and group encounters, different stories from the Quran and the Torah were shared which as a result spurred constructive dialogue about these two spiritual texts. *ADAMA* group, which brings together Settlers from Ma'aleh Adumim and neighboring Abu Dis' residents, continued to surpass any expectations, as this group focused on tolerance and respect this year.

After a year of planning, the Gush Etzion interfaith encounter group had its first meeting and brought together 18 Palestinians and Settlers. This encounter was a huge success and paved the way for future encounters of the same nature.

On April 30-31, the Interfaith Encounter Association in conjunction with the Hope Flowers School held IEA's 24th Israeli-Palestinian retreat of interfaith encounter. The topic was prayer in religion and it was one that allowed for flourishing conversation between the three religions present at the retreat. The IEA's 25th retreat took place on July 16-17 in the Austrian Hospice and the topic was Abraham. IEA's 26th Israeli-Palestinian retreat opened on Thursday, August 13 and discussed way in which Moses was significant for them and their religion. IEA's 27th retreat allowed for those involved to share their life story and elements of the story of Joseph that inspire or move them. The 28th Israeli-Palestinian IEA retreat was dedicated to *The Circle of Life and Hope* encounter group and held at the Austrian Hospice.



Support

The IEA would not have been able to achieve such progress in 2009 were it not for the generous financial support and gifts-in-kind of many friends around the world. We are deeply grateful to those friends for their contributions, no matter how large or small.

In particular we wish to thank:

Our Donors (\$500+):

- David Scheim
- Anna Lindh Foundation
- St. Nicolas Foundation
- Government of Canada's "Networking for Peace"
- The Joseph and Harvey Meyerhoff Family Charitable Funds
- Protestant Church of the Netherlands
- Church of Sweden
- US Embassy to Israel
- Middle East Peace Dialogue Network
- Lester and Edna Shapiro Family foundation
- Ben Keene

Our Sponsors (\$150 - \$499):

- Rabbi Bruce D. Aft
- Mary-Hannah Klonz
- Shoshana Shamberg
- Japke van Malde
- Joe Perlow
- Andrew J. Horning

Gifts-in-Kind:

- The Swedish Theological Institute
- The Austrian Hospice
- Bob Halim Johnson
- Dom Bellino

Every bit counts!

\$30 – covers printing & communication costs for one encounter

\$100 – pays for transportation for Palestinian youth to come to Israel for an encounter session

\$250 – allows us to retain trained coordinators for one encounter session

\$500 – covers all the costs for one Palestinian and Israeli Youth Encounter

\$1,000 – pays for one conference

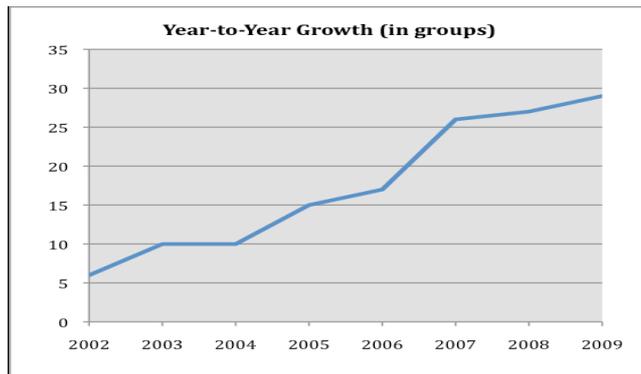
\$5,000 – can sustain one dialogue group for the year

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Women's Interfaith Encounter (WIE)

Women's Interfaith Encounters occurred all over Israel this past year as well. In Jerusalem, *WIE* had an interfaith cooking workshop, attended museums together, and discussed different aspects of their faiths with one another. On top of that, they attended the Jerusalem Cinematheque together where they watched short films about Palestinian and Israeli youth from Jerusalem. In Haifa, women met with an emphasis on recognizing the importance of listening as they discussed each the holidays and other dimensions of each other's religious beliefs with one another. Also, this year the *Galilee WIE* renewed their activity in spite of the fighting in Gaza. It turned out to be an incredible year for them, as they took a trip to Frankfurt in March together. Not only did they have a wonderful trip exploring the city, but they also deepened their friendships with one another.

In 2009, the IEA had over 31 groups!



THE SECRET OF OUR SUCCESS

Unlike most other dialogue organizations, we work with, rather than around, the deep cultural roots, beliefs, and traditions of the peoples of the Middle East. Each encounter is centered on a religious theme and features a carefully planned program of joint study and dialogue. The group then coalesces into a single community that respects the unique identity of each of its "sub-communities" and participants, which helps create a long-term process of grassroots peace-building. By constructively engaging core religious and cultural values, while initially discouraging political conversations that may close off constructive dialogue, our approach successfully involves social and political groups that may feel very uncomfortable with other approaches.

Youth Interfaith Encounter (YIE)

In 2009, the YIE organized interreligious meetings across Israel and discussed a range of topics. *A/Nahnu Youth* Interfaith encounter group spent time discussing marriage, sacrifice, and attended a two day retreat in the Old City where they discussed identity building in relation to one's values. The *Jerusalem Hebron Youth* group met several times discussing such themes as personalities in the Bible and Kuran, Jesus in Islam and Judaism, as well as Hanukkah. Other YIE groups met at Mt. Scopus (Hebrew University Campus) in order to watch the film "The Destiny" by Egyptian director Yusef Shaheen as well as at the Swedish Theological Institute to discuss different aspects of the Torah and Quran.

IEA International Advisory Council (In Formation)

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Rabbi Dr. Tsvi Blanchard	Fr. Prof. John Pawlikowski
Rabbi Dr. Alan Brill	Rev. Dr. Donald Shriver
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 Rabbi Bob Carroll, Director of Development



*Above all, it was a very significant reminder
of the plain fact that we are all individuals, with
similar hopes, dreams and concerns.*

-Anonymous participant at an IEA encounter

CONTACT US

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