



## A Letter from the Executive Director

When I come to summarize the year 2004 I look back with a lot of satisfaction on the achievements of the Interfaith Encounter Association in programs and outreach, and forward with a lot of concern on the fragility of our financial basis and a lot of hope that we will be able to gather the needed help in order to make it stable and sustainable.

During 2004, we managed to organize more than 100 programs that included nearly 3,000 participants, to establish and maintain 10 on-going groups across Israel with some 700 members of all ages, between 6 and 86: general groups in Jerusalem, in the Galilee, in the Center area and in Eilat; groups of Women's Interfaith Encounter in Jerusalem and the Galilee; Youth Interfaith Encounter groups in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv; to organize a 6 Israeli-Palestinian interfaith retreats with more than 300 participants, to organize a Middle Eastern conference in Amman and an international interfaith conference in Jerusalem (in cooperation with the Council for a Parliament of the World Religions).

Looking ahead to 2005, we are now working on a series of weekend retreats, designed to create more on-going

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## Programmatic Report

### General Program:

#### Inner-Israeli & Israeli-Palestinian Circles

Operating in both the Inner-Israeli as well as Israeli-Palestinian circles and accessible to all segments of society, the general program achieved enormous growth in 2004: 42 inter-religious study sessions, 6 Israeli-Palestinian conferences, 1 international conference and 1 training for activists.

#### Inner-Israeli Activities

Eleven of the inter-religious study sessions were organized by the continued work of the ongoing group in Jerusalem called Reut-Sadaqa-Friendship and focused on such themes as: peace, mysticism, Abraham, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Ten more sessions were organized by the Karmiel-Majd el-Krum Interfaith Encounter group in the Galilee. Centered around the two main schools, this group brings together the two neighboring towns, who otherwise have hardly any interaction between them, on many levels: educators, children and parents.

## The IEA, in conjunction with the Nablus Youth Federation, organized six more Israeli-Palestinian interfaith retreats in 2004.

A newly established group in the far-south city of Eilat held ten encounters during 2004, on themes such as: Pesach / Easter, mourning, marriage, birth and growth and daily prayers.

Other encounters took place in Natania and Qalansawa, growing out of the "Extremism and Tolerance" conference in Natania in 2003; within the framework of the new group in Kfar Kasem-Petach Tikva and in the city of Um el-Fahim. We also held a special meeting with Rabbi Shear-Yashuv Cohen, Chief Rabbi of Haifa and Head of the Chief Rabbinate committee for interfaith dialogue, about the Jewish approach to interfaith encounters.

#### Israeli-Palestinian Activities

The IEA in conjunction with the Nablus Youth Federation managed to organize six more Israeli-Palestinian retreats of interfaith encounter in 2004, continuing the momentum established during

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interfaith encounter groups in Israel, on other series of Israeli-Palestinian interfaith weekend retreats, with our 7 Palestinian partners, and are in different stages of establishment of 8 new on-going groups, including a group focused on low income neighborhoods and an environmental students group. All our programs are growing islands of respectful and friendly inter-communal relations between the various communities of the Holy Land and we expect to continue and even increase the growth in quantity and quality, in outreach and in diversity, of our process of sustainable human development in the Holy Land.

On the financial side we are more concerned as the generous grant from the European Union, that significantly helped support the core expenses of the office for the last three years, is coming to an end in February 2005. This fact confronts us with the urgent need to secure sustainable financial basis for the Interfaith Encounter Association that will provide at least \$70,000 annually and will support the running of the office and allow us to give seed money to new IEA projects. For that purpose we are currently working with a devoted group in the United States on the development of a US based Friends of IEA. It is already incorporated and is now working on its 501(c)(3) status and we plan to hold some major fundraising events during 2005. If you are willing to help you are welcome, with our gratitude, to contact the point person of this wonderful group Kathy Goetz Wolf, at: [kgwolf@lariatsolutions.net](mailto:kgwolf@lariatsolutions.net)

In parallel we were also very active in writing grant requests to different foundations and put much hope on our new request from the European Union, as our record with them is excellent, being the only organization from our cycle that succeeded to actually bring together Israelis and Palestinians in the Holy Land, the only one who had such a wide outreach and the one that managed to realize 13 retreats in a 12 retreat project.

You are welcome to maintain on-going contact with us as we continue these activities in the coming year. You will find our contact information on page 4.

Yours,



Yehuda Stolov, Ph.D., Executive Director

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the six previous retreats. All twelve retreats were made possible through the generous funding of the European Union, UNESCO and the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv. The 2004 retreats focused on the themes “Money: Commerce and Charity,” “Monotheism,” “Moses and Muhammad,” “Prayers” and “Love your neighbor as yourself” respectively. One of the retreats was dedicated to

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young adults who dealt together with the theme “Young adults and religion.” Each retreat demonstrated how easy it is for Israelis and Palestinians, from a wide variety of walks of life and of religious and political convictions, to connect together, overcome prejudices and develop trust and friendship. It looks so natural when the IEA and the Nablus Youth Federation get together that it is easy to forget how unique such encounters really are.

#### **Middle East Region Activities**

Under the auspices of the Middle East and North Africa region of the United Religions Initiative (URI) and together with its colleagues in Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, the IEA organized a Middle East Conference in Amman in September on the theme of “Revelation,” with some 40 participants—Jews, Muslims, Christians and Druze—coming from 6 Middle East countries—Egypt, Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Tunisia



and Turkey—and with good will of our colleagues in Iran, who were unable to secure visas on time. The first part of the conference was dedicated to four sessions, each focusing on the different aspects of the theme from the different religious viewpoints, starting with a short presentation of the basics of that Jewish/Muslim/Druze/Christian approach, followed by a longer conversation in the discussion groups about those basics and the way they are understood and practiced. In the evenings we had more relaxed social interaction among participants through presentation of a variety of filmed documents that several participants brought about their interfaith work and joint dinner outside in a nearby restaurant where we enjoyed the house music as well as danced and sang together. The afternoon of the third day was devoted to regional planning for the future, resulting in reaffirming the projects that were proposed last year and hoping that with the coming finalization of the official registration of the regional URI office in Amman, the office will be able to start being

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## Support

The IEA would not have been able to continue to achieve such progress in 2004 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 support, no matter how large or small, and hope to continue to rely on it. It is this ongoing support which enables us to continue to build upon and expand our activities as we continue to work for peace, justice, and harmony in the Holy Land and the Middle East. We hope to be able to widen this circle of friends and supporters and thereby expand the scope and reach of our programs and efforts. Every single donation makes a difference and we wish to thank every single one of our friends and supporters—past, present and future—around the world.

In particular we wish to thank:

### Our Donors (\$500+)

- The European Union
- David E. Scheim
- Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions
- Global Ministries: Protestant Church in the Netherlands
- The Risho kosei-kai Fund for Peace
- Firedoll Foundation
- The United States Embassy in Israel
- Lester and Edna Shapiro Family Foundation
- Archdiocese of Milan
- Diane and Morton Goldin Foundation

- The United Religions Initiative
- Positive Community Spirit Trust—Jim Phillips
- Choromondo—Allyn Harris
- M. Haines
- Sara A. Gottesman
- Barbara J. Meislin
- Ben N. Teitel Charitable Trust—Gerald Cook Esq
- Spirit of the Desert—Ruach Hamidbar
- John Regier

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

- Harvard-Epworth United Methodist Church
- Jeffrey Slade and Ruth Diem
- Shoshana Grossbard
- North Shore Congregation Israel
- Cassandra M. Flipper
- Leslie Sacks
- Community of Christ—Ms. Dorothy Pohlman
- Germantown Jewish center
- The Shefa Fund
- Abraham Haya

### Gifts in Kind

- The Swedish Theological Institute
- Hillel at Tel Aviv University
- Dr. Jodi Prinzivalli
- Yemin Orde Community

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active in fundraising for the different projects and realizing them. We concluded the conference in a joint visit to the remarkable remains of the Roman city of Jarash.

**Women's Interfaith Encounter (WIE): Inner-Israeli Circle**

In 2004, the WIE organized 26 inter-religious programs in Jerusalem, 4 programs in Wadi Ara and 1 program in the Galilee. Themes ranged from "Experiences of Forgiveness" to "Personal Stories of Jerusalem Women" to "Religious Calendars" and included lighting of candles, joint meals and joint holiday celebrations.

**Youth Interfaith Encounter (YIE): Inner-Israeli Circle**

In 2004, the YIE held 14 interfaith encounters in the Jerusalem group and 5 encounters in the Tel-Aviv group, dealing with themes such as: religion and evolution theory, the status of women, divorce, the importance of law and commandments in religion versus spontaneous personal experience, equality and many more. Due to the dynamic and associative nature of young adults' discussions, the original topic invariably led to many others.

**The Power of Commitment International Conference**

In March we were privileged to host in Jerusalem a Pre-Parliament conference that we organized in cooperation with the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR), on the two topics of Overcoming Religious Violence and Creating Access to Clean Water, with 44 Israeli and 31 International participants—people of the Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Druze, Hindu, Buddhists and Sikh religions as well as people of no religion—representing a wide variety of perspectives on the respective topics. Many of them were religious resources—the Chief Rabbi of Haifa Rabbi Shear-Yashuv Cohen, the Papal Nuncio to Israel Monsignor Pietro Sambini, the General Secretary of the Sufi Council in the Holy Land Sheikh Abd-e-



Sallam Manasra, Swami Agnivesh; representatives of the Chief Rabbi, the Latin Patriarch and the Lutheran Bishop and many community leaders.

Other participants were interfaith activists, young adults, representatives of guiding institutions, experts on the respective topics and people affected by them. Participants connected and got to know one another. Then they gradually moved to deeper understanding of the issues as they shared personal experiences regarding the issues, identified contributions offered by their religious and spiritual traditions and created maps that presented the dynamics and complexity of the issues.

In the next phase they shifted their focus from the current reality to the desired reality: they learned from each other what works to make a positive change, shared their visions for a better future, developed strategies for taking these ideas home and engaging the networks and resources they already have in their communities in making a difference and finally took specific commitments for "simple and profound acts" on the issues when they go home.

**IEA Board**

- Mr. Shlomo Alon (Chair), Head of Supervision Department & Chief Supervisor of Arabic Language and Middle Eastern Studies, Ministry of Education
- Sr. Karmela Farrugia (Vice-Chair), General Secretary, U.S.R.T.S. Union of Religious Superiors in the Holy Land
- Sheikh Muhammad Kiwan (Vice-Chair), Imam of Majd El Krum
- Sheikh Ali Birani, Dalyat El Karmel
- Rabbi Dov Maimon, Researcher, Sorbon University
- Deacon Eng. Jirias Mansour, Rame
- Sheikh Tawfiq Salama, Secretary, Druze High Religious Council

**CONTACT US**

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