



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

2005 ANNUAL REPORT

A Letter from the Executive Director

Reflecting on this past year, I think the most striking fact is that, despite financial challenges, the Interfaith Encounter Association (IEA) continued to grow—launching new encounter groups, developing new group models, and building numerous partnerships with organizations in Israel, in the Palestinian Authority, in the Middle East and throughout the world. Still, the demanding efforts we invested in fundraising left much less time than we would have preferred for programmatic growth.

During 2005, we successfully organized more than **110 programs** that included nearly **3,000 participants**. We established and maintained five new ongoing groups across Israel with some 200 members of all ages—these groups were also novel in focus and participation:

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Activity Report:

Inner-Israeli Activities

During the year 2005, the inner-Israeli activities grew significantly, holding a total of 105 programs comprised of 77 inter-religious study sessions in the general program, 14 in the women's program, and 14 in the young adults program.

General Program

Nine of the inter-religious encounters were organized by an ongoing group in Jerusalem called Reut-Sadaqa-Friendship, which focuses on such themes as: "Welcoming 'the Other'," "Freedom," and "Our Neighbors' Bread and Mercy."

The IEA held more than 110 programs in 2005—developing 4 new group models, and launching 5 new encounter groups.

Twenty-three more encounters were organized by the Karmiel-Majd el-Krum Interfaith Encounter group in the Galilee. Centered around the two main schools, this group brings together educators, children and parents of the two neighboring towns, who otherwise have very little interaction.

The two new groups in M'ghar had seventeen encounters on themes such as: "Religious Ceremonies," "The Status of Women," "Prayer in Mecca During Hajj," and "Divorce in the Christian Community." This group is also very active in social activities in M'ghar.

A newly established group for challenged neighborhoods in East and West Jerusalem held ten encounters during 2005, on themes such as: "Human Dignity," "Adam and Eve," "Morality," and "Love Your

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- Responding to the violent clashes between Christians and Druze in the Galilee village of M'ghar, we established two groups in cooperation with the local community center. Both groups are unique in composition, and include Druze, Christians and Muslims.
- In Jerusalem, we started a group focused on low-income neighborhoods in the eastern and western parts of the city.
- We started an environmental students' group at the Mount Scopus campus.
- Finally, we started a group that convenes in Arabic and focuses on educational and linguistic issues.

In addition to these ongoing groups, we organized three Israeli-Palestinian interfaith programs with some 150 participants, a Middle Eastern conference in Amman, and a series of Friends of IEA encounters.

All our programs are growing islands of respectful and friendly inter-communal relations in the Holy Land. We expect a continued growth in the quantity and quality of our programs, and in the outreach and diversity of our process of sustainable human development in the Holy Land.

Our financial situation remains a pressing concern. Although our efforts succeeded in getting us through another year, we were unable to satisfy the IEA's urgent need for a sustainable yearly operational budget of \$70,000. This money is necessarily used to run the office and as seed money for new IEA projects. Towards this end, we continue to work with a devoted group in the United States on the development of a U.S. based Friends of IEA. It is already incorporated and awaiting its 501(c)(3) status. We also plan to hold major fundraising events during the spring of 2007. If you are willing to help you are welcome, with our gratitude, to contact the point person of this wonderful group, Kathy Goetz Wolf: kgwolf@lariatsolutions.net

In parallel, we were also very active in writing grant requests to different foundations. We now put much hope on our renewed proposal to the European Union as our record with them is excellent: we were the only organization from our cycle to actually succeed in bringing Israelis and Palestinians together in the Holy Land—realizing 13 retreats in a 12-retreat project.

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

Yours,

Yehuda Stolov, Ph.D.
Executive Director

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Neighbor.”

Other encounters took place in Natania-Qalansawa within the framework of the new Arabic-speaking group and in the older group in the southern city of Eilat. We also held a special encounter with all our Jerusalem groups on the International Day of Peace, and facilitated a program on human rights in war.

Women's Interfaith Encounter (WIE)

In 2005, the WIE organized 14 inter-religious programs in Jerusalem. Themes ranged from “Seasonal Holidays of the Three Religions” to “Religion and Modern Women” to “Water,” and included candle-lighting ceremonies, joint meals and holiday celebrations. It also held a pilgrimage to Holy Druze sights.

Each program demonstrated how easy it is for Israelis and Palestinians, from many walks of life and of different religious and political convictions, to connect together, overcome prejudices and develop trust and friendship.

Youth Interfaith Encounter (YIE)

In 2005, the YIE held six encounters in the Jerusalem group, four in the Tel-Aviv group and four in the Mount Scopus Students Environmental group. Encounters dealt with themes such as: "He and She Relations," "Home," "The Tree," and "The Sacrifice of Abraham's Son." The Jerusalem group also held a joint breaking of the fasts of Ramadan and Gedaliah. Due to the dynamic and associative nature of young adults' discussions, the original topic invariably led to many others.

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Israeli-Palestinian Activities

Three Israeli-Palestinian programs were held in 2005. The IEA, in conjunction with the Hope Flowers School, managed to organize two Israeli-Palestinian interfaith encounter retreats—continuing the momentum established during the previous 12 retreats. The 2005 retreats focused on the themes of “Peace” and “Creation.” In the opening to the “Peace” retreat, we discussed the significance of this word to the different traditions and its root, which means “whole,” wholeness being one of God’s attributes. The human has to learn how to contribute to the harmonic wholeness of the world and then people will also live in peace with each other.

We also organized a most unique joint prayer vigil, together with the Abu Sukkar Center for Peace and Dialogue. This vigil took place at Nebi-Samuel, the

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Support

The IEA would not have been able to achieve such progress in 2005 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. It is this ongoing support which enables us to build upon and expand our activities as we dedicate ourselves and our work to peace, justice, and harmony in the Holy Land and the Middle East. We hope to widen this circle of friends and supporters and thereby expand the scope and reach of our programs and efforts. Every 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+)

- European Union
- David Scheim
- Global Ministries
- International Relief Friendship Foundation
- US Embassy
- Diane & Morton Goldin Foundation
- Lester and Edna Shapiro Family foundation (Nathan Shapiro)
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Our Sponsors (\$150 - \$499)

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- Sr. Marie Pierre (Jacobson) & Sr. Michele Debrouwer
- Gina & Roger B. Myerson
- Oktar Babuna – Science and Research Foundation
- Adrian Dominican Sisters
- Bernice Weissbourd

Gifts-in-Kind

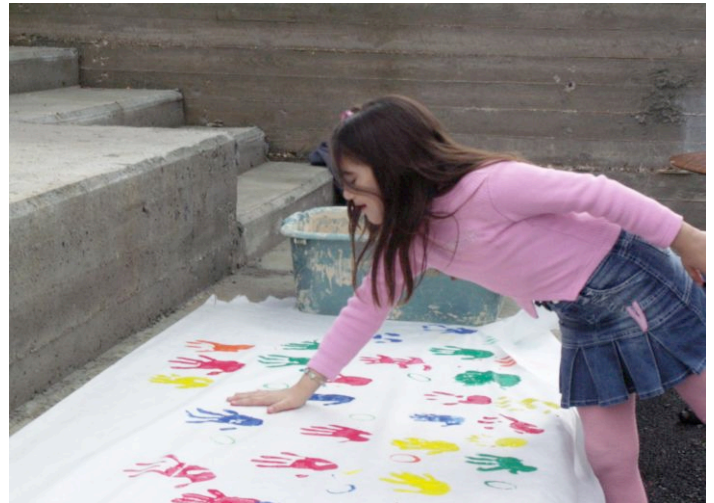
- The Swedish Theological Institute
- Hillel at Tel Aviv University
- Dr. Jodi Prinzivalli
- Kathy Goetz Wolf
- Yemin Orde Community

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tomb of Prophet Samuel, on top of which lies a synagogue and a mosque. The concurrent afternoon prayer of Jewish and Muslim participants, and the subsequent gathering in the entrance hall was uplifting and inspiring for all. Each program demonstrated how easy it is for Israelis and Palestinians, from many walks of life and of different religious and political convictions, to connect together, overcome prejudices and develop trust and friendship. It looks so natural when we 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 African districts of the United Religions Initiative (URI), and together with our colleagues in Egypt, Jordan, Iran and the Palestinian Authority, the IEA organized a Middle East Conference in Amman in September on the theme of "Charity." More than 50 participants — Jews, Muslims, Christians and Druze coming from eight Middle East countries (Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, Morocco and Tunisia) — attended the conference. The first part of the conference was divided into four sessions, each focusing on the different aspects of "charity" from the different religious viewpoints. Each session started with a short presentation on the basics of that group's (Jewish/Muslim/Druze/Christian) approach, followed by a longer conversation in discussion groups about the way the approach is understood and practiced. In the evenings we had more relaxed social interaction among participants, and the afternoon of the third day was devoted to regional planning for the future.



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