**From the Executive Director:**

2008 was another year of growth for IEA. This year we added two new groups to our roster while developing innovative models for cultural encounters. We re-launched three of our Youth Interfaith Encounter (YIE) groups that halted their activity in previous years. During this past year, we successfully organized 150 programs that included more than 4,000 participants that came from all walks of life. We established and maintained the only group that regularly brings together settlers from Maaleh Adumim and Palestinians from Abu Dis. The Haifa Women's Interfaith Encounter – who have followed our inspiration but acted independently for three years – joined IEA as its twenty-eighth group. We also had a pilot series called "Encounter with the Religions of Jerusalem", which concluded successfully. We are now exploring the possibility to replicate this program on a larger scale in cooperation with the City of Jerusalem. Altogether, we had 28 groups across the country, most of them maintaining regular activities that contribute to real and sustainable coexistence.

In addition to these ongoing groups, we also managed to organize two Israeli-Palestinian interfaith encounter retreats, a special training retreat for our coordinators and a gathering of all the Jerusalem groups for an Iftar dinner of Ramadan, also marking the International Day of Peace. Lastly, we joined the Al-Qasemi Academy as co-organizers for the Third Conference of the "Culture of Dialogue".

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.

**Activity Report:**

**Intra-Israeli Activities**

During the year 2008, our intra-Israel activities continued to have a positive impact on the Holy Land. We held a total of 137 programs comprised of 122 inter-religious study sessions in the general program, fifteen in the three Women’s Programs, and ten in the Young Adults programs.

**General Program**

Eight of the inter-religious encounters were organized by Jerusalem-based IEA Reut–Sadaga–Friendship group, which focused on themes such as “Joseph in Judaism, Christianity and Islam” and “Hannukah, Christmas and Eid al-Adha”.

The IEA held more than 150 programs in 2008—providing encounters to more than 4000 participants!
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Two very special moments of 2008 were: (1) when the IEA was one of the sixty projects indicated as one of "the entrepreneurial projects that will change the face of tomorrow" at the Israeli Presidential Conference (one of only eleven social projects and the only project of peaceful coexistence!) and (2) when our film "Interfaith Encounter in the Galilee" was awarded the Commendable Effort at the Second World Peace Film & Music Festival by the World Movement for Global Democracy.

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 both the quantity and quality of our programs. We are also looking to see a significant increase 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, 7 Lancaster Court, Ramsey, NJ 07446; or made online (see the top of www.interfaith-encounter.org/donations.htm) are fully tax deductible. We also plan to hold major fundraising events whenever possible. Any volunteers are gratefully welcome to contact our point person, Bob Halim Johnson, at: hermes4halim@yahoo.com

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

Yours,

Yehuda Stolov, Ph.D.
Executive Director

ACTIVITY REPORT, cont. from p. 1

Twenty-four more encounters were organized by the Karmiel–Majd el-Krum group in the Galilee. Centered on the two main schools, this group brings together educators, children and parents of the two neighboring towns who would otherwise have very little interaction. Some of their more recent activities include visiting the nearby Abu Baker Mosque, discussing the significance of Ramadan and Hanukah and a demonstration of the Qa’aba and Hajj. Several more inter-religious encounters were organized by IEA’s ongoing group in the southern city of Eilat. Of note is their two-session discussion of the meaning of Moses in the Jewish, Druze and Islamic traditions earlier in the year.

The Sawa Rabina group in M’ghar had over twenty encounters and events, where issues that are specific to the M’ghar community were addressed. The group also met to plan many activities for the whole community in M’ghar, which included making donations of flowers to the many diverse schools in the area and an art gallery opening.

Several of the groups that were created only last year maintained a strong presence throughout 2008. For example, The Future – Mothers and Daughters encounter group held five encounters, where discussions centered on themes such as Sukkot, Purim, Mothers Day and Family Day. This group also gave the opportunity for the girls to play together while the moms continued their discussions.

Dozens more encounters took place across the other groups: within the frameworks of the Arabic-speaking group, the Study and Dialogue group, and the Encounters with Religions of Jerusalem series and other groups. Similar to previous years, we also held a special encounter with many members that belong to several of our Jerusalem groups on the International Day of Peace (which also included a very delicious pot luck Iftar meal!) and a training for the groups’ coordinators.

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Women’s Interfaith Encounter (WIE)

In 2008, IEA’s women program organized inter-religious programs in Jerusalem and in M’ghar. Themes were very diverse and included Muslim weddings, Greek Orthodox Christmas and the Sabbath meal. We were also extremely pleased to welcome the Haifa Women’s Interfaith Encounter group this past year. Unlike other groups in the IEA, we did not create this group. Instead, this group of Jewish, Muslim and Christian women decided almost four years ago to meet on their own. It was not until 2008 that they decided to join our ever-expanding family.

Youth Interfaith Encounter (YIE)

In late 2008, the YIE was happy to see a revival in both the Tel Aviv University Youth and Jerusalem Youth groups. Themes included were “My Connection to my Creator” and “Jewish-Arab Relations”. The “Talking” Interfaith Encounter Group of Mt. Scopus continued to meet throughout 2008 as well.

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 with core religious and cultural values, while explicitly discouraging partisan bickering that might close off constructive dialogue, our approach successfully involves social and political groups that may feel very uncomfortable with other approaches.

Support

The IEA would not have been able to achieve such progress in 2008 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
- St. Nicolas Foundation
- The Joseph and Harvey Meyerhoff Family Charitable Funds
- Government of Canada’s “Networking for Peace”
- Ford Motor Company
- Lester and Edna Shapiro Family Foundation
- Lake Street Church
- Middle East Peace Dialogue Network
- Dr. Tony Klug – The Ploughshares Trust
- Ben N. Teitel Charitable Trust – Gerald Cook, Esq.

Our Sponsors ($150 - $499):
- Octar Babuna
- Laurie Duker

Gifts-in-Kind:
- The Swedish Theological Institute
- The Austrian Hospice
- Dr. Jodi Prinzivalli
- Bob Halim Johnson

Every bit counts!

$30 – covers printing and communications costs for one encounter session
$100 – pays for transportation for Palestinian youth to come to Israel for an encounter session
$250 – allows us to retain trained coordinators of 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 ongoing dialogue group for one year
**Israeli-Palestinian Activities**

The IEA held two Israeli-Palestinian retreats in 2008; one in conjunction with the Hope Flowers School and another with the Palestinian Peace Society. The two themes focused on in the retreats were “The Binding of Abraham’s Son” and “How G-d Communicates with us,” respectively. 2008 also saw the first Palestinian/Jewish Settler-based encounter group: ADAMA, which brings together inhabitants from Abu Dis and neighboring Maaleh Adumim. Themes discussed by the group included “Fasting”, “Marriage” and “Prophets”. Also of note, the Jerusalem-Hebron Youth Interfaith Encounter group continued to meet throughout 2008 as well.

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