

# INTERFAITH ENCOUNTER ASSOCIATION

## Annual Report 2010



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



אגודת הספוט הכין דתי (ימ"א)    جمعية اللقاء بين الديانات  
INTERFAITH ENCOUNTER ASSOCIATION

*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 2010

### Activity Report:

Throughout 2010 we continued our efforts to bring more people from across the region together. Our work this past year has helped create hope for a new generation through increased programming for children and youth. In 2010, we sponsored 165 encounters and events of various interfaith groups. Sixty of these encounters involved children, youth, and university students. Cumulatively, over 4,000 people attended our groups in 2010, many taking part on a regular basis. We sponsor groups meeting both within the "Green Line" and in the West Bank, providing safe spaces for respectful discussions of issues relating to participants' religious beliefs. It is through these meetings, discussions, and time spent together that warm and understanding relationships are built and maintained among people of different faiths, cultures, and communities.

### General Program

In 2010, we founded four new interfaith encounter groups and revived one of our oldest, a unique encounter that brings the children of two schools, the A-Sallam School of Majd el-Krum and the Dekel School from Karmiel, together for learning and recreation. Two of our newly founded groups are youth groups, one for the youth of Hebron and Jerusalem, and one for the students of Jerusalem University and Bethlehem University.

In addition to the new groups aimed at children



### A Message from the Executive Director:

2010 was another year of growth for IEA. In addition to creating 5 new interfaith groups, we also developed new innovative models for cross-cultural encounters. We continued to initiate partnerships across the Holy Land and the world and launched, with international partners, the Euro-Mediterranean Abrahamic Forum.

During 2010, we successfully organized 165 programs that included more than 4,000 participants, from all social sectors. We established and maintained the extremely special group of Rabbis from the settlements of Gush Etzion and Sheikhs from Hebron. By the end of 2010 we had 35 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 three Israeli-Palestinian interfaith encounter retreats as well as co-organizing the Second Annual Interfaith Tolerance Symposium together with Mishkenot Shaananim and the Jerusalem Foundation. Last but not least: in 2009 we invited Bar Ilan University as an outside,



### Activity Report, cont. from p.2

and youth, an interfaith prayer group was founded and has been meeting regularly in Jerusalem. This particular group has attracted attendees from many countries including Israel, Ireland, Norway, Switzerland, France, UK, USA, Korea, and Italy.

2010 also saw the beginning of a new and exciting initiative involving religious leaders of different faiths working together. The first meeting took place in Hebron and involved three Rabbis—the head of a Modern Orthodox Yeshiva, a teacher there, and an Ultra Orthodox leader of a local Breslav Chassidic community — and a leading Sheikh. The second meeting, which took months of effort to make possible, included the original participants plus another head of an important Yeshiva, the spokesman of the Jewish Settlers of Hebron and his son, the leader of another important Hebron family, the head of a major Dawa center, and two popular Imams from Hebron.

A particular high point of the year was an achievement of the A/Nahnu Students Interfaith Encounter group. On 14 December, thanks to the members of this group, Jewish and Arab, from all parts of the political spectrum, a Muslim Prayer Room was opened at the Mt. Scopus campus of Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

### Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue

In addition to regular meetings, the IEA also sponsored four Israeli-Palestinian retreats, conferences, and other events in 2010. These have included several Israeli-Palestinian interfaith encounter retreats—one of them supporting our Gush Etzion Interfaith Encounter group and another supporting our Jerusalem-Yata Youth Interfaith

### Message from the Director, cont. from p.2

independent academic institution, to evaluate the effectiveness of our work. The encouraging results were finalized in early 2010 and one of our Israeli-Palestinian retreats this year was a special gathering of IEA's coordinators and activists from other organizations, under the auspices of the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, to jointly discuss the assessment research.

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 hope that in 2011 IEA will shift to the next gear and move even faster 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 (see in: <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](mailto: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

### Activity Report, cont. from p.3

Encounter group. Together with our friends at the Palestinian Peace Club from Yata, we held the 30th Retreat of Israeli-Palestinian Interfaith Encounter.

During 2010 we worked with partners at Mishkenot Shaananim and the Jerusalem Foundation to organize another large event with highly distinguished speakers and hundreds of participants: the Second Annual Interfaith Tolerance Symposium. The symposium, a joint forum of religious leaders and interfaith practitioners, took place in October and was a great success.

The first Euro-Mediterranean Abrahamic Forum took place, very successfully, in April 2010. The event was organized by IEA in cooperation with organizations from Jordan, Palestine, Belgium, and Poland and sponsored by a generous grant from the Anna Lindh Foundation.

### Women's Interfaith Encounter (WIE)

Women's Interfaith Encounters occurred all over Israel this past year. In Haifa, Ohr (Light) WIE learned about both the Druze faith and Tibetan Buddhism from new group members. The Galilee WIE was holding a meeting when the women heard the bells of a nearby Church and decided to visit it. The priest and his wife received them warmly and it was an overwhelmingly positive experience, especially for the Jewish members because for some of them it was the first time they heard Christian prayer. In addition to their regular meetings, the women of Jerusalem WIE decided to enjoy each other's company and pamper themselves, so the group of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish women got up very early and traveled to the Dead Sea, to relax



## Support

The IEA would not have been able to achieve such progress in 2010 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
- Anti Defamation League
- 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

in the mineral waters at the Ein Gedi Spa!

A recurring theme in the reports of every WIE group is that one of the highlights of their times together is watching their children play with one another, oblivious to how remarkable it may seem to others that they should get along. In a perfect world, children having fun and playing games together would not be remarkable, it would be commonplace. While we have not yet entered that world, during WIE group meetings, playing together can be normal for the members' children. These women's dedication to keeping their hearts and minds open makes it possible for their children to have this invaluable experience. Hopefully, the memories of these times, and of each other, will stay with the children as they grow up in a world that all too often keeps them apart from each other.



### 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 revolves around a religious theme or topic and features a carefully planned program of joint study and dialogue. The group coalesces into a single community that respects the unique identity of each of its "sub-communities" and participants, thus catalyzing 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)

On 4 November, about 25 members of the Jerusalem-Hebron Youth Interfaith Encounter group, both Israeli and Palestinian, took part in an historic visit to the Palestinian side of the city of Hebron, with permission from military authorities.

The visit included a tour of the old city, the old market, and the Cave of the Patriarchs. The Palestinian members of the group from Hebron talked about the emptiness of the market and showed everyone the division between the Palestinian and Jewish sides of the city. They explained the complexity of living in the city and its consequences.

According to one participant "It is important to note that despite the political differences between the two peoples, the tour went in a very calm and peaceful way, in which we were privileged to get to know the city and hear about it through the people who live in it."

(See more in the General Program section).

### IEA International Advisory Council (In Formation)

Rabbi Saul Berman	Dr. Eboo Patel
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Roshei Bernie Glassman	Rev. Dr. Krister Stendahl (Deceased)
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### IEA Staff

Dr. Yehuda Stolov, Executive Director  
 Mr. Salah Alladin, Assistant Director  
 Ms. Fathiey Jaber, Office Manager  
 Ms. Mariam Hussein, Administrative Assistant  
 Arielle Sternman, Intern



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

- an anonymous participant at an IEA encounter

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