INTERFAITH ENCOUNTER ASSOCIATION

Annual Report 2011
Activity Report:

Throughout 2011 we continued to bring more people from across the region together and reach new communities. Our work this past year has helped create hope for women and children, in new areas of the Holy Land. In 2011, we sponsored 199 encounters and events of various interfaith groups. Sixty three of these encounters involved children, youth, and university students. Cumulatively, over 4,000 people attended our groups in 2011, 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 2011, we founded eight new interfaith encounter groups. Four of our newly founded groups are for young people: a Language Exchange group at Hebrew University, a group at Jordan Valley College, a group for Interfaith Visits and our first ever group of Israeli and Palestinian Teens.

In addition to the new groups aimed at children and youth, an interfaith encounter group was founded in the upper-Galilee through a new and...
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unique partnership with the cluster of Rotary Clubs in that region.

In 2011 we continued to develop an exciting initiative involving religious leaders of different faiths working together: Modern Orthodox and Ultra Orthodox Rabbis as well as leading Sheikhs from Hebron, including Salafi Sheikhs. This group had a distinctive achievement in August, when it brought together for the first time Pastor John Hagee with Sheikh Farid al-Jabari and Rabbi Shlomo Riskin.

Another high point of the year was when we launched "Oil for Peace" – a social business venture for fair-trade joint marketing of olive oil, organically grown, produced in traditional methods and bottled in hand-made Hebron glass bottles. It was jointly initiated by Palestinian and Israeli IEA coordinators and is jointly run for the benefit of both communities.

During the year IEA has sponsored two special visits to Jerusalem: "Mother of Messiah" and "The Divine Presence".

Lastly, in 2011 we began an exceptional cooperation with the Feuerstein Institute. A group of teachers from Hebron were trained in the innovative and effective methods of the Institute so that they will be able to implement them in advancing kids in their home town.

Israeli-Palestinian and Middle Eastern Dialogue

In addition to regular meetings, the IEA also sponsored fifty-five Israeli-Palestinian encounters, retreats, conferences, and other events in 2011. These have included three Israeli-Palestinian interfaith encounter retreats and encounters of 11(!)

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their unique methods to Palestinian children. In addition, we launched the Israeli-Palestinian interfaith social business of Oil for Peace, in which olive oil, produced through traditional methods by Palestinian farmers, is bottled in hand-made Hebron glass bottles and fair-trade marketed in Israel, hopefully later also abroad, with the profits invested in encounter activity. A very special moment was when one of the leading rabbis in our “Rabbis and Sheikhs” group, Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, organized a first-ever meeting between Pastor John Hagee and Sheikh Farid Jabari.

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 at one of our events.

We hope that in 2012 IEA will continue to grow and move even more quickly toward 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 affiliate, Friends of IEA, is tax exempt under section 501(c)3 of the IRS code. Any donations sent to Friends of Interfaith Encounter Association, 832 Lathrop Ave, Forest Park, IL 60130-2039; or made online (see 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 also invited 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 of this report. We look forward to your feedback and ideas.

Yours,

Yehuda Stolov, Ph.D.
Executive Director
on-going groups of interfaith encounter, including the new Visits and Teens groups.

The Euro-Mediterranean Abrahamic Forum, founded in 2010, held its second conference, very successfully, in May 2011 in Lublin, Poland. This year the conference included the first-ever joint visit of Israelis, Palestinian, Lebanese, Egyptians, Jordanians and Morroccans to the nearby Majdanek Concentration Camp. The conference 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. Our veteran WIE groups continued to thrive and develop: the Jerusalem WIE held seven encounters, the Haifa Ohr/Nur (=light) WIE held eight encounters and the Galilee WIE held 18 encounters. In addition, we saw two new WIE groups in 2011: the Women Empowerment group that was established and run in cooperation with Kolech and Open House held 13 encounters during 2011.

The Israeli-Palestinian group of Midwives from across the land has been working independently for three years. In 2011 they applied to join IEA’s network of active on-going groups and were accepted as one of them. During 2011 this group's activities included dance workshops for pregnancy and childbirth, yoga lessons for pregnant women and their care givers, stories of trips in health missions, and programs relating to home births vs. births in hospitals and the importance of bonding.

Support

The IEA would not have been able to achieve such progress in 2011 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
- Joseph and Harvey Meyerhoff Family Charitable Funds
- Jonathan Wolf - Margery S. Wolf & Institute for Jewish Activism Donor Advised Funds
- Protestant Church of the Netherlands
- Church of Sweden
- Silverstein Foundation
- Fund for Reconciliation, Tolerance and Peace
- International Association for Religious Freedom
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- Lester and Edna Shapiro Family foundation
- Anti Defamation League
- Rabbi Bob Carroll and Ruthie Levi
- Ploughshares Trust
- Rev. Robert Thompson
- Middle East Peace Dialogue Network
- John Regier
- John Katonah

Our Sponsors ($150-$499):
- Ahmed Jaber
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- DePaul University
- Rabbi Isaac Serotta
- Kenneth Saffir
- Lucia Sommers
- Eryn Kalish
- Lisa Fagerstrom

Gifts-in-Kind:
- The Swedish Theological Institute
- The Austrian Hospice
- Goodword Books
- Bob Halim Johnson
- Jill Bratt
- Jonathan Wolf

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 a year
breastfeeding and shared care of babies and young children.

A recurring theme in the reports of the 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 is the norm 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.

Youth Interfaith Encounter (YIE)

In 2011, no less than 12 on going groups of children, university-age young adults and older young adults were active throughout the land; holding 71 encounters. These included groups in Haifa, the Galilee, the Jordan Valley and Jerusalem, as well as Israeli-Palestinian groups of Jewish and Muslim young adults from Jerusalem and Muslim and Christian young adults from Bethlehem, Hebron, Yata and Ramallah.

Two groups that should be especially noted are the new group of Israeli and Palestinian teens, which met twice since it started towards the end of the year and the Interfaith Visits group that was formed in October and visited Ramalla and Bethlehem. Another special achievement is the social-business venture "Oil for Peace", mentioned above, which also held several very successful events for joint olive harvesting and bottling.
“Above all, it was a very significant reminder of the plain fact that we are all human beings, with similar hopes, dreams, and concerns”

- an anonymous participant at an IEA encounter