“The Interfaith Encounter Association (IEA) is an innovative and entrepreneurial initiative dedicated to the daunting task of strengthening the foundations for peace, justice and stability in the Holy Land and throughout the greater Middle East. Through a variety of carefully structured interfaith and inter-ethnic activities, we continue to make real the dream for a society in which the ‘otherness’ of each participant is not only accepted, but truly understood and respected. Over the past 12 years, the IEA has envisioned a Middle East characterized by peaceful coexistence and respect, and has made great strides in developing the human infrastructure needed to make this vision a reality.”

A Letter From the Executive Director:

Dear friends,

2012 was not only a year for growth and expansion at the IEA, but for consolidating and strengthening our existing groups as well. 5 new groups were born, while 45 pre-existing groups continued to develop and exemplify positive cross-cultural interaction, accounting for a total of 195 overwhelmingly successful encounters and events.

Throughout the course of the year, well over 4,000 people from all varieties of religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds converged to participate and lead in each of our innovative, bridge-building initiatives. Our boundaries continued to grow geographically too, with successful encounters being held throughout the Holy Land, on both sides of the Green Line, and beyond.

Furthermore, as we continued to work together and grow as a community, the world at large looked on with admiration and support, physically, spiritually, and financially. 2012 saw our website receiving over 15,000 views from a whopping 106 countries across all continents and regions.

Personally, among our proudest accomplishments in 2012 was the continued development of our youth programs, new and old. Together with the invaluable help of our many donors and supporters, we have furthered the planting of seeds in the most delicate, crucial and influential section of the garden of peace: our children.

(continued on next page)
Along these lines, numerous encounters, retreats, and meetings were organized in which young people from all walks of life were presented with precious and rare opportunities to learn about and experience each other, while developing skills in such areas as cross-cultural linguistics and non-violent communication.

Ultimately, the various invaluable and innumerable programs which we held, as detailed in the following pages, are but a snippet of what has been built and continues to be built here at IEA.

Friends, our programs are ever-growing stands of trees in what will eventually be the forest of peace and co-existence in the Holy Land. The incredible strides that we have made, and continue to make, are not to be found in any other similar initiative because, simply put, there are no others like us. Although we would welcome happily the emergence of other organizations with similar techniques and methods, we are proud and grateful for our uniqueness and ability to thrive through the continued support of caring individuals, families, institutions, and communities like you.

With your continued generosity, we look forward to growing even more in 2013, where we will progress even further down the road towards significant social and civic improvements in the climate of the Holy Land. Together, we can and will build the future that all of us, regardless of faith, color, or creed, deserve.

We invite you to join our community by making a tax-deductible donation either online, at http://interfaithencounter.wordpress.com/donate/, or via mail to our U.S.-based affiliate, Friends of IEA, a tax-exempt charity under section 501(c)3 of the IRS code. Mail-in donations may be sent at any time to Friends of Interfaith Encounter Association, 832 Lathrop Ave., Forest Park, IL, 60130-2039. You are also more than welcome to join us at any of the many fun and engaging fund-raising events which we will hold this year, as a donor and/or a volunteer. For more information concerning these events, please contact Bob Halim Johnson at halim@interfaith-encounter.org.

Finally, we welcome and look forward to maintaining ongoing contact with you as we continue our work in the coming year. You may find our contact information at the end of this report and we welcome all kinds of feedback and ideas.

With inexpressible gratitude,

Yehuda Stolov, PhD
Executive Director
Interfaith Encounter Association
In 2012 we founded 5 new Interfaith Encounter groups, expanding to a total of 48 groups throughout the region. 2 of these 5 groups are youth groups, including an expansion of the popular language exchange program we introduced last year, while another is a joint group of Palestinian and Israeli students from Hebron and the Siach Yeshiva, respectively.

In addition to these new groups aimed at our youth, another group was founded at a restaurant in the Galilee, where Jewish, Muslim, and Christian employees who knew nothing of each other built relationships that would eventually transcend the workplace.

Yet another group was founded for the purpose of teaching non-violent communication skills to Palestinians and Israelis from both sides of the Green Line. Here, collaborative communication was taught to participants for use both in their personal and professional lives. A great deal of emphasis was also put on the importance of empathy and understanding the needs of others in communication.

A new group was also created for Yeshiva students and young Palestinians who live South of Hebron. This group met both in Tel Aviv and in the West Bank. Among the topics that this group discussed in detail were the commonalities in the Jewish and Muslim religions, with a specific focus on fasting rituals and marital practices.

2012 also saw the continued development of our groundbreaking Karmiel-Majd el-Krum mixed encounter group. Here we held encounters between both students and also educators from the Muslim A-Sallam school and the Jewish Dekel school. Fun and engaging activities were organized in order to illuminate shared values such as acceptance and tolerance through discussions on such topics as similarities between the Hebrew and Arabic languages.

This year also saw the continuation of growth in our religious leadership initiative, creating and strengthening never-before-seen bonds between Sheikhs and Rabbis in the Jerusalem-Hebron area. We held a total of 3 of these cutting-edge encounters this year, despite tremendous obstacles, attesting to the solidity and efficacy of our unique approach.

9 encounters were also held in Eilat, where topics specifically concerning the Holy Land itself were discussed. Participants were treated to informative expositions on the significance of the Holy Land in the Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Druze faiths. What's more, discussions were shaped in a way that allowed participants to rejoice in their shared love of the land, downplaying the role of differences in favor of similarities. Other interesting topics covered by this group included the relationship between democracy and Islam, spirits and demons in monotheism, and attitudes towards gender and towards the human body.

In 2012 we also expanded our interactive and incredibly popular Bibliodrama program, holding a total of 11 meetings where Christian, Jewish and Muslim participants explored their relationship to and value for their respective holy books through active participation. Specific stories-
Our service-oriented Health Equality for All People in Israel (HEFAPII) initiative was also continued in 2012, with 15 sessions held at the Henrietta Szold/Hadassah Hebrew University School of Nursing in Ein Kerem. Here, extensive and thought-provoking discussions were held among health care professionals of all backgrounds relating to the importance of ethics and equality of access to healthcare for all major religions in the Holy Land. Healthcare professionals shared countless stories of challenges and triumphs in the field, while instructive lessons were given on the importance of working with various cultural practices and norms in treating patients from diverse backgrounds. Emphasis was also given to crucial issues such as organ donation and DNR (do not resuscitate) orders in the three Abrahamic faiths.

In addition to regular meetings in 2012, the IEA also sponsored 62 Israeli-Palestinian encounters, conferences, retreats, and other bridge-building events. Many of these were contiguous with the Youth Interfaith Encounter program, featuring innovative meetings between students from neighboring Arab and Jewish communities such as Abu Dis and Maaleh Adumim. Others, such as the Jerusalem-Hebron Religious Leaders initiative brought together Muslim Shiekhs and Jewish Rabbis from both communities in an atmosphere of warmth and confluence, the likes of which has never before been done anywhere else.

One group, of particular interest in 2012 was the Visits group which was established just last year. This collection of Israeli and Palestinian participants strengthened their cross-cultural ties and understandings through a variety of stimulating organized trips to locations of interest on both sides of the green line which would otherwise have been difficult for many to visit on their own. Among the many stimulating areas visited this year were the Museum of Islamic Art in Jerusalem, the breathtaking hills at Ora Junction near Ein Kerem, the ancient and historical city of Bethlehem, and the Austrian Hospice in the Old City of Jerusalem, which offers sweeping views of the nearby Temple Mount/Haraam ash-Shareef.

Another such event of extreme intrigue and importance was our two day long Israeli-Palestinian retreat, cosponsored by the Palestinian Peace Society, and also held at the Austrian Hospice. During-
(Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue continued): this intensive and intimate retreat, guests bonded over meals and various activities throughout the Old City, including an outdoor music festival. In between activities, a structured discussion was held around two presentations concerning the topic of attitudes towards orphans in both Judaism and Islam, as given by Dr. Yehuda Stolov, Ahmed Makhluf, and Dr. Taleb Alharithi, respectively. Ultimately, commonalities between the two great faiths were illuminated as they often are in our programs, with the shared Jewish-Muslim values of morality, equality, respect, and protection towards the bereaved shining through in each example.

Growth in groups

Left: 2012 saw a continuation of our previous constant growth, as more and more new and ambitious groups were admitted into our family!

Women's Interfaith Encounters (WIE)

Right: Dr. Yehuda Stolov looks on with interest as participants discuss the philosophies of Judaism and Islam towards the treatment of orphans. Taken at the Austrian Hospice in Jerusalem's Old City, March 2012.

This year, women's interfaith encounters were held throughout the Holy Land. In total, four groups met for a collective sum of 32 encounters. The Galilee Women's Interfaith Encounter group held 10 of these encounters, while the Haifa and Jerusalem groups held 12 and 6, respectively.

The Midwives group, which was accepted and coordinated into our organization just last year, held 4 meetings in 2012. Among the many crucial topics that they covered were ultrasounds, proper cord-clamping techniques, new neonatal resuscitation guidelines, and other invaluable maternity issues. (Continued next page...)

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Arrangements were also made in many of our meetings for women of all faiths to bring their children to encounters, where they were able to interact together in a safe and developmentally-encouraging environment. Not only were the children able to bond during their shared time spent together, but the women as well enjoyed watching and playing with each others children, illustrating the innate motherly instinct to care, which knows no ethnic or cultural boundaries.

Religious holidays, such as Palm Sunday and Hanukkah were shared together by the women, and different festive foods, such as Easter chocolates and Hanukkah sufganiyot, were introduced to participants from various cultural backgrounds. The women also have many fond memories from their participation together in various festivals and events, such as the Haifa Film Festival and the Bat Galim Festival, where they enjoyed a spectacular modern dance performance from the women of Tura, which illustrated the profound struggles of traditional women in a busy modern society.

Among the most profound experiences held this year was a New Years Eve party in Eilaboun. For many of our participating women, including a group of women from the village of Bueina, this was the first time that a New Year’s Eve celebration was ever experienced. Much like the program in general, this was both a new, rare, and positive experience for everyone involved.

Youth Interfaith Encounters (YIE)

2012 was a very successful year for our youth program as well. Throughout the land, 12 groups of youth, ranging from children to university aged young adults, held a total of 63 encounters and events, including a new incarnation of our thriving Language-Exchange group. Groups met both within Israel and the Palestinian territories, where a whole range of topics and issues were discussed.

Among the variety of topics that were covered, participants spoke about the the various gender and family issues that they face, as well as the roles that television and media play in their lives. Other concepts, such as religious rulings regarding male-female interactions, honesty, and even the injunction to put optimism above pessimism were also given attention.

2012 also saw the successful merger of 6 different youth groups in Beit Jala for a coordinated fast-breaking dinner for the Jewish and Muslim holidays of Tisha B’Av and Ramadan. During this dinner event, the young people who had formed bonds in each of their individual group were provided with a fun and nurturing atmosphere in which to expand their bonds further with other groups, forming an even larger community of shared hopes and values. From a psychological standpoint, this type of process helped to prepare the youth involved for the continuation of their interfaith and inter-ethnic interactions by establishing precedents of cross-cultural communication at an early age.
Board Members:

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- Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, co-founder, Muslim-Jewish Peace Walk
- Dr. Iftekhar Hai, United Muslims of America Interfaith Alliance
- Imam Yahiya Hendi, Moslem Chaplain, Georgetown University
- Rabbi Dr. Asher Lopatin, Rabbi of Anshe Sholom B’nai Israel Congregation, Chicago, IL
- Prof. Katherine Marshall, Senior Fellow and Visiting Professor, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University
- Prof. Mohamed Mosaad Abdelaziz Mohamed, Professor of Islamic Studies, Northern Arizona University
- Dr. Eboo Patel, Executive Director, Interfaith Youth Core
- Dr. Charles R. Paul, President, Foundation for Interreligious Diplomacy
- Father Dr. John Pawlikowski, OSM, Professor of Social Ethics at Catholic Theological Union and Director of the Catholic-Jewish Studies Program
- Rev. Dr. Donald Shriver, President & Professor of Ethics Emeritus Union Theological Seminary
- Rev. Dr. Krister Stendahl, Mellon Professor of Divinity Emeritus, Harvard Divinity School (deceased)
- Rev. Robert V. Thompson, former Minister of Lake Street Church, Chicago, IL, and former Chair of the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions
- Mr. Jon Wolf, Director, former social policy director of the Synagogue Council of America
- Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin, Chief Rabbi of Efrat and Chancellor of the Ohr Torah Stone Institutions

STAFF

- Dr. Yehuda Stolov, Executive Director
- Mr. Salah Alladin, Assistant Director
- Ms. Fathiey Jaber, Office Manager
- Rabbi Bob Carroll, Director of Development and Communications
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We extend our eternal gratitude to the following, whose gifts of financial support and gifts-in-kind have allowed us to reach the incredible heights that we have reached. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you!

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Every Bit Counts!

$30 Covers Printing and Communication Costs for One Encounter

$100 Covers Transportation for Palestinian Youth to Israel for One Encounter

$250 Covers Retainment Costs for Trained Coordinators for One Encounter

$500 Covers All Costs for One Palestinian-Israeli Youth Encounter

$1000 Covers All Costs for One Conference

$5000 Covers all Costs for One Dialogue Group for an Entire Year!

www.interfaithencounter.wordpress.com/donate/

Friends of Interfaith Encounter Association, 832 Lathrop Ave., Forest Park, IL, 60130-2039
Many share the opinion, including other dialogue organizations, that religion is an issue of potential contention. Our innovative approach, however, refuses to accept this. For almost 12 years, we have brought people from all faiths and cultures together to build lifetime bonds through sharing cultural roots, beliefs, and traditions. We believe, and continue to prove, that by sharing our backgrounds we eliminate the “otherness” of the other, erasing invisible boundaries while investing in our future generations by creating and maintaining contagiously progressive and optimistic bonds. Each and every encounter that we hold is centered on an interactive and thought-provoking theme, buttressed by a carefully structured program of joint study and dialogue. Our groups coalesce into profound unitary communities which respect and admire the unique identities of each participant, both in the similar and the uniquely foreign, thus catalyzing a long-term process of grass-roots peace-building.

At the Interfaith Encounter Association, we don’t just hope for the future that we all deserve, we put stock in and build it as well.

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

-Anonymous Participant at an IEA Encounter