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.

2015 ANNUAL REPORT
Activity Report:

This year in 2015, we continued to endure the challenging process of our peace building efforts in the Holy Land, by bringing more people together from both Israel and the West Bank through faith based dialogue. This year, IEA achieved to facilitate 220 encounters and events under the backing of 74 groups. 16 of these groups involved youth groups, ranging from school aged children to university students. 4 of these rendezvous’ were women’s interfaith groups.

As last year, the Non-violent Communication group tallied the most encounters of any other interfaith group with 26. We also held a talk by Dr. Omar Salem on his book titled, “The Missing Peace” which explains the contribution of religion to the conflict. The entire group learned how religion could be used in order to promote the conflict and how it could be utilized to promote peace between Palestinians and Israelis. Furthermore, the acknowledgement that both religions believe in the same God became consensus. The IEA also had two events that were hosted at our coordinators’ houses which were complete successes.

In light of the violence held last year, the IEA struggled slightly with keeping up encounters. This was due to the remaining heightened security at checkpoints thus limiting the movement of our Palestinian friends in the West Bank. However, despite this, our organization was still able to create and build new encounters as well as resurfacing a long 9-year drought that finally re-submerged. Thusly, we are happy to announce the re-emergence of our encounter groups at Tel-Aviv University and Tel Aviv-Jaffa. As well as initiating new encounter

A Letter From the Executive Director

Dear friends,

2015 was not only another year of growth and expansion at the IEA, but also for consolidating and strengthening our existing groups. A total of 220 successful encounters and events over 74 groups throughout the year continued to develop and exemplify positive cross-cultural interaction. These encounters took place during the volatile and tense times of a newly resurgent intifada. This caused many participants from being able to attend encounter sessions due to stricter controls. In light of this obstacle, we still managed to thrive and demonstrate our rigid determination. Every encounter was a statement that we will continue our work until inter-communal peace prevails!

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

Personally, among our proudest accomplishments in 2015 was the continued development of our program despite the obstacles before us. Not only were we able to rekindle the interfaith encounter group in Tel-Aviv after 9 years of dormancy and revive the group in Tel Aviv University, we were able to establish for the first time a large interfaith encounter group of over 100 teens through the Model UN.

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

Similarly, we also held many encounters for women, educators, healthcare professionals, religious leaders, medical students and more. 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.
groups at Jerusalem-Ramallah, and in Beit-Hakerem-Bethlehem, our first group in Europe at Munich and within a Model UN – our first lasting group of teens. We also re-established our Jewish-Christian encounter group for the Study of Matthew, and the very unique encounter group in Hebron. Therefore, our organization can be happy to announce the IEA’s ability to continue acting even under unfavorable circumstances.

General Program:

In addition to the new groups, we are happy to announce that we have been keeping up our tradition of celebrating Jewish and Muslim holidays together. Keeping the spirit that both religions can come together, even during the holiest of holidays. Many of our groups were able to come together and establish great relations with one another. Recognizing our motto that religion can be used as a converging force rather than a dividing one. This culminated in the last encounter at the Swedish Theological Institute where we were able to bring together Yeshiva students, as well as young people from the West Bank city of Jenin. Through all of these encounters, politics were able to stand by and give way to an enlightened and beautiful religious discussion.

The re-emerging of the student group at Tel-Aviv University was one of our proudest achievements. This re-emergence led to 17 encounters during the year and allowed for the group to come back stronger than ever.

We are also happy to say that the emergence of the Jerusalem-Ramallah encounter, and the one in Hebron take shape, thus expanding our organization further into the West Bank. This is especially true for Hebron since it may be

(Letter from the Executive Director continued):

Friends, our programs are ever-growing strands of trees in what will eventually be the forest of peace and co-existence in the Holy Land.

The incredible strides 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 happily welcome 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 2016, where we will progress further down the road towards significant social and civic improvements in the climate of the Holy Land. Together, we can and will build a 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://interfaith-encounter.org/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 fundraising 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
the most important success so far because of the state of the city. The IEA hopes to continue having encounters there and to allow the city to once again be a place for peace and religious understanding. Thusly, allowing the city to be rebuilt as a city of friendship, as its name indicates in both Hebrew and Arabic.

We are also proud of Jewish-Christian Matthew Study Group because it allows for Christianity to help aid with its religious texts. Specifically, one encounter included the phrase, “Turning the other cheek, being nice to our enemy”, and another encounter that recognized that “together you can do things in-faith that you could not alone”. Together, these encounters are showing real progress in interfaith relations between the religions.

**Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue:**

Our encounters amongst Israelis and Palestinians become very influential this year. Not only were we able to bring together both religions together for their respective holidays, but we were also to do it great numbers as well. On June 5th, we held an Iftar meal for breaking the Muslim fast of Ramadan and Jewish 17th of Tamuz fast at the spectacular, Mediterranean restaurant. More than 50 people participated and enjoyed the food and merriment while still discussing the religious nature of the celebration. This was not the only time we

**SUPPORT:**

The IEA would not have been able to achieve such progress in 2015 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+):**

- Fetzer Institute
- Church of Sweden
- Joseph and Harvey Meyerhof Family Charitable Funds
- Big Shopping Centers
- International Association for Religious Freedom
- Sobell Foundation
- Bob Carroll & Ruthie Levi
- Groeben Foundation
- Sally Gottesman
- Madre
- David Scheim
- Anti-Defamation League

**Our Sponsors ($150-$499):**

- Carolyn Seburn
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- Elizabeth Traubman
- Mark Zivin
- Marilyn Schuster
- Renee Garfinkel
- Carolyn Gifford
- Michael Ward
- Lucia Sommers

**Gifts-in-Kind:**

- The Swedish Theological Institute
- The Austrian Hospice
- Bob Halim Johnson

**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 retreat
- $5,000 – can sustain one encounter group for a year
were able to bring both religions together for meal and merriment, but was one of our most influential yet.

Yet, another fantastic encounter that took place on September 16th young people from Jerusalem and Yata. The most enlightening quote from the encounter was: The main way to calm people is to show them peace through a face-to-face experience that often what they know about the other is not correct. This understanding warms the heart of the IEA because it is exactly this misunderstanding that we wish to heal.

Most successfully, on May 26th, an encounter of the Medical Students group took place like no other. It was beautiful to watch the ways that the participants asked each other and answered questions in an open forum where the discussion overflowed with enthusiasm.

Woman’s Interfaith Encounters (WIE):

In 2015, the Woman’s Interfaith Encounters continued to thrive and remain influential in their respective communities. Amongst the 4 groups that met, they established 24 encounters. Of these encounter groups, the Haifa Woman’s Interfaith Encounter continues to remain one of the strongest groups that we had meeting a total of 15 times during the year. Their dedication and perseverance to schedule and hold encounters represents their determination.

On another note, the Jerusalem Woman’s group has shown their dedication by being the oldest group to hold encounters. They have been meeting for 13 years now, and continue to grow stronger. As a result, the coordinators, Evelyne Savir and Saheer Siam deserved the Certificate of Appreciation from us on May 20th as a signification of their dedication. In all, the WIEs continue to remain strong due to the amazing attitude of these extraordinary women.

Youth Interfaith Encounters (YIE):

The IEA’s Youth Interfaith Encounters continue to have major successes. In this year, we were able to re-establish several new groups, including a Model UN one. This new encounter was a great success that took place on December 31st. 100 high-school students met, half of them Muslim and half Jewish. This group met specifically to discuss the conflicts taking place in Syria, Libya, Yemen and Nigeria for a grand total of 3 hours. To have a group that could establish itself like this for the amount of time it put into it was truly inspiring and we hope to continue this encounter group for the years to come.
IEA International Advisory Council
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Salah Aladdin
Alaa Khateeb

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 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.

“Lighting a candle in this darkness is always better than condemning the darkness.”

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