



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

# Annual Report 2018



## Activity Report

In 2018, the Interfaith Encounter Association (IEA) persisted in its mission to build and promote peace in the Holy Land by encouraging interfaith dialogue. Despite the challenges created by the cut of USAID funding to all projects that build bridges between Israelis and Palestinians, IEA facilitated a record number of 414 encounters and events across 101 groups, oversaw the creation or renewal of 11 groups, and engaged an estimated 4,000 people.



Out of the active groups this year, 12 of them were youth interfaith encounter (YIE) groups or schools. The most active encounter groups of all were the

**Model UN YIE** and the **Bearer of Peace Group**, which both met a total of 54 times throughout the course of the year. In March, a student led and run **YIE at Bar Ilan University** started, which met a total of 15 times. This group became a credited course in October and was recognized under the “Hope for Israel” initiative by the president of Israel.

In 2018, IEA surpassed 100 encounter groups! The 100<sup>th</sup> group was the **Tabor Area Group**, which began meeting in November. Other new groups in 2018 are the **Lower Galilee Rabbis and Sheikhs**, **Harduf Interfaith Encounter Group**, and the **Oranit-Kfar Qasem Women’s Interfaith Encounter Group** which began meeting in August, October, and April respectively.

In addition to the 100 groups located in the Holy Land, two groups met throughout the year in **Teaneck, NJ** and **Gainesville, FL**. There were other IEA events in the United States, including an event held in March at University of Santa Monica entitled, “Peace in the Middle East – It’s Happening!” 38 other groups in the Holy Land are currently in the process of reorganizing for 2019.

### ***A letter from the Executive Director***

*Dear friends,*

*In 2018, we consolidated and strengthened our existing groups and launched over 10 new ones. We hosted well over 400 encounters and various events and broke through 100 groups. Thousands of participants representing a wide range of ages, viewpoints, social statuses, religions, and cultures joined our bridge-building encounters. We added more youth and women’s groups in the past year, including a youth group at Bar Ilan University.*

*We are pleased with these developments and wish to expand our work with the region’s youth in upcoming years! The encounters continue to provide participants with an opportunity to familiarize themselves with different cultures, faith systems, and languages to challenge prevailing stereotypes about the other.*

*The numerous groups and activities, detailed in this report, only scratch the surface of our determined and tireless work to create a foundation for sustainable peace in the Holy Land.*

## General Program

Our **general program** is accessible to all segments of society, regardless of age or gender. Many groups across the country met regularly to connect on a personal level and to discuss a wide range of topics of interest.



Groups within our general program include **Bearer of Peace** which met 54 times this year, one of which was a visit to a yeshiva in Otniel and to Al Fawwar refugee camp and **Non-violent communication** group which met 16 times,

including many retreats, theological discussions about sacred spaces, ritual purity, human choice, and questioning God.

In October, Dr. Yehuda Stolov and one of IEA's groups, **Music Interfaith Group** were featured on a story on the U.S. National Public Radio (NPR). Music in FELM is a musical group of Israelis and Palestinians that performs both Hebrew and Arabic music. The group met 30 times this past year.

Groups from the past few years continued to thrive, such as Jews and Christians study Matthew has transitioned into **Jews and Christians Study Romans**, as they move onto a new book of the Christian Bible. **Leah's Interfaith Encounter (LIFE)** met regularly throughout the year, at one point even hosting tourists from Mexico, Spain, and Italy.

In June, IEA continued its tradition of holding the **Joint IEA-Iftar** at the FELM center in Jerusalem. A total of around 130 local and international guests gathered to talk, share their traditions, and eat a meal.

The third annual **Interfaith Encounter Day** was celebrated in September at the FELM center in Jerusalem. After a short series of blessings, participants shared in encounter circles, an artistic experience, and dinner.

*Behind the scenes, there is a lot of planning and paperwork, phone calls, and most importantly, the continuing support of caring individuals, families, and communities like you.*

*With your much-appreciated assistance, together we will grow and continue to work towards our goal – a better and more peaceful future for people of all ages, gender, races, and faiths. We are convinced that, as reality shows, with the support of our partners, it is all possible.*

*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,  
Dr. Yehuda Stolov,*



*IEA  
Executive  
Director*

## Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue

IEA continued to encourage dialogue and encounters between Israelis and Palestinians as a way of eliminating racism, hatred, and discrimination and as a method of striving for peace. Nearly two dozen groups of Palestinians and Israelis met throughout 2018. A focus throughout many of IEA's groups, not only those of Palestinians and Israelis, is a conscious effort to try and learn the language of one's peers, be it Hebrew or Arabic. This happens in the WIE, YIE, and general program groups.

The **Jerusalem & Hebron Young Adults** group met frequently to discuss similarities and differences between Judaism

and Islam. The **Jezreel Valley-Jenin** group discussed how necessary encounters are to overcome the hate and racism present in both Israeli and Palestinian societies. The **Hebron Interfaith Encounter Group** marked 10 years of interfaith encounters between Jews and Muslims. In the new **Gilboa-Nablus YIE**, Palestinians and Jews, including a Satmar Chasid, sat down to discuss their similarities and positive experiences of the "other."

### How It Works:

*The IEA invites people from different traditional and cultural backgrounds and faiths to join our groups. Within the groups, participants have meaningful encounters which bring them closer to each other. Prejudice, hostility, and suspicion are transformed into direct acquaintance, mutual respect, and friendship. Our groups are both a model for intercommunal relations of appreciation and care, and vehicles to promote them.*

*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 focused 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.*

## Women's Interfaith Encounter (WIE)



Throughout the year, IEA supported a number of different women's interfaith encounters. Supporting women in creating their own spaces while they come together is an important aspect of interfaith peace-building and lends itself toward interesting cross-cultural learning.

The most active WIE this year was the **Haifa Women's Interfaith Encounter** which met a total of 11 times to go to conferences, see plays at the Al-Midan theater, attend the opening of a Jewish-Muslim Creative Center in Hilf, and see documentaries produced by Jewish and Muslim women.

## Get Involved

We invite you to join our community by making a tax-deductible donation online at [interfaith-encounter.org/donate](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](mailto:halim@interfaith-encounter.org).

The **East and West Reading Group** practiced their Hebrew and Arabic with each other and for many of the Muslim women who came, it was their first time meeting Jewish women. The **Yeruham-Rahme WIE** met to talk about their lives. In February, they held a Tu Bishvat Seder where they discussed similar Bedouin holidays and customs. In November, while the children played together, the women split into smaller groups and discussed prevalent health issues and the opportunity/accessibility of higher education and professional development for the women of Rahme. The **Oranit-Kfar Qasem WIE** met in October to discuss breast cancer and the importance of breast exams. They hosted a speaker from “One of Nine” and shared personal stories. In June, they met to discuss the statuses of women in Judaism and Islam.

## Youth Interfaith Encounters (YIE)

This past year, IEA’s most active groups were its youth interfaith encounter groups. Building cross-cultural friendships at a young age is essential to pursuing peace and



understanding. The most active group, **Model UN YIE**, met a total of 54 times. They engaged in impressive programs at the Spanish mission, the Institut Francais, and the U.S. embassy

and participated in Model UN competitions both in the Holy Land and abroad.

**Bar Ilan University YIE** started just this year and immediately jumped into engaging in dialogue and doing community work. During Hannukah, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish students gave out sufganiot throughout Bar Ilan University’s campus. IEA at Bar Ilan University now counts as an accredited course!

The **Hartman and Armenian Schools YIE Group** visited each other’s schools to learn about being Jewish and Armenian in Jerusalem. The students participated in ice-breakers, discussed what school is like, and compared and contrasted the holidays that they celebrate.

## Special Events/Projects

IEA cooperated with local NGOs and institutes on a variety of initiatives. In June, on the last day of Ramadan, in conjunction with the Tower of David Museum, Jerusalem.com, and Koolulam, and in honor of the visit of Indonesian Sheikh Yahya Cholil Staqf, the General Secretary of Nahdlatul Ulama, the world's largest Muslim organization, IEA organized an event, with nearly 1,000 people, to sing together to celebrate universal love, understanding, compassion and peace. Prior to the event, there was a forum attended by leaders of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, led by Dr. Yehuda Stolov to discuss the need for religious morality in the world and how religion can be used as a building block for peace. This event was followed by the formation of Forum of Religious Leaders in December.

In July, in cooperation with the organization, "Arabs with Israelis," IEA hosted an event called **"Together in Israel."** The event began with a small group discussion and then led to participants listening to a conversation between Kadi Muhammed Abu Obeid, Kadi in the Shari'a Court of Appeal and Rabbi Shlomo Dov Rosen, Rabbi of the Yakar Community. They spoke about the importance of religion and interfaith activities in the process of peace building.

In July and August, several activists from IEA visited the United States. Ibrahim Mustafa, outgoing Chair of the Board, and Dr.



Yehuda Stolov, Executive Director, first went to Gainesville, Florida to meet the IEA group there. Joined by Rabbi Bob Carroll, incoming Chair of the Board, and Dr. Shlomo Alon,

a retired founder and coordinator of IEA's Arabic Speaking Interfaith group, they then attended to the International Association for Religious Freedom Congress in Washington, D.C. They formally presented about IEA's approach and were able to talk to other organizations to make new contacts and strengthen old ones. They then went to the New York City area where Yehuda presented IEA to the Hampton Synagogue and attended the Teaneck, NJ IEA group.

### Support

IEA could not achieve such progress in 2018 were it not for the generous financial support and gifts-in-kind from our many friends around the world. We are deeply grateful for the contributions of the following donors:

#### **\$2000 and up**

Church of Sweden  
Big Shopping Centers  
Sobell Foundation  
U.S. Embassy  
Foundation for Ethnic Understanding  
European Union  
Jonathan Wolf  
Bob Carroll & Ruth Levi  
International Association for Religious Freedom  
FELM  
Madre

#### **\$500-\$1999**

Michal Lichtman  
Hibbert Trust  
Victor Goldberg & Patricia Waldeck  
John Katonah  
Charles & Ilana Horowitz  
Ratner Philanthropic Fund  
The Ploughshares Trust  
Jerusalem Peacebuilders  
Dagmar Zinser

*“Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.”*

*- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr*

### **Every gift counts**

\$30 covers printing and 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 of the costs for one Palestinian and Israeli Youth Encounter for a year



### **IEA International Advisory Council**

Rabbi Saul Berman  
Rabbi Dr. Tsvi Blanchard  
Rabbi Dr. Alan Brill  
Roshei Bernie Glassman  
Rabbi Dr. Marc Gopin  
Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb  
Dr. Iftekhar Hai  
Imam Yahya Hendi  
Rabbi Dr. Asher Lopatin  
Prof. Katherine Marshall  
Prof. Mohamed Mosaad Adelaziz Mohamed  
Dr. Eboo Patel  
Dr. Charles R. Paul  
Father Dr. John Pawlikowski  
Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin  
Rabbi Marc Schneier  
Rev. Dr. Donald Shriver  
Rev. Robert V. Thompson  
Mr. Jon Wolf

### **IEA Board**

Rabbi Bob Carroll (Chair)  
Mr. Ibrahim Mustafa  
Dr. Taleb Al-Harithi  
Ms. Shani regev

### **IEA Staff**

Dr. Yehuda Stolov  
Mr. Subhi Kouz

## **Interfaith Encounter Association**

2 HaSoreg Street, PO Box 3814

Jerusalem 91037, Israel

Phone: +972-2-651-0520

Fax: +972-2-651-0557

Email: [office@interfaith-encounter.org](mailto:office@interfaith-encounter.org)

[www.interfaith-encounter.org](http://www.interfaith-encounter.org)

