



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

# 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



## OVERVIEW

2020 was certainly not a regular year by any standards. The Covid-19 pandemic certainly posed us with many challenges and difficult choices. However, we would also like to remember it as a year of adaptation, overcoming and resilience. Our **31 active groups** held **299 encounters**, mostly online but also offline whenever it was allowed (with the proper restrictions). We organized several projects and events, including partnerships with **22 different partner organizations**. We oversaw the creation of **5 new groups**- including 2 that were launched online without having met in person beforehand.

## A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*Dear friends,*

*2020 was a year like no other! Shortly after it began the Covid-19 pandemic broke off and it became clear that we will not be able to continue holding hundreds of face to face encounters with dozens of active groups. After short time of reflection we worked to move groups to online encounters and make sure we maintain ongoing connection with all groups' coordinators and them with their group members.*

*These immense efforts paid off and nearly half the groups were able to meet. Most of them were able to move to online encounters and others met offline in times the pandemic was less intense. We were even able to start five new groups! And we also organized relatively many public events.*

## INTERFAITH ENCOUNTERS

Interfaith encounters are the core of our activity. During the encounters, participants discuss their perspectives on different issues and topics of their interests in a friendly, informal and open environment. Until 2020, all of our encounters had been in person, while in 2020 the great majority of the encounters happened online because of the restrictions in social gatherings posed by Covid-19.

When the need to limit in-person interactions rose, we all turned to online platforms. However, transferring activities to the online realm is not as simple as it sounds. Some populations have limited access to smartphones, computers, internet and telephone service, and certain participants feared the exposure that online encounters may bring, since one is unable to make sure other participants don't record or screenshot the exchanges. On the other hand, online encounters allowed groups to expand their circles and make their encounters more accessible even for participants from outside the Holy Land. We are very happy to continue providing opportunities for accessible interfaith connection beyond geographical limitations- but we also look forward to having our groups meet face-to-face again!

*Thousands of participants representing a wide range of ages, viewpoints, social status, religions, and cultures joined our bridge-building encounters even in 2020, finding not only mutual understanding and friendship but also mutual support in front of the pandemic. We are now looking forward to recover the activity of the other groups and continue to grow our activity further.*

*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. 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, 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*





**Reut Sadaqa, Circle of Light and Hope and Hashfela** kept consistent encounters online. For example, **LIFE, Etzion-Hussan, Nablus region, Etzion-Hussan and Kenya** groups met in person before the pandemic, and most kept in touch afterwards, while **Hebron** group managed to meet in person once between lockdowns. Our four **Religious Leaders (HaSharon, Gush Etzion, Lower Galilee and Tower of David Forum for Senior Religious Leaders)** group held in-depth discussions on shared theological topics.

We started two online groups: the **Jerusalem and beyond** Hebrew speaking group including participants from Jericho, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Gaza, Haifa, Nablus, Sderot and Yeruham; and an American-based group **D.C. and beyond**, with participants mostly based in D.C., Virginia and Maryland, but welcome participants from other regions as well.

## 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.

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 Interfaith Encounter (WIE)** groups continued to be a safe space to advance the crucial role of women in peacebuilding. This year we had a new addition, the **Arad-Tel Arad WIE**. **Midwives for Peace** had several discussions about the impact of the pandemic in their work and personal lives, and **Haifa WIE** managed to meet in person in open spaces in-between lockdowns.

**Youth Interfaith Encounter (YIE)** groups continued to spread the message of peace among our future leaders. **Debate for Peace** organized Model UN simulations, interfaith discussions, lectures with top diplomats and special projects (see below). Our groups in **Bar Ilan University**, and **Mt. Scopus YIE** also combined interfaith dialogue and academic studies. An additional group that promoted interfaith encounters among students of the **Sts. Tarkmanchatz Armenian School** and the **Hartman Boys High School** started meeting but had to halt its activities when schools closed during lockdowns.

## SUPPORT

The IEA could not achieve such progress in 2019 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

U.S. Embassy

Foundation For Ethnic Understanding

Jonathan Wolf

Bob Carroll & Ruthie Levi

FELM

Nitzan Foundation

### \$500-\$1999

Evangelische Gesamtkirchengemeind

The Ploughshares Trust

### In kind

Goodword Books

Tower of David Museum

Felm Center

Swedish Theological Institute

Museum of Islamic Art

Some of our groups connected through learning together. **The New Testament Study Group** dedicated to studying the Gospel of Luke, and also organized a panel on the history and beliefs of different Christian denominations. The **English Study Group** learned English together with lessons offered by the American Center in Jerusalem, while the **Cultural Competence Study Group** researched issues relevant to cultural differences in health care work in the Henrietta Szold School for Nursing at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Other groups used diverse methods of intercultural dialogue. **Listeners of Life Stories** practiced active and empathetic listening by inviting guest speakers to share their personal stories; **Wast El Tarik** band further developed through music a message of peace and hope across communities and languages; **Praying Together in Jerusalem** connected through collective prayer; and **Bearer of Peace** kept meeting informally with Muslims and Jews in South Hebron hills, creating bridges between them through deep listening and sharing in small groups and through encounters.

It is also very important to mention that even among the groups that did not meet in 2020, the coordinators worked hard to keep in touch with group members, and help each other whenever possible.

## GET INVOLVED

There are many ways to be part of our movement for peace:

- [Join one of our groups](#) or help us form a new group in your area/university
- Join our [listserv](#) and invite others to join
- Be active on our social media ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#))
- Partner your institution with us
- Make your Amazon shopping through [our link](#)
- Make a tax-deductible donation [online](#) 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).



## INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

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## SPECIAL PROJECTS

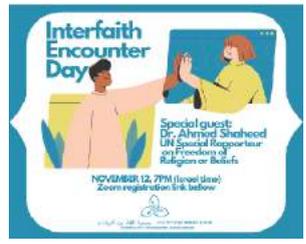
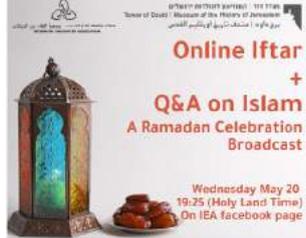
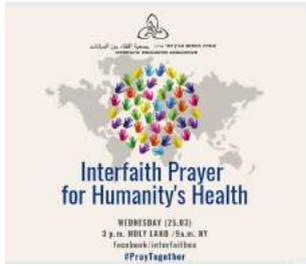
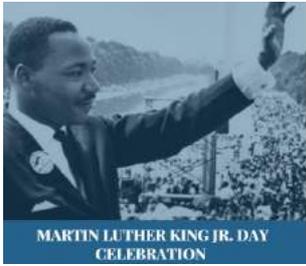
Besides regular interfaith encounters, our coordinators were dedicated to organizing several special projects. Debate for Peace organized the **Empathy Storytelling** project, in which 8 young Jews and Muslims were paired to interview one another's family and tell their story.

The **Beit Midrash on Interfaith Relations** focuses on in-depth study of Jewish religious sources that deal with relations between Jews and members of other peoples and faiths, in order to provide guidance on the desired relations and how to promote them.

We relaunched with greater energy the **IEA Coordinators Community**, a space to enhance the communication between our group coordinators and to provide further support and training to their excellent work. Coordinators' also engaged in supporting our community in difficult periods.

In addition, we partnered with the Jerusalem Municipality to make calls to families with special needs in order to check their necessities during the lockdowns, and organized a Job Task Force to help each other look for work opportunities.





## CONTACT US

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## FOLLOW US



## EVENTS

In a year when we could not meet in person, the need to connect with other people and engage in meaningful exchanges felt more urgent. Therefore, we organized **9 online events**, attracting around **250 people**, and over **3500 visualizations** on Facebook Live and YouTube. The events included **holidays celebrations** (Passover and Ramadan), as well as **open interfaith encounters and panels** (Prayer for Humanity, Panel on “Baseless love”, Interfaith Encounter Day). In the beginning of the year we also had the opportunity to organize a very enriching event celebrating **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s Day**, attended by diplomats, religious leaders and a diverse audience.

You can watch the recordings on our **[YouTube Channel](#)**.

