

ANNUAL REPORT



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

Overview

2025 was another year shaped by the ongoing war and its impact on everyone involved in our work. Participants, coordinators, and staff continued to face uncertainty, emotional strain, and practical obstacles to meeting in person. In this context, simply maintaining regular dialogue required commitment and flexibility.

Despite these challenges, the Interfaith Encounter Association experienced continued growth. Existing groups remained active, several new groups were established, and interest in joining interfaith encounters remained high. Rather than withdrawing from contact with those perceived as "the other," many people actively sought spaces where they could meet across religious and national lines in a respectful, human setting.

IEA's methodology proved its value once again: by focusing on spiritual, cultural, and existential topics rather than political ones, our groups were able to continue meeting with sincerity and warmth even as the world around them remained tense. The friendships built over years of encounter provided the resilience needed to keep showing up for one another.



Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we look back at the journey of the Interfaith Encounter Association throughout 2025, the core truth of our mission has never been clearer: grassroots, human-to-human connection is not a luxury - it is the very foundation upon which any peaceful future must be built.

The past couple of years have tested the fabric of our societies in ways we could scarcely have imagined. Amidst ongoing regional tensions, political division, and widespread anxiety, it would have been easy for our circles to retreat into isolation.

Instead, 2025 became a testament to the extraordinary resilience of our groups, coordinators, and participants. When the surrounding world met walls of distrust, the communities within the IEA chose to build bridges of understanding.

Throughout 2025, we did not just maintain our presence; we actively worked to heal and sustain our networks. Our regional circles, women's groups, and youth initiatives continued to meet, proving that even in the hardest times, the desire for mutual respect, shared humanity, and constructive encounter remains unshakeable. Every single encounter held this year was a quiet, courageous victory against prejudice and despair.

None of this would have been possible without the unwavering commitment of our community leaders, the bravery of our participants, and the vital generosity of our global donors and friends. You have stood by us, ensuring that the vital work of coexistence did not falter when it was needed most.

As we step forward into the coming year, we carry the profound lessons of 2025 with us. We remain deeply committed to growing our impact, welcoming new voices into our circles, and proving day by day that a different reality is possible when we choose to look into the eyes of our neighbors and truly listen.

With deep gratitude and hope,
Yehuda Stolov Executive Director
Interfaith Encounter Association



INTERFAITH ENCOUNTER GROUPS

In 2025, the Interfaith Encounter Association had **36 active groups** across the Holy Land and beyond, holding **361 encounters** throughout the year.

Our veteran groups continued their steady, meaningful work. The **Jerusalem and Surroundings** group met regularly throughout the year, exploring topics ranging from prayer and spring celebrations to Passover, Eid El Adha, Rosh Hashana, and Hanukkah, always finding in the shared rhythm of the religious calendar a bridge between communities. The **Jaffa** group gathered for dinners, discussions on Ramadan and Ashura, and deeper conversations about Sufism, life after death, and what it means to be a neighbor. The **Haifa** group explored the stories that appear both in the Torah and the Quran, including the creation of the world, Cain and Abel, Noah, and the Tower of Babel, weaving together Jewish, Christian, and Muslim perspectives on shared sacred narratives.

The **Wadi Ara** group, meeting regularly at Ein Shemer, engaged in a rich year-long series on the life cycle, from how couples meet, to childhood, to honoring parents, to mourning and death, exploring how different traditions mark the passages of human life. The **Tower of David Forum** of high-level religious leaders continued its in-depth study of complex topics including religion and state, the Oral Law, and the attitude toward Talmudic sages. The **Religious Leaders Nazareth** group met to discuss prophecy, young people in religious communities, and difficult passages in sacred texts.

Several groups focused on text-based interfaith learning. The **New Testament Study in Jerusalem** and the **New Testament Study Online** continued their multi-year journeys through the books of Acts of the Apostles and Luke, respectively. The **929 Interfaith Encounter** series held multiple sessions on topics that appear in the later scriptural books of the Hebrew Bible, including, divine revelation and mystery, the transience of life, historical precision of religious texts, and religion and state. The Beit Midrash for Israel and the Nations continued its regular sessions throughout the year, bringing participants together to study Jewish texts that explore the relationship between the Jewish people and other nations and faiths.



New groups that launched or significantly expanded in 2025 included **Beer Sheva** group, which began with an enthusiastic group of seven, who expressed how much they had missed this kind of encounter in their city and committed to inviting others to join. **Lower Galilee** group began meeting exploring topics such as fasts, charity, and the Exodus story. **City Center** group (Jerusalem) launched with conversations about social life and fasts. **Nablus Region** group resumed its encounters, with participants demonstrating extraordinary determination to meet despite the logistical challenges of the ongoing conflict. The "**The Good We Share**" social action group launched in June, bringing together participants in trilingual (Hebrew, Arabic, English) encounters focused on community service.

Women's groups continued to be a vital and vibrant part of IEA's work in 2025. The **Women Language Exchange** group, meeting weekly in Jerusalem and online, held dozens of sessions throughout the year, practicing Hebrew and Arabic while discussing topics as varied as religion, universities, food, psychology, animals, art, law, journeys, and the alphabet. This group's consistency and warmth made it one of the most active on the board.

The **Women of Arad–Tel Arad** group had a particularly rich year, meeting multiple times to discuss health, Bedouin communities, trauma, and community projects. They organized a visit to a Bedouin school, hosted a workshop, and went on a year-end trip together. The **Women of Yeruham–Rahme** group met for music, social conversations, and continued to build their cross-community friendship. The **Women of North Jordan Valley** group gathered to discuss holiday traditions, language, and the coming of spring. The **Haifa Women's** group met for a social conversation and supported a bereaved member with a personal visit, a testament to the depth of friendship the group has developed. **Midwives for Peace** group met several times, including sessions on non-violent communication and EMDR (a psychotherapeutic method), exploring how their professional and personal lives intersect with interfaith encounter.

Young people played an important role in IEA's work in 2025. The **Teens Jerusalem** group met regularly throughout the year, discussing topics such as getting to know the other, invisible heroes, holidays, school, customs and traditions, language, and summer vacation. They also went on a trip to the cinema together. The **Young Adults** in Jerusalem group explored university majors, adventures and travel, Hajj, Saturday, and the faith of Isaac and Ishmael, building a close-knit community that continued to grow. The **Mt. Scopus** group continued meeting on topics including invisible heroes, holidays, hope, and what it means to be a good human being.

Debate for Peace, which trains Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Druze students to participate in Model UN simulations, had an exceptionally active year with dozens of sessions, including weekly training meetings, a large public event with 300 participants, and the launch of a Writers' Group that met weekly from October through December. The Bar Ilan University Course on Jewish-Arab Interreligious Dialogue continued to welcome 30 students per session.

The **International Online Group** (renamed the Global Dialogue Series in the fall) brought together participants from multiple continents and religious traditions, exploring topics such as obedience and dissent, conflict resolution, meeting the "other," symbols, and silence and gestures. The **DC and Beyond** group met regularly on Zoom, discussing inspiring figures, depolarization and community building, dementia, spring and our connection with the earth, freedom of speech, and how spiritual practices guide us through conflicting ideologies. A new collaboration with JIDS (Jewish Interfaith Dialogue Society) brought over 50 participants to a joint session in June. The Wilmington, North Carolina **Faith Leaders United** group continued to meet, exploring topics including the most challenging aspects of their work, faith, planning, encountering God, and prayer.



Special events

The **Annual IEA Iftar** took place in March at the Old Shaarei Tzedek building, bringing together 60 participants to celebrate Ramadan and engage in interfaith encounter. The spirit of the evening was one of warmth, shared food, and genuine connection across communities. Our coordinators also joined a very special Iftar meal in cooperation with **AISH Hatorah Center**, in the Old City of Jerusalem.

The **Interfaith Encounter Day** in September brought together 50 participants from across the Holy Land for a day of social conversation, reconnection, and celebration of the year's work.

In November, IEA co-organized a major event marking **60 Years of Nostra Aetate**, the landmark Vatican declaration on the relationship between the Catholic Church and non-Christian religions. Over 100 participants gathered in Jerusalem for a day of reflection, dialogue, and celebration of this milestone in interfaith history.



Our team

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Carolina Frimer
Abier Abd-Aldaim
Salah Aladdin

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Get involved

- 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](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#))
- Partner your institution with us
- 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, 6949 Conservation Dr.; Springfield, VA 22153; USA
- 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 Bruce Aft at rabbibruce@gmail.com.



Contact Us

Hillel 24, PO Box 3814
Jerusalem 91037, Israel

Phone: +972-2-651-0520
Fax: +972-2-651-0557

Email: office@interfaith-encounter.org



www.interfaith-encounter.org

