

# Parents Circle Families Forum

Annual Report 2015



## Bereaved Palestinian and Israeli Families for Peace and Reconciliation



**Palestinian Israeli**  
Bereaved Families for Peace  
פורום משפחות שכולות  
ישראל-פלסטיני בעד שלום  
منتدى العائلات الشكلى  
الفلسطيني-إسرائيلي من أجل السلام

The Parents Circle – Families Forum (PCFF) is a unique, grassroots organization made up of more than 600 Israeli and Palestinian families, who have lost an immediate family member to the conflict.

Our long-term vision is to have a reconciliation process as an integral part of any future peace agreement. We can no longer be satisfied with political agreements which bring temporary ceasefires. We want a permanent, sustainable peace. By creating understanding and humanizing the “other side”, we lay the foundation for reconciliation. We educate the general public and our leaders to understand that reconciliation is possible and essential to stop the bloodshed, prevent future bereavement and achieve a lasting peace.





## 2015 – Holding on to Hope

We cannot afford to give up hope. We dare not give in to waves of violence engulfing both societies in Israel and Palestine. We, who have paid the highest price, can share our stories to promote reconciliation, non-violence and an understanding of the other side. We continue with our work so that our children and grandchildren will have the opportunity for a safer life. The possibility of hope is the unique element the PCFF contributes through our work in schools, our narrative projects for adults, the public Peace Square, our summer youth program, and public awareness both locally and internationally.

This past year, we have an even greater appreciation for the people who make the small steps towards reconciliation every day. We wish to take this opportunity to introduce you to the people who make our work possible. They are the extraordinary staff and members of the Parents Circle, who continue with a dedication for creating change. Through their eyes you will experience some of the highlights and occasions which moved them never to give up during these difficult and very violent times.

Let us wish for better times in 2016. Let us wish for the creation of hope for those who have none. Let us wish for the realization that no person will be free until all people are.

## The Moments that Made a Difference

### From Our Leadership

**Wajeeh Tmeizi, Palestinian Chairperson:** "My special moments came from the opportunities I had at the Peace Square in Israel. By bringing a Palestinian message of reconciliation to such a varied audience and seeing their reaction of hope and empathy to our plight, I felt I was making a difference."

**Yael Admi, Israeli Chairperson:** "The most moving moment I had this year was when our Palestinian members told us that they are proud of us, their partners, that even in the most difficult days, we listen to them and we are not afraid to stand up and demand freedom and dignity for all of us."

**Mazen Faraj, Palestinian PCFF Director:** "A bereaved mother from Jenin traveled through many checkpoints and dangers to come meet with her Israeli counterparts as well as to an alumni unilateral meeting. Her children were reluctant to let her go. Nevertheless, she insisted. She is totally committed to our message and to educating her children against violence. She is the reason I continue and hope for change."

**Doubi Schwartz, Israeli PCFF Director:** "My most moving moment was when a Palestinian from Gaza, who happened to be near the Peace Square, came by to listen and talk to us. He was so moved that he is now in constant contact with us and in fact, spoke from Gaza about peace by phone to the crowd."



## Our Projects

### Parallel Narrative Project:

To date, more than 700 Palestinians and Israelis have participated in the Parallel Narrative Experience (PNE) workshops and have spread our message of reconciliation in their communities. Lawyers, psychologists, students, bereaved families, women, social activists, were just some of the groups who participated. In 2015 we began working with alumni of our project. 100 alumni participated in a conference where they shared their struggles with dealing with their communities in these difficult times. They are working on joint projects aimed at increasing hope and trust in Palestinian-Israeli cooperation.



**Rakefet Enoch, Projects Manager:** "One of the Israeli participants in the Bereaved PNE Workshop, who lost his uncle, was so moved because one of the Palestinian participants, who did not speak Hebrew or English had asked to connect on Facebook and then phoned him even though they could only exchange greetings. Although he shared the experience with his wife, she could not understand the significance. Only those who participated in the workshop could understand. This gesture led him to understand the strength of the group."

**Ahmad Al Jafaari, Website and Social Media Manager:** "Every time I accompany a group as a translator for the Parallel Narrative projects, I feel that peace is within reach. If it were only possible to lead the two nations through a similar process."

**Shiri Barr, Projects Manager:** "My most memorable moment was during the height of the violence. The Israeli alumni gathered to be with like-minded people instead of being alone with their fears. A Palestinian member of the PCFF spoke to the group through Skype and he, as a Palestinian, was encouraging the Israelis not to lose hope. I felt thankful for being a part of the Parents Circle and for being able to offer Israelis something to hold on to, knowing that this short encounter would go a long way in their task to bring a different voice to the public arena."

## On the Road to Reconciliation Dialogue Meetings

We held nearly 360 dialogue meetings this year, which is really a great achievement as in the latter part of the year, Palestinian members could not get permits to speak in schools.

**Ossama Abu-Ayash, Projects Manager:** "We successfully organized a screening of our documentary, *Two Sided Story*, and a dialogue meeting for a group of 23 women in Sanour, Jenin. Although this was not the first time we had met with groups in Jenin, they were reluctant to host a meeting in which an Israeli would be speaking. Sanour has witnessed much violence in past years so hosting an organization that works with Israelis is still very strange for them. We decided that I would conduct the meeting without an Israeli partner. I managed to utilize the documentary to break down some walls of mistrust and by the end of the discussion, many of the participants were more ready to accept the PCFF's vision, asked many questions and showed interest in joining future narrative groups."

**Nadine Quomsieh, Office Manager:** "The most significant moment for me this year was the Palestinian facilitators training weekend in Askelan (Ashkelon). Veteran facilitators shared their experiences – giving each other and new facilitators powerful tools to help them further spread our messages."



## Social Media

Crack in the Wall is the PCFF's Arabic-Hebrew Facebook community which is the main channel through which we communicate our activities and messages to the Palestinian and Israeli public. In an adverse reality between two torn nations, Crack in the Wall succeeds in talking in one voice to two peoples, in two languages.

**Sharon Kalimi Misheiker, Website and Social Media Manager:** "For me the most significant thing about the Crack in the Wall community, even more significant than any momentary success, is its stability over time. The most moving moments in "Crack in the Wall" occur when a war is raging yet our Facebook community continues to grow. More Palestinians and Israelis join daily, knowing that here people from both sides think differently and act to change the situation."

## The Peace Square

The Parents Circle responded to the recent surge of violence by bringing back the Peace Square – hosted in the mixed Jewish-Arab city of Jaffa. Every weekend since the violence erupted, the Peace Square is constructed and dozens of Israelis are invited to hear members share their stories, engage in dialogue with the other side and find solidarity for their hopes for non-violence and a peaceful solution. Israeli members also attended and spoke at non-violence rallies in Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, Haifa and Beer-Sheva, published op-eds and gave interviews to the media, resolute in answering fear with hope.

**Efrat Tal, Director of Grants and Finance:** "I am so proud to be part of an organization whose members and team make a brave choice to overcome personal fears and overwhelming societal pressure and truly commit to each other and to the cause. There is a moment at the beginning of every member-led event when the Palestinian and Israeli members greet each other and their unity is apparent despite their very separate lives. It is breathtaking."



## Youth Program

This summer, 40 Palestinian and Israeli youth, aged 14-18, joined by 8 counsellors, held another successful summer youth program. Over four days, the youth engaged in games, discussions, site visits, outdoor activities, art projects and more. In light of the role that youth played in the outbreak and escalation of violence this year, it is even more important that Israeli and Palestinian youth are given the opportunity to form and strengthen beliefs in non-violence and for peace.



**Dana Wegman, Youth Program Director:** "This summer's theme culminated in a mask-making art workshop. The youth were divided into joint Palestinian-Israeli pairs. The first stage required delicacy and trust as each participant laid layers of plastered bandages on their peer's face. The youth had bonded so much over those days that they showed no reluctance and trusted their partners in this vulnerable position."

**Muhamed El Bau, Youth Program Director:** "I invited my young Palestinian cousin to the summer program. He was extremely reluctant as he had never met and really did not want to meet the 'Israeli enemy'. After much persuasion, he joined. I will not forget those moments throughout the summer camp when I watched my cousin engage in the activities with the Israeli participants and I saw him gradually discover the humanity of the 'other'."

## The Women's Group

During 2015, our Women's Group focused on training and capacity building to give women the opportunity to join the cadre of Dialogue Meeting facilitators. On International Women's Day, right before Israeli election day, hundreds of bereaved and other Palestinian and Israeli women gathered in Tel Aviv where we set up a monument dedicated to the Future Victims of the Conflict and encouraged the Israeli public to "Vote for Life".

**Aisha Khateeb, co-Director of the Women's Group:** "It has been a privilege to be a part of training the women to find the most moving parts of their stories. Watching the women build their capacities and gain confidence has been so special."

**Tima Rabie, Director of Finance and Operations:** "This year I stepped out of my usual role and accompanied Palestinian member, Bushra Awad and Israeli member, Robi Damelin two bereaved mothers to New York and New Delhi to attend Women in the World and to Paris for the launching of the French book, *The Tears are the Same Color*. It was my honor to translate for and give voice to Bushra in English. The most moving moment was watching Bushra leave her village and fly for the first time."

**Robi Damelin, co-Director of the Women's Group:** "The highlight of my work with the Women's Group was developing the Taking Steps Embroidered Bird Project. Recognizing the potential for increasing the women's income and with it their position, and at the same time spreading our message of reconciliation both locally and internationally has been more than rewarding."



## Members Meetings and Capacity Building

This year we were able to double the number of facilitator trainings and solidarity meetings offered to our members including an Iftar, a joint breaking of the fast during Ramadan.

**Shiri Ourian, Executive Director, American Friends of the Parents Circle:** “On a visit to meet with the PCFF, I was told, just a few days prior to our meeting that it might not be possible for the Palestinians to join us because of the closures, permit restrictions, violence and fear. When I arrived at the offices in Ramat Efal, several Palestinian staff members had made the difficult journey to be with us that day. While the news blared violent events, the staff and members were laughing, hugging, breaking bread and discussing, without doubt, the future of our work together. I was aware that even such a simple staff meeting was a small miracle.”

**Ronit Maor, Bookkeeper:** "My special moments are the staff meetings in Beit Jala, Palestine. I have been working with many team members for many years, yet the warm and generous welcome in the Beit Jala office is still always moving."

**Iris Meisler, Office Manager:** “My most moving moment was to see the concern the Palestinians showed when there was an explosion in South Tel Aviv. They called several times to find out if everyone was safe. What an affirmation of trust and recognition of the humanity of all.”

*"Connecting Narratives", Shai Kremer*



## International Relations

Our members and staff participated in various delegations, seminars and panels in the United States, England, India, Germany, France, Italy and Belgium.

**Bassam Aramin, Palestinian Spokesperson:** “2015 had so many highlights like opening the J Street Conference in Washington, DC with a moment of silence, alongside my Israeli partner, and the display of the mural we made during the Gaza war, at the United Nations. But the event which was most moving was my trip to Germany with my Israeli partner and member of the PCFF, Rami Elhanan, the son of a Holocaust survivor, who had refused to go to Germany. Eventually, I persuaded him to make the trip. This trip cemented my relationship with Rami, two fathers who lost our beloved daughters.”

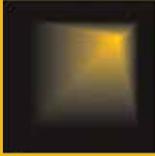
**Robi Damelin, Israeli Spokesperson:** "There were so many moving moments. I was moved to tears at Congregation Kol Ami in White Plains, NY where Bassam and I were invited to speak on Yom Kippur. At Women in the World in Los Angeles, New York and New Delhi, I was alongside women from all over the world fighting to make a difference. The most moving of all was to sit on stage at Lincoln Center in NY with my partner, alongside celebrities like Meryl Streep, Helen Mirren, and Jon Stewart and to receive a standing ovation by an audience of more than 3,000 people."

## Our Supporters

We are thankful to our supporters from all over the world. We are moved not only by their financial support but by their expressions of concern and solidarity during times of violence. We would like to thank our friends all over the world for their support which makes our work possible.\*

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\*Donations of \$5,000 or more.



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