

Oslo's 25th Anniversary: Rebuilding the Israeli peace camp

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**SEEDS
OF PEACE**

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General Introduction

On the 13th September 1993, the Oslo Accords were signed on the White House lawn. Yet 25 years on, peace seems as elusive as ever. In a series of essays by Fathom Journal to mark the anniversary, both [Yair Hirschfeld](#), an Israeli academic who led negotiations with the PLO in Oslo, and [Hussein Agha](#), who has been involved in Palestinian peace negotiations for three decades, emphasised the importance of including previously excluded groups in negotiations and the role of civil society in peacebuilding. Hirschfeld discusses ‘Annex III’ and ‘Annex IV’ of the Declaration of Principles which he authored which included a long list for cooperation and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, although he adds that “very little action was taken to implement these components”.

These claims echo conclusions from a comprehensive report published by BICOM last July, [‘A Future for Israeli-Palestinian Peacebuilding’](#). In the paper, Dr Ned Lazarus argued that grassroots peacebuilding efforts were a vital missing ingredient in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Using data based on field work and academic and governmental evaluations spanning over 20 years, he demonstrates that such projects create constituencies for peace, change attitudes, create trust and empathy between peoples, and improve life on the ground in practical ways.

Lazarus’ exploration of the topic was an attempt to better understand the feasibility and dynamics originating from Track 2 discussions co-chaired by BICOM and Chatham House in late 2016. While current and former Israeli and Palestinian officials and academics evaluated and argued over the respective merits of different diplomatic paradigms, the participants overwhelmingly agreed on how crucial building constituencies of peace was; BICOM’s summary of the discussions noted that “Israelis and Palestinians believe there is a need for further research on how peace constituencies and a culture of peace can be strengthened and how messages can be developed that will resonate with different groups, including the young, within each nation...”

Yet while there may be widespread understanding over the effectiveness of “cross-border” and “shared society” initiatives as well as the vital role constituencies of peace play in facilitating and subsequently sustaining an Israeli-Palestinian political agreement, missing

from the conversation has been how to build such constituencies. It is this question that the first part of this report, written by activist Noam Shuster-Eliassi seeks to answer.

Drawing on her early memories of the Oslo Accords, as well as years of experience in peacebuilding initiatives with populations historically excluded from the peace process, Shuster-Eliassi provides a conceptual framework for strengthening and expanding peace constituencies in Israel. She argues that the traditional Israeli peace camp needs to break out of its comfort zone and stop talking to the same people over and over again. She identifies four key communities – Russian speakers, ultra-Orthodox, Palestinian citizens of Israel and perhaps most controversially the national religious – that need to engage with the existing peace camp in a dialogue about their different visions of peace.

She also presents a series of operating principles for the Israeli peace camp, international diplomats, and philanthropists for more effective work within Israeli society. In her conclusion, she argues that “many in the Israeli public believe that only the Right can provide a direction for the country and that the Left is stuck with irrelevant ideas” adding that “it is essential that the public is shown that another way is possible – one beyond dichotomies of right and left.” This, she argues, can only be done by honest, determined and courageous dialogue between the traditional peace camp and those who think differently.

The second part of the paper is the product of BICOM’s continued engagement with several important Israeli grassroots organisations. It highlights some groups who in different ways are seeking – as per Shuster-Eliassi’s recommendations – to reach across divides within Israeli society to strengthen constituencies of peace.

Siach Shalom (Talking Peace) has engaged with the rabbinic leadership of the Israeli National Religious right wing about visions of peace and has conducted dialogues with Jewish, Muslim and Christian religious populations to help them become a positive and constructive part of the peace effort. Women Waging Peace stresses that it is “nonpartisan, unaffiliated, and by design, uncommitted to any particular peace

Section 1: Building Constituencies of Peace in Israel, Noam Shuster-Eliassi

Advancing peace in Israel - a personal introduction

plan” which it argues enables the movement to reach a diverse population of Jewish and Arab women. Specifically choosing not to speak about occupation has led to criticism of Women Waging Peace by the Israeli left, and some women have refused to join the movement until it ‘calls out’ the occupation. But Women Waging Peace argue for a different model – one that doesn’t fall “into the trap of a 51-year-old zero-sum mentality that relies on binaries such as us-versus-them and peace-versus-security... which have split the country”.

Other groups BICOM spoke to continue to scale up and reach large numbers of people. The Peres Centre delivers medical treatment and community healthcare, promotes environmental sustainability, and cultivates youth leadership and peace education; Eco-Peace brings Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli environmentalists together in cooperative efforts to advance sustainable regional development; Seeds of Peace uses cross-conflict relationships to shift attitudes and foster personal and interpersonal change among their participants; Parents Circle, comprised of Israeli and Palestinian families who have lost family members in the conflict, aims to create a framework for a reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians and work towards achieving an accepted political agreement.

In conversations with the BICOM research team, these groups discussed their achievements, detailed their challenges, and described barriers to scaling up their work and activities. Many of them echoed one of the findings of BICOM’s peacebuilding paper, that the “current macro-political context of the Middle East is profoundly challenging for civil society initiatives associated with ‘peace’”. However, even in the absence of a political horizon, these groups continue in their important work strengthening civil society.

In 1993, during first or second grade, I remember my parents being optimistic about this concept called “peace” between Israelis and Palestinians. My mother picked me up from school one day particularly happy and told me that we were “going to watch the peace agreement being signed”. I shared her happiness, although I didn’t fully understand the details, and I was also confused, because the day before I hadn’t been allowed to go to the Tel Aviv mall because of a warning about a terrorist attack. I realised that peace meant calm and quiet but also felt the current tension.

Shortly after the Oslo Accords, my parents moved to Neve Shalom/Wahat Al Salam, the only village in Israel where Jews and Arabs live together by choice. By second grade I shared a classroom with Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel and started to become fluent in Arabic. Yet very early on, because I watched the news, I realised that the peace my parents hoped for – and which had partially influenced their decision to move to the village – wasn’t coming any time soon. I also intuitively knew that what I was a part of at Neve Shalom/Wahat Al Salam was something unique and very different to what was going on outside the village (because my extended family would tell me, and because I noticed my cousins felt distant from those Arab friends and neighbours of ours who became like family to me.)

I also started noticing something else – initially connected to my identity but subsequently something broader – about what peace means in Israel. Whenever I spoke Arabic, people would often mistake me for an Arab. While this made a certain amount of sense (because I inherited my mother’s strong Middle Eastern Iranian roots), when I told them I was Jewish, they subsequently assumed that I must have learned the language for intelligence purposes in the army. This binary aspect of peoples’ perception – that a person knows Arabic either because they’re an Arab or for security reasons (rather than because it might be an integral part of their identity from home) – indicated to me that the assumptions within much of the ‘traditional

peace camp' were too narrow.

This experience helped to shape the way I came to understand my identity, and is a partial testament to the failure and the problems of the traditional peace camp I am part of, grew up amongst and wish to repair from its present and historical mistakes.

The Israeli peace camp's challenge

In today's public discourse in Israel, it is difficult to use the word "peace" without experiencing a certain level of delegitimization or fear of being immediately dismissed. There is a historical and political context to this. The Intifada of the early 2000s which followed the Oslo peace process of the 1990's seriously undermined much of the Israeli public's belief in the vision of peace that the peace camp was promoting. But it's not just this. Historically, the elite traditionally associated with the peace camp is mostly secular and is the same camp which is perceived as being responsible for discriminating against populations of non-European immigrants over a period of decades which has stoked ethnic tensions between Ashkenazi (European Jews) and Mizrahi ("Oriental", Jews from the Arab and Muslim world). Even though the right wing has succeeded in positioning itself as the political camp that seeks to repair this discrimination, it has failed to do so, despite its many years in power.

Yet what makes the challenge of promoting peace more difficult is the historic exclusion of many components of Israeli society from the peace process. In fact, during the 'Oslo years', both Israeli and Palestinian societies – both of which are highly fragmented – experienced the exclusion of several groups, including the most strategically important ones. On the Palestinian side, this included former detainees and prisoners. Many Palestinians felt excluded by the non-West Bankers who returned with Yasser Arafat from Tunis and who dominated the peace talks and subsequently the Palestinian Authority (PA). Moreover, religious leaders and more traditional communities were excluded from both sides and never considered as constructive options or voices. This constituted one of the biggest mistakes the peace camp has ever made.

Expanding constituencies for peace – key populations

In an attempt to help alleviate these challenges faced by the traditional peace camp, below is a discussion about the characteristics of the most strategic groups in Israeli society who have been traditionally excluded from peacebuilding.

The Russian speaking population

The Russian speaking population, which numbers almost one million, is a huge force in Israeli politics. While most have integrated into Israeli society, many still maintain their language and other factors of their origins. Moreover, the younger generation which grew up in Israel no longer automatically supports the 'leadership'. The main wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union came in the early 90's, at a similar time to the increase in suicide bombings. In fact, one of the deadliest bombings took place at the Dolphinarium Tel Aviv nightclub which was directly associated with the Russian speaking population. This was one of the factors that led to a perception that the Russian speaking population is right wing, although today the opinions of this population are more complex and nuanced.

There is a large untapped potential among this community to become a constructive voice in seeking practical solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The group is generally secular and supports separating Church and State – many influential leaders complain that in Russian speaking countries they were considered Jews yet when they reached Israel they were treated as (non-Jewish) 'Russians'. Many are not swayed by romantic or religious notions of the Jewish historical and religious connection to its ancestral homeland in the West Bank. During projects and activities with this community in which I participated, it became clear that while many are concerned about security, they are also primarily driven by pragmatism and practicalities. We also heard from business people the wish for Israel to better integrate into the Middle East, which a peace agreement would help facilitate.

The ultra-Orthodox population

The ultra-Orthodox population is growing in numbers and has huge potential to influence the discourse on peace. Because this group is strict

in its religious observance, it is stereotypically considered part of the Likud led right wing 'national camp'. But this is not necessarily the case. The community is far from homogenous and is undergoing many changes in its relationship to its interaction with society, the army and employment. The community's attitude to the concept of "land" is very different to that of the religious nationalist relationship, which makes the ultra-Orthodox a key, rather than an obstacle, to peace. And while the two largest settlements in the West Bank are populated by ultra-Orthodox, the residents live there for economic rather than ideological reasons.

Historically, the most respected Ashkenazi and Sephardi ultra-Orthodox leadership have issued religious rulings that pave the way for this community to support future solutions of territorial compromise. In the 1990's Rabbi Ovadya Yosef, the spiritual leader of Shas, presented a ruling which concluded that Israel was allowed to withdraw from land in the West Bank if it would help save lives. And Rav Shach, one of the rabbinic leaders of the Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox, opposed the expansion of some settlements based on the principle which appears in the Talmud not to 'rebel against the nations'

While small groups of ultra-Orthodox are engaged in this issue, Israeli society should prepare the ground for leaders of this community to be around the table and included in discussions around peace.

The religious Zionist population

The religious Zionist population has become increasingly influential over the last decade and probably represents the most complex and strategic community in the challenge of expanding constituencies for peace. This population is slowly overtaking 'secular Zionism' as the new elite in Israeli society, with its representatives fully active in the IDF, Knesset and other avenues of power and influence. Based on a current reading of the political map, Israel will be unable to reach a long term sustainable agreement with the Palestinians without this constituency.

This group possesses a variety of leaders and a variety of opinions. Some are moving politically rightwards and prioritise the principle

of the unity and sanctity of the 'Land of Israel' as a way to achieve redemption. Yet many religious Zionist youth are grappling with the tensions between competing principles in Jewish thought and exploring prioritising elements such as the sanctity and unity of the 'People of Israel' (rather than the Land of Israel). Such a religious outlook facilitates the beginning of a conversation about peace to advance without the ideology of the Greater Land of Israel being central.

It is also the settler community which comes into the most direct contact with Palestinians. This encounter is far from equal, yet when it happens in an authentic way, it is far less idealized and includes greater exposure to the practical daily reality of life in the West Bank than those of typical "Tel-Aviv liberals" who maintain dialogue with Palestinians.

The population of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel

Often overlooked and misunderstood, Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel were excluded from the conversation about peace rather than becoming a key factor and mediator between both sides. Too often in dialogue groups people ask whether if a Palestinian state was created they would move there. Yet this question reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel as located between two worlds. On the one hand, they possess a desire to build a life in their ancestral land within the borders of sovereign Israel; on the other they have a natural desire to see their people, the Palestinian people, live in dignity and freedom.

This raises several critical questions that remain open and can only be explored through engagement. How can the desires of this community be bridged? What contribution can they have on the process? Yet from my experience in this field, even engagement itself between this group and the majority Israeli-Jewish population is challenging. In December 2006, the Higher Arab Monitoring Committee and the Committee of Arab Local Council Heads published a 'Vision Document' which called for economic and social equality in Israel, as well as a 'Consensual Democratic system' which most Israeli Jews oppose. And many political leaders are anxious about engaging with this population due to the perceived political cost among their supporters.

Ultimately, this community possesses huge potential to bridge between Israelis and Palestinians. One act as a key issue will be to help the community strengthen itself internally, which may subsequently help it to play a greater role in peacemaking.

[Principles for the Israeli peace camp, philanthropists and international diplomats](#)

A non-violent, fair solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will include elements of equality, freedom of movement and justice. However, this must be built strategically though an inclusive and long-term strategy. No scenario for a sustainable breakthrough with the Palestinians exists without these populations nor without recalculating our perceptions of peace to involve representatives from these communities and space needs to be created for these voices to be heard.

Below are some principles that the traditional Israeli peace camp, philanthropists and international diplomats should consider adopting:

[Include and strengthen new voices](#)

Discourse on peace needs to be changed to include and to strengthen these new voices. The concept of “peace” was not invented by Meretz or the Labour party and does not belong to the residents of north Tel Aviv. The term must be broken down and allowed to also be defined by people and activists from other places. Unusual suspects from these populations will surprise others by the diversity of their voices and will probably make some people feel uncomfortable. Yet this is an integral part of the process of peace building. There are excellent journalists and writers in religious newspapers who are voices of peace and who constitute a crucial part of every initiative, and the work of an individual from a traditional, right-wing community is significantly more difficult than that of some of the strongest and most famous peace activists. The traditional ‘peace camp’ should create mechanisms – whether in projects, writing, and activities – that will oversee and ensure a wider representation of marginalized groups among the participants. International diplomats should employ political advisors from these communities and use them to map out the key stakeholders in positions of influence.

A common mistake is to say that “there are no suitable people in these communities”. But these people exist. They must be found. The Israeli peace camp and international diplomats should go out into the field and spend days and weeks with other voices. The most dangerous thing is to, once again, forget about the people the peace camp left behind.

Many international diplomats are not yet aware of the crucial importance of reaching out to and engaging with all the different sectors within Israeli society. Such a process will require diplomats moving out of what some may see as their comfort zones and meeting those considered outside the Israeli liberal secular mainstream. Embassies should find and employ political advisors from each community discussed above; map out and identify the people and influencers in each sector; arrange meetings with these people – who might include social activists in the ‘periphery’, spiritual leaders, ultra-Orthodox women trying to stand for the Knesset or advisors to MKs on the right – discover their priorities and worries. This can’t be cosmetic or short term but should reflect an ongoing commitment to deepen understanding of Israeli society. Decisions over effective funding for projects should be made in light of such meetings.

[Integrate / Accept difference](#)

International diplomats and the Israeli peace camp need to learn to sit with honesty, bravery and determination with Israelis who think differently. Difficult questions about ending occupation can and should be asked – but out of a genuine desire to understand rather than to expose the perceived ignorance of the other, whose point of departure is different and who deals with peace-related issues in a different way. Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, which is of utmost importance, has been taking place for years. But the only way to make progress is for the traditional peace camp to also sit with other Israelis and discuss visions for Israel. Dialogue is not only to be held with those beyond the wall.

A change is happening in the philanthropic world based on the realization that additional groups need to be engaged with rather than the ‘usual suspects’. While some organisations are willing to engage with voices on the periphery,

this is often regarding issues on which they agree – such as shortages of housing or discrimination. What is also needed however is an engagement with such peripheral voices on more controversial issues such as resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A deep commitment to engaging in internal domestic dialogue within Israel – which inevitably involves including people with radical views within the tent – can come with a political price that not every organisation is willing to pay. It will take courage for philanthropic groups to invest in dialogue with groups whose political positions they may not agree with.

Religious leaders are key to legitimacy

Violent conflicts cannot end without at least some support from religious leaders. For many centuries, Jewish leaders were an integral part of the Arab world and Middle East and the religious world contains knowledge and experience on how Jews can live in peace and brotherhood with their Muslim neighbours. While not everything needs to be copied from the past, there is much that can be drawn upon. Many Halachic edicts exist that support brave political processes of reconciliation. Even the use of halakhic language by the Israeli peace camp will turn the work into something far more relevant.

Consider which political positions may need to be recalculated

The above process will also require asking difficult, self-critical questions for the Israeli peace camp and even international diplomats. It may be time to consider that something in the ideas proposed by these groups has stopped working and needs to be recalculated. Old frameworks may need to be disassembled. The peace camp may even need to show flexibility and to compromise on some of its positions. Considering that the two-state solution has been stuck for 20 years, even Palestinians may be happy to hear alternatives and new ideas.

Many in the Israeli public believe that only the Right can provide a direction for the country and that the Left is stuck with irrelevant ideas. It is essential that the public is shown that another way is possible – one beyond dichotomies of right and left.

Section 2: Peace Organisations in Israel: Achievements and Challenges

The following case studies detail specific grassroots organisations in Israel. They were asked about their achievements, the challenges they have encountered, and the greatest barriers to their ability to scale up their work and activities.



Talking Peace | שיח שלום

Case Study 1 | Siach Shalom (Talking Peace): Engaging religious leaders in the push for peace

What do you do and what are the main achievements to date?

Siach Shalom (Talking Peace) is a non-partisan civil society peace project that was co-founded by Dr Avinoam Rosenak, Ms Sharon Leshem-Zinger and Dr Alick Isaacs in 2009. Siach Shalom operates under the aegis of Mishkenot Sha'ananim in Jerusalem.

Our primary objective is to introduce religiously sensitive group dynamic facilitation into peace dialogue from the highest levels of national leadership to the grassroots and local community level. The unique mode of facilitation that we have developed allows us to meet the goal of engaging the religious populations – who have traditionally been most opposed to Middle East peace – and help them to become a positive and constructive part of the peace effort.

In our first few years we focused almost exclusively on bringing the most influential religious leaders of the Israeli National-Religious camp into group dynamic processes with left-leaning secular and religious/moderate leaders inside Israel. Over time the scope of our projects has expanded to include group dynamic dialogue processes between National-Religious Rabbis and senior representatives of the international diplomatic community, religious and political leaders in Palestinian society

and both Muslim and Christian leaders from elsewhere in the region. Since the beginning of 2018 we have been engaged in an expansion process that consists of training facilitators in our method and opening up group dynamic dialogue processes about peace in multiple community centres around the country.

As for our main achievements: Siach Shalom has blazed a new trail in terms of engaging with the rabbinic leadership of the National-Religious right-wing in Israel about visions of peace. We have opened the door for others to include this community in NGO peace work and through meetings and numerous presentations in foreign offices and parliaments around the world (including the White House, The State Department, the British Parliament and the FCO), which have helped strengthen the case for the importance of addressing religious issues in the context of the Middle East peace effort.

Our work has specifically helped to heal some of the public (i.e. between groups) and private (i.e. between individuals) rifts inside Israeli society by creating a space for meaningful engagement and understanding where people from opposite poles of the political spectrum feel 'heard' by each other. In a number of cases this healing has helped to deescalate potentially violent clashes over sensitive issues. Our sense is that the talking about the most crucial personal and painful issues of the conflict has hardly begun. Destructive arguing about yesterday's news abounds. Politics fills the airwaves. However, serious personal engagement inside and between the peoples about the existential issues that define our circumstances has hardly begun. When people don't see this, and don't commit to the importance of making time for this, the cycles of misunderstanding and hardness of heart are difficult to break. This is most pronounced when Palestinians are bound by anti-normalisation and fear of retribution for engaging in discourse.

Our interventions have helped deescalate potential clashes between the Hebron settlers and the international observers of TIPH. We have also been indirectly responsible for the establishment of a range of peace efforts and initiatives that appeal to a broader spectrum of Israeli society than the traditional "peace" camp. Many of these are the result of collaborations between people who encountered each other in Siach Shalom.

What are the greatest barriers to implementing your goals?

As an organisation we face a number of key barriers that we are working to overcome in order to achieve our goals:

1. Too many people have given up on peace and are cynical about the value of dialogue. There is a perception that all the talking has been done and now the time has come for action. Our sense is that the talking about the most crucial personal and painful issues of the conflict has hardly begun. When people don't see this and don't commit to the importance of making time for this the cycles of misunderstanding and hardness of heart are difficult to break. This is most pronounced when Palestinians are bound by anti-normalisation and fear of retribution for engaging in discourse.

2. The skills required for facilitating religiously sensitive and inclusive group dynamic dialogue about peace are not easily acquired. There is a desperate need for facilitators to be trained and have work in this field.

3. Though a significant amount of our work focuses on facilitating internal Israeli group dynamic processes, Israeli-Palestinian cross border dialogue is an extremely important element of our vision as well. This faces the challenge of finding places where Israelis and Palestinians can meet in a genuinely safe environment. Places like this are rare. The political, cultural and physical barriers that need to be overcome are extremely challenging and overcoming them requires highly skilled staff.

4. Funding for peace work and social cohesion tends to be too compartmentalised. Many seek short-term results and few have patience for long term social change projects. Many miss the obvious connections between dialogue about peace, the religious/secular divide, politics and social cohesion, diplomacy and international relations. This applies not only to funders but to scholarship as well that separates these areas into different disciplines, overlooking the matrix of interactions and interdependence that ties them together.

5. Finally, public discourse in the press and in politics is fuelled by the perpetuation of division. Our work is based on the creation

of unlikely or even impossible combinations. Entrenchment in camps is good politics and good business but the price being paid for it is severe. This long-term price is known to everyone but too many are locked in by group identities that entrench divisions.

How can you scale up your work? What else do you need in order to achieve more of your objectives?

Despite all of the above, we experience a tremendous thirst in both Israeli and Palestinian society for deep interaction and engagement about peace. Our feeling is that politics aside, people are ready to engage and the ground is there for a massive scaling up of the work we are doing.

This involves training both Israeli and Palestinian, religious and secular, male and female facilitators. It means building our organisational capacity and establishing groups throughout the country in which people of conflicting identities can engage with each other in a skillfully, facilitated, constructive and transformative encounter. This network has to be built slowly and carefully so that we can ensure the quality of the group processes and create confidence in the value of the encounter.

To do this we need organisational support and not only project-based long-term financial support. Tremendous energies are spent on fundraising, in which it would be nice to direct to the work itself. Moreover, we still need to hire additional staff and rent appropriate office space. Financial instability for people working in this area is a source of ongoing anxiety and an obstacle to hiring additional staff to increase output.

After two years of careful preparation, together with an outside evaluator, we have built a five year plan for large scale expansion that includes very specific details about how and where each new group we open will be organised and implemented.

To date approximately 300 people have participated in Siach Shalom. All of these are highly influential leaders. In the expansion plan we will be opening up four leadership and facilitator training cohorts as well as four grassroots groups. Two of these have been adopted by the Jerusalem municipality and

will address the religious/secular as well as the Jewish/Arab tensions in the city. In 2019 and 2020 our four leadership groups will be supplemented by eight and 13 grassroots groups respectively, reaching a total of approximately 500 participants in three years.



WomenWagePeace

Case study 2 | Women Wage Peace (WWP): Working to put women at the forefront of politics and national security

What do you do and what are the achievements of your work to date?

Our goal is to reach an honourable and bilaterally acceptable political agreement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We focus on three objectives: to increase our numbers through reaching as diverse a group of women as possible; to pressure our elected leaders to prioritise diplomacy over military options; and to increase women's participation in all aspects of national security and peacemaking, as mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – to which Israel was an early signatory in 2005.

While we are political, we remain nonpartisan, unaffiliated, and by design, uncommitted to any particular peace plan, thus enabling us to reach out to a diverse population of women – Right, Centre, Left, religious and secular, Jewish and Arab – in at least 85 different geographical regions throughout Israel, including the Palestinian territories.

What first comes to mind in terms of those activities we feel have been most impactful, are our two mass marches: the 2016 March of Hope, which drew 30,000; and the 2017 Journey to Peace, which drew even larger crowds over two weeks, including 3,000 Palestinian women from the West Bank. Both these activities far exceeded our expectations in terms of attendance (including the participation of Palestinian women at a time of increased violence), domestic and international media exposure, and an increase in our membership.

This year, the first of four integrated activities has already proven successful beyond anyone's expectation. What we call the Mothers' Tent (which we named in part to honour our

predecessors, the Four Mothers movement, [an Israeli protest movement founded in 1997 by four mothers of soldiers serving in southern Lebanon which pushed for an Israeli withdrawal]) is a "soft place for round discussions" as one of our members aptly put it. It was pitched in the Wohl Rose Garden opposite the Knesset at the opening of the legislature's summer session. Our skepticism about its somewhat out-of-the-way location gave way during its first week of operation. From 9 May until 20 June we had over 6,000 visitors including Members of Knesset, school children and their teachers, tourists visiting the Knesset, as well as ordinary people and distinguished leaders from all over the country and abroad. In fact, a number of religious youth groups were actually meeting Arab women for the very first time in the Mothers' Tent. This pop-up project has also dovetailed nicely with our weekly presence in the Knesset plenum and our consistent presence in relevant Knesset committee meetings.

Through all three of these endeavours, we have established high visibility in a relatively short time and, several MKs have already returned the word "hope" and the notion that "peace is possible" to the political arena.

What are the greatest barriers to implementing your goals?

We cannot implement major projects without raising a large amount of money. Yet, given our innovative, non-protest-oriented, non-hierarchical approach, we can never be sure in the planning stages if we're going to succeed. All non-profits are limited in their risk-taking and WWP is also a volunteer movement, which further limits our fundraising capacity since we are dependent on members finding the time and sometimes resources to reach out to their contacts. We are always pleased to share that half of our funding comes from Israel and half from abroad, reflecting a very high ratio of domestic giving. In order to remain politically non-affiliated, we do not solicit funds from foreign governments or politically-identified foundations or other groups.

Another challenge is one of perception. We are a movement that draws women from the Left, Right and Centre. Yet part of our challenge is that peace is associated with the Left while security is associated with the Right. We are working to change the paradigm and create

an inclusive culture of discourse that respects people from across the religious or political spectrum. We also face challenges with trying to increase our membership is dealing with the sense of despair and a lack of belief that change is possible.

We are criticised, sometimes strongly, by the Left because we do not condemn or even speak about the occupation as such. Instead we use a different language, one based on the principle of “no shaming and no blaming.” We have friends who say they will not join WWP until we call out the occupation. Our response is that by falling into the trap of a 51-year-old zero-sum mentality that relies on binaries such as us-versus-them and peace-versus-security, as well as on language such as “there’s no partner for peace on the other side”, all of which have split the country, we are in fact preventing progress from being made to resolve the conflict, which by definition will end occupation. We, the 40,000 members of WWP, understand that we have to break this ineffective paradigm and its binary language and that it can only be done effectively with the support of a critical mass of Israelis. To reach that critical mass, we speak of the intrinsic and existential needs of all people for freedom, dignity, and opportunity, without saying that the occupation is preventing that from happening.

How do you scale up? What else do you need in order to achieve more of your objectives?

We need more resources to scale up and we need to sharpen our skills in branding, messaging, and engaging with decision makers and opinion shapers.



Case study 3 | Parents Circle – Family Forum: Bereaved families looking for a peaceful future, not new members

What do you do and what are your achievements to date?

The Parents Circle – Families Forum (PCFF) is the only association in the world that does not wish to welcome any new members into its fold. Our core is comprised of Israeli and Palestinian families who have lost immediate family members due to the conflict. The Parents Circle was started by Yitzhak Frankenthal and now we consist of 600 Palestinian and Israeli families from all walks of life who form and participate in a variety of vital international campaigns. We have four objectives: to create a framework for a reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians; to work towards ending violence and achieving an accepted political agreement; to influence the public and political decision-makers to choose the path of reconciliation and peace over violence and war; and to avoid the use of bereavement for further violence and retribution. Our members are opposed to the occupation and believe that attaining historical reconciliation between the nations is a prerequisite for turning a future peace treaty into sustainable peace.

Our work consists of several events and activities that predominately use dialogue and storytelling to support reconciliation efforts. Through the years, the PCFF has arranged almost 7,000 dialogue meetings, with more than 200,000 participating youth and adults. In June we organised a meeting with 25 women in the West Bank and we have started a new project with bereaved parents, and another one that will begin soon with USAID. Our Connecting Threads programme brought 12 Palestinian women from different villages in the West Bank to meet design students from Shenkar College and from the Royal College of Art in London. Each summer, we hold a youth camp for peace

and reconciliation in several locations around Israel. The activity, which began in 2003, brings together 40 Israeli and Palestinian teens, aged 14 to 18, for five days of shared experiences, in order to help dispel stereotypes and create the team of leaders of the next generation. We also have a young ambassador's programme. All of these programmes are continuing, which with everything going between Israelis and Palestinians is an incredible achievement. Our long-term vision is to create a framework for a reconciliation process to be an integral part of any future political agreement. If it isn't, we believe any agreement will simply be another ceasefire until violence returns.

What are the greatest barriers to implementing your goals?

There are societal and cultural barriers. Neither leadership gives much hope for reconciliation which is why we are focused on a bottom up grassroots movement. And the anti-normalisation movement is gaining more ground in Palestinian society which provides complications for our work.

Sometimes politicians get in the way of our activities. Every year we hold an alternative Israeli-Palestinian memorial day service on the eve of Memorial Day and this year Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman decided that 200 Palestinians could not get permits to come to the ceremony – not because of security concerns but rather because it might offend other bereaved parents. We took him to the High Court and won and we managed to have the Palestinians come. I think that's an achievement – working within and winning via the system and also that so many Palestinians actually came. What Lieberman did was just the tip of the iceberg. Bar-Ilan University wouldn't allow us in to give a talk last month, because we have Palestinian partners. But Parents Circles does have a nod of approval from both sides.

Funding is of course another problem. Instead of having two parallel narrative experience projects in June (a project that brings different groups of Israelis and Palestinians to learn about the personal and national narrative of the "other"), we could have had five projects. And with more money we could employ more staff to carry out our work and have a wider reach. The majority of our funding comes from USAID and

the EU, and some small donations from foreign donors.

How can you scale up your work? What else do you need in order to achieve more of your objectives?

The bottom line is funding. More money would allow us to make more social media outputs that help spread our message to a wider audience and change more attitudes. Because Israelis and Palestinians are so cut off from one another on the ground, social media has become a vital tool to getting our message across. We're very lucky that Saatchi and Saatchi do all our media work pro-bono, but we could invest much more money in social media. Our message is not a local message, it is an international message and we conduct many events abroad.

SEEDS OF PEACE

Case Study 4 | Seeds of Peace: Growing the future leaders of the peace process

What do you do and what are the achievements of your work to date?

Seeds of Peace inspires and equips new leaders with the skills and relationships they need to accelerate social, economic, and political changes essential for peace. We have more than 6700 alumni from 27 countries, with the majority residing in the Middle East. We invest significantly in understanding both the short and long-term impacts of our work.

Our programmatic approach is grounded in the individual/personal theory of change: peace is advanced through a transformative change in the attitudes, values, skills, perceptions, or circumstances of key groups of individuals. As interpersonal relations between two or more people are often the catalyst for personal change, and an essential element of conflict transformation, our programmes aim to build trust, respect, empathy, and community across lines of conflict. Personal and interpersonal change must be leveraged on a socio-political or structural level for communities to move from conflict to peace. The full realisation of our change theory therefore occurs when our alumni leverage their unique relationships and skills to effect economic, social, and political change in ways that transform conflict.

While personal growth and interpersonal change are a continual journey and consistent thread through our programmes, our core focus for adult alumni (ages 18+) is to encourage and support their ability to impact conflict transformation. We accelerate and deepen the impact and influence of our alumni and other changemakers who are challenging ideologies, policies, and practices that perpetuate conflict through critical convenings, targeted

fellowships, and general support.

Recognising that families, schools, and communities play a critical role in youth development, Seeds of Peace offers opportunities for parents, educators, and community members to take part in our programs with the intention of building broader ecosystems of support.

Cross-conflict relationships have been found to be the single most important factor in shifting attitudes. We have found that both Israelis and Palestinians showed significant positive attitude change about the other side from pre-camp to post-camp in terms of: their feelings towards the other side; empathy towards the other side; humanisation of the other side; reduced anxiety about interacting with the other side.

Through our work we have also seen how nearly 1 in 5 Israeli and Palestinian alumni of Seeds of Peace were active in peacebuilding as adults (after age 21), following army service or university and four years of renewed violence at the time of the study. This serves a baseline, minimum estimate for long-term impact that sets the bar high at engagement in public peacebuilding activity at a time when such work was increasingly controversial and challenged by escalating violence. It did not include alumni contributing to peacebuilding through their professional work in politics, media, business, education and other fields or through initiatives in their personal lives.

What are the greatest barriers to implementing your goals?

Political: Political stagnation and continued violence can lead to feelings of hopelessness and discourage active participation in peacebuilding. Moreover, continued conflict has also led to the growth of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement which places cultural pressure on Palestinians to disengage from all contact with Israelis who do not already share their political beliefs – despite the fact that engagement is perhaps most necessary with those not yet persuaded towards peace.

Financial: Our model is expensive as it requires in-person contact over an extended period of time, as well as extensive local follow-up. Based on the evaluations of our work, and continued feedback from our community, we are convinced that this type of intensive engagement

has been central to our impact (and that of our alumni). Many other organisations that offer more limited engagements struggle to keep participants involved and see the same type of transformative impact that translates to socio-political results. In the current climate, when people-to-people work is needed most to create pressure on political leaders and keep Israelis and Palestinians connected, funds are drying up as a result of donor fatigue and despair.

How can you scale up your work? What else do you need in order to achieve more of your objectives?

The most immediate opportunity to scale exists through investments in our alumni (and others who have been through similar experiences). Our alumni have succeeded in reaching positions of influence within their communities – advising senior political officials and sitting around negotiating tables, shaping the news media, leading schools, starting businesses – and are uniquely positioned to advance change within and across sectors. We need resources to build up and maintain this cross-border network, and support their ventures specifically designed to transform conflict. Additional opportunities to scale exist through partnerships, both with other like-minded organisations and mainstream institutions within society, and in growing the number of participants engaged directly and indirectly in our work. While the political situation presents challenges, we have a community hungry for opportunities to take this work forward.



Case Study 5 | Peres Center for Peace: Training people from across society to continue Simon Peres' work for peace

What do you do and what are the achievements of your work to date?

The Peres Center is dedicated to advancing his vision of a prosperous Israel within a peaceful Middle East and is a leading non-profit and non-government organisation focused on developing and implementing unique and cutting-edge programmes. We serve hundreds of thousands of participants of all ages, religions, genders and cultural backgrounds. Our focus includes advancing economic opportunity and inclusivity, delivering lifesaving medical treatment and community healthcare, promoting environmental sustainability, and cultivating youth leadership and peace education.

Over 22 years of scalable and impactful work, the Peres Center has reached over 30,000 children from more than 50 communities through educational programmes, along with dozens of coaches, teachers, and student leaders, and 1,000 young leaders from across the Middle East and North Africa region have participated in in-depth online training.

Some of our main projects include:

The Peres Center's Medicine and Healthcare initiatives which have been active since the organisation's founding, advance health education and services, while also providing crucial humanitarian medical aid. In addition to their medical benefits, these programmes act as bridges of peace between people. Today, the Peres Center is now one of the few organisations with the ability to assist children in Gaza and Syria in desperate need of immediate life-saving treatment.

Through the Saving Children project, crucial medical treatment is provided to Palestinian infants and children in Israeli hospitals, where the necessary medical services cannot be provided by the Palestinian healthcare system due to lack of expertise. This humanitarian programme was initiated in 2003 by Shimon Peres and has since saved the lives of more than 12,500 infants and children. Saving Children receives hundreds of referrals annually from Palestinian healthcare institutions. Following years of successful best practices and by request, this programme has expanded to include Syrian children.

Training Doctors works with Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza and has trained 260 Palestinian doctors who in turn have treated approximately 1.5 million patients.

In addition, thousands of business professionals and entrepreneurs have gained skills necessary to prosper and have created a cross border network of like-minded individuals working together to boost the economy on both sides. Projects include:

Starting-Up Together trains 40 young Israeli Arab and Jewish entrepreneurs per cycle. Participants receive capacity building training, mentoring, and networking opportunities, with the most promising entrepreneurs fast-tracked into an internationally recognised accelerator program. Upon graduation, participants continue to receive access to programmes, mentors, and industry events. Project partners include The Edmond de Rothschild Caesarea Foundation, Tel Aviv University, and MassChallenge.

CityZoom creates connections between innovators, local and multi-national companies, and city governments by implementing: meet-ups between industry leaders, municipal stakeholders and academics; round table discussions and webinars with innovation experts, entrepreneurs, researchers and city leaders; and an International Smart City Conference.

Strengthening Private Sector and Business-to-Business Cooperation – Together with local, regional, and international stakeholders, the Peres Center identifies and targets challenges and opportunities to facilitate easier trade and economic growth through policy, structural

research and practical action. Ongoing programmes work to assess needs, build capacities, and link the Israeli and Palestinian economy while fostering cross-border, people-to-people interaction.

Startup-Link – Startup-Link aims to expand the Startup Nation into the Startup Region by the creation of a new Palestinian startup accelerator, which will train the next generation of Palestinian entrepreneurs. The project will bring together experienced Israeli innovators and young Palestinian entrepreneurs to strengthen ties and mutual understanding and invigorate the Palestinian innovation ecosystem.

New IT Horizons - The potential of the Palestinian hi-tech sector is widely recognised but struggles to penetrate markets. Launched in 2018, this program exposes 40-60 Palestinian and Israeli professionals and ICT companies over three years to mutually beneficial business opportunities and capacity building through a multilayered process and match making opportunities. In addition, 50-70 Palestinian students and recent graduates receive work experience and exposure to the ICT industry. This programme connects the Israeli and Palestinian hi-tech sectors and promotes cooperation, thus strengthening innovation in the Palestinian private sector and forging unique cross-border business relationships.

What are the greatest barriers to implementing your goals?

The Peres Center develops and implements its work thanks to the support of donors and we are fortunate to have a core group of supporters who are invested in our methodology to promoting peacebuilding locally, regionally, and internationally. This support is crucial and identifying and gaining additional partners and funders is key to furthering this significant work.

In any conflict situation the reality on the ground is that it is a challenge to bring together members from different groups. Mistrust, dehumanisation, and stereotypes are difficult barriers that must be faced. It is crucial that Peres Center programmes challenge the zero-sum paradigm and bring together diverse groups in a holistic way that focuses on action and working together. Through being productive, participants can enjoy the fruits of their labour

and begin to engage with one another in a positive way.

How can you scale up your work? What else do you need in order to achieve more of your objectives?

Our programs are designed with scalability and sustainability in mind. Educational programmes, for example, are modular, and with the proper partners and financial support can be implemented in any public or private school, community centre, and more. By ensuring that each programme is developed with sustainable impact in mind, these programmes can continue to affect change well after the project cycle ends.

Crucial to achieving Peres Center objectives are dedicated, strategic partners, both in terms of implementation and in terms of funding.



EcoPeace
Middle East

Case study 6 | EcoPeace: Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians working for sustainable regional development

What do you do and what are the achievements of your work to date?

EcoPeace Middle East brings together Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli environmentalists to try and promote cooperative efforts to protect our shared environmental heritage in order to advance both sustainable regional development and the creation of necessary conditions for lasting peace in our region.

EcoPeace is a project oriented NGO, using both a “bottom-up” (grass roots / community) approach coupled with a “top-down” (advocacy) strategy that has proven to be a very effective work model. We approach cross border environment and peacebuilding issues by first developing a regional strategy. Our staff from our respective offices take the same vision and present it to their respective audiences; Palestinian to Palestinian, Jordanian to Jordanian and Israeli to Israeli.

Despite the ongoing conflict, bottom-up programming facilitates the advancement of community interests in cross-border environmental solutions. Our “Community Involvement” and “Youth Education” projects are two components of our Good Water Neighbors (GWN) project. Initiated in 2001, the GWN programme remains EcoPeace’s flagship programme for environmental peacebuilding, whereby we create local constituencies that empower youth, adult residents, mayors and other municipal officials to call for and lead necessary cross-border solutions to regional water issues. We are committed to further grow the project to include more communities across the regions cross-border basins.

This programme has helped attract over half a billion US dollars in investments in water and sanitation solutions region wide. We have brought municipal leaders together to sign MoUs needed to solve common concerns and we have educated thousands of youth across the region that cooperation on water issues is a necessity not a privilege. We have also built EcoCenters as a place where local, regional and international youth and tourists can come together to learn about and experience the shared environment.

Other programmes include Water Cannot Wait in which we promote the idea that the water crisis in Gaza, water scarcity in the West Bank, and unprecedented levels of pollution, mean that water allocation and management issues can no longer be held hostage to other final status issues. Our efforts have helped promote a general consensus that water is the most solvable of all final status issues. Jason Greenblatt, the US special envoy or international negotiations, has in fact lead with water issues in much of his diplomacy. EcoPeace succeeded to help change policies as to both water and electricity supply re-Gaza, having released to the public information on the closure of Ashkelon desalination plant due to Gaza sewage.

The Jordan Valley and Dead Sea program highlights that the demise of the Jordan River together with the actions of the mineral extraction companies in Israel and Jordan have led to the dramatic destruction of the Dead Sea, into which the Jordan River flows; EcoPeace advocacy lead to Israel releasing fresh water from the Sea of Galilee for the first time in 49 years and helped convince decision makers of the need to reverse Israel's National Water Carrier. Here, we prepared the first ever Jordan Valley regional integrated Master Plan that speaks to the investments and policy changes needed to bring prosperity to the valley.

Water Energy Nexus (WEN) seeks to create an Israeli/Palestinian/Jordanian Water Energy community that borrows from European experience in creating healthy resource interdependencies that augment national security. Our efforts in this programme have already brought together Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian private sector investors interested to

start building solar farms for energy exchange. High level interest here exists for that game-change type intervention that this project represents.

What are the greatest barriers to implementing your goals?

The cultural and political barriers that we face are expected. The international community could help us overcome some of these barriers if there was greater dialogue with and understanding of the role of civil society. Embassies and consulates of the same government generally fail to work as one team and they certainly do not capitalise on the potential partnership with civil society across the border.

Also, increased finance is critical as it would enable us to compete with the market in hiring the very best of staff and then to scale up our activities to maximise impact. Donor fatigue is also a problem as donors tend to support short-term programming although it is the long-term programmes that bring results. The creation of an international fund as was done in Northern Ireland would here be a game changer.

How can you scale up your work? What else do you need in order to achieve more of your objectives?

If the international community would take dialogue with civil society on both sides of the divide more seriously they would help empower civil society via the governments.

This report has been produced by BICOM's research team in consultation with peace activists. We are grateful for their help.

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