



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

# 2007 ANNUAL REPORT

## A Letter from the Executive Director

During 2007, IEA grew more than at any other point in our history. In this year alone we launched 9 new groups and developed additional new and innovative models for cross-cultural encounters. We continued as well to initiate partnerships across the Holy Land, the Middle East and the world.

During 2007, we successfully organized **130 programs** that included more than **3,500 participants**, from all social sectors. We established and maintained the following new ongoing groups (from north to south): Acre, Lana women's group in M'ghar, Bridging group in M'ghar, Haifa University, Wadi Ara, Healthcare Professionals at Hadassah Ein Karem, Jewish-Christian group for joint study of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew, Mothers and Daughters, and our first Israeli-Palestinian group of young adults from Jerusalem and Hebron. We also started the process for the creation or renewal of additional groups that have been launched in 2008. By the end of 2007 we had **26 on-going groups** across the country, most of them maintaining regular activities that contribute to building real and sustainable coexistence.

In addition to these ongoing groups, we also managed to organize four Israeli-Palestinian interfaith encounter retreats, two special retreats that included meeting and training for coordinators, and a series of "Meeting the Religious Communities of Jerusalem" encounters.

Our programs are growing islands of respectful and friendly inter-communal relations between the various communities of the Holy Land, bringing together a very wide spectrum of participants, most of whom encounter 'the other' for the first time through our programs.

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## Activity Report:

### Intra-Israeli Activities

During the year 2007, our intra-Israeli activities continued to flourish. We held a total of 120 programs comprised of 96 inter-religious study sessions in the general program, 20 in the Women's Program, and 4 in the Young Adults program.

#### General Program

Ten of the inter-religious encounters were organized by an ongoing group in Jerusalem called "Reut-Sadaqa-Friendship," which focused on themes such as "Vows and Promises," "Communication," and "Miracles."

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**The IEA held more than 130 programs in 2007—developing new group models, and launching 9 new encounter groups.**

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Two very special moments were when the IEA was awarded the "2007 INTRA Award for Complementarity of Religions" by Institute of Interreligious Studies in Germany, and when two of its coordinators won the Women's Peace Initiative Award of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding in the United States.

We now feel ready to shift IEA to the next gear and move faster in the process of becoming a significant social and civil movement for change in the pattern of inter-communal relations in the Holy Land. And we invite you to join the many individuals and institutions that partner with us to make this a reality. Together, we expect accelerated growth in the quantity and quality of our programs, and in the diversity of the processes we employ to create sustainable dialog and trust across religious and cultural boundaries.

An important development in the U.S. based Friends of IEA was the confirmation of its tax exempt status under section 501(c)(3), by the IRS on 13 September 2007. Any donations sent to Friends of Interfaith Encounter Association, 7 Lancaster Court, Ramsey, NJ 07446; or made online (see the top of [www.interfaith-encounter.org/donations.htm](http://www.interfaith-encounter.org/donations.htm)) are fully tax deductible.

We also plan to hold major fundraising events whenever possible. If you are willing to help you are welcome, with our gratitude, to contact the point person of this wonderful group, Bob Halim Johnson, at: [hermes4halim@yahoo.com](mailto:hermes4halim@yahoo.com).

You are welcome to maintain ongoing contact with us as we continue these activities in the coming year. You will find our contact information on the end page. We look forward to your feedback and ideas.

Yours,

Dr. Yehuda Stolov  
Executive Director



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30 more encounters were organized by the Karmiel–Majd el-Krum Interfaith Encounter group in the Galilee. Centered on the two main schools, this group brings together educators, children and parents of the two neighboring towns, who would otherwise have very little interaction. Throughout the year there were joint celebrations of the religious holidays, field trips, art workshops, study days and performances of the Hebrew-Arabic choir.

Eight more inter-religious encounters were organized by IEA's ongoing group in the southern city of Eilat, focusing on such themes as: "Religious Leadership," "Anti-Semitism," and "Food."

The "Sawa Rabina" group in M'ghar had seven encounters, where issues such as "Technological Advancement and its Influence on Religions" were discussed. The group also met to plan many social events for the whole community in M'ghar, such as the International Children's Day, the Day of Spring, and the Festival of Festivals. 2007 also saw the birth of the new M'ghar Bridging group, which held three encounters, bringing together community leaders from the Druze, Muslim and Christian neighborhoods.

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**Each program demonstrated how easy it is for Jews, Muslims and Christians, from a variety of walks of life and of different political convictions, to connect together, to overcome prejudices and suspicions, and to develop friendship and trust.**

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Many other new groups were formed around the country in 2007. A newly established group called "The Future – Mothers and Daughters" held three encounters, where the young girls gave presentations on the meaning of Hanukkah and Eid el-Adha. The mothers then engaged in further discussions while the girls played games together.

Dozens more encounters took place across the other groups: in Carmel City, Acre, and Ein Karem, and within the framework of the Arabic-speaking group, the "Study and Dialogue" group, and the "Religions of Jerusalem" group. We also held a special encounter with all our Jerusalem groups on the International Day of Peace, a training meeting for the groups' coordinators, and a meeting to explore a new method of facilitating group reconciliation called "Circlework." In December, members from all the IEA's groups in Jerusalem gathered for a Hanukkah feast: the perfect way to end a year of success.

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### Women's Interfaith Encounter (WIE)

In 2007, IEA's women program organized 10 inter-religious programs in Jerusalem and 10 programs in M'ghar: 6 of the "Shibolot" group and 4 of the new "Lana" group for health advancement. Themes ranged from "Seasonal Holidays" to "Abraham/Ibrahim" to "Carnival and Fasting Traditions" in the three religions. There were also film screenings, joint meals – such as a traditional Shabbat supper and at Iftar during Ramadan – and a celebration of Mother and Family Day.

### Youth Interfaith Encounter (YIE)

In 2007, the YIE saw the birth of an encounter group at the University of Haifa and a revival of activity in the Jerusalem group. At the start of 2008, the Mount Scopus Students group is also seeing renewed activity.

### Israeli-Palestinian Activities

The IEA held four Israeli-Palestinian retreats in 2007; two in conjunction with the Hope Flowers School, one with the Israeli branch of Focusing, and one with the Palestinian Peace Society. The 2007 retreats focused on the meaning of "Food", "The Woman", "Forgiveness" and "The Binding of Isaac/Ishmael" in Judaism, Islam and Christianity. 2007 also saw the launch of the IEA's Jerusalem-Hebron Youth group – the first on-going Israeli-Palestinian group of interfaith encounter. At the first encounter, the Jewish members read aloud passages from the Koran in Hebrew translation, and the Muslim members read aloud passages from the Torah in Arabic, thus highlighting the similarities between the two languages.

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### Support

The IEA would not have been able to achieve such progress in 2007 were it not for the generous financial support and gifts-in-kind of many friends around the world. We are deeply grateful to those friends for their contributions, no matter how large or small. It is this ongoing support which enables us to build upon and expand our activities as we dedicate ourselves and our work to peace, justice, and harmony in the Holy Land and the Middle East. We hope to widen this circle of friends and supporters and thereby expand the scope and reach of our programs and efforts. Every donation makes a difference and we wish to thank every single one of our friends and supporters – past, present and future – around the world. In particular we wish to thank:

#### Our Donors (\$500+)

- David Scheim
- The Joseph and Harvey Meyerhoff Family Charitable Funds
- US Embassy to Israel
- Sara A. Gottesman
- Lake Street Church
- Global Giving Foundation
- Samuel Fleischaker
- Sandor Straus
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- Middle East Peace Dialogue Network
- John Kador & Anna Beth Payne
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#### Our Sponsors (\$150 - \$499)

- Ronald K. Walder
- Robert E. Johnson
- Shoshana Shamberg

#### Gifts-in-Kind

- The Swedish Theological Institute
- Dr. Jodi Prinzivalli
- The Austrian Hospice
- Bob Halim Johnson

### The Secret of Our Success

Unlike most other dialogue organizations, we work with, rather than around, the deep cultural roots, beliefs, and traditions of the peoples of the Middle East. Each encounter is centered on a religious theme and features a carefully planned program of joint study and dialogue, designed to help the group coalesce into a single community that respects the unique identity of each of its "sub-communities" and participants, and to create a long-term process of apolitical, grassroots peace-building. By constructively engaging with core religious and cultural values, while explicitly avoiding political issues that might close off dialogue, our approach successfully involves social and political groups that may feel very uncomfortable with other approaches.



ACTIVITY REPORT, cont. from p. 3

## Middle East Region Activities

The IEA co-organized a Regional Conference on the theme of “Religious Traditions”, which took place at Petra. More than 40 participants – Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Druze and Taoist, from six Middle Eastern countries (Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and Morocco) – attended the conference. Presentations were given on topics such as the role of food in Islam, the Sacraments of Christianity, and wedding rituals in Judaism. These were followed by discussion groups which focused on the similarities and differences among the participants’ religious traditions. The cultural exchange was consolidated through more informal discussions, social activities and workshops on conflict management and cross-cultural communication.

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