



UK Friends of the Bereaved Families Forum (FBFF)

NEWSLETTER 22, FEBRUARY/MARCH 2012

Inspiring work continues in Israel and Palestine

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the February/March newsletter of FBFF. We have lots of news to report in this edition. I have returned from Israel/Palestine with a wealth of material about the inspiring work carried out by Parents Circle-Families Forum, as well as the many challenges faced by the courageous, bereaved Palestinians and Israelis who continue to do this work despite encountering opposition from both sides.

Palestinian Ali Abu Awwad, whose brother was shot dead at a checkpoint by Israeli soldiers, sums up the situation very eloquently:

'Many Israelis and Palestinians want peace yet extremists on both sides dominate the agenda. Being bereaved builds a bridge with the other side. I believe we don't need a million people to build it, just a good group of people who can build a bridge that millions can pass through.'

The work that Ali and others are doing really is making a difference. Rami Elhanan, an Israeli, whose 14-year-old daughter Smadar was killed by a suicide bomber, said that he

spoke with his Palestinian partner at a meeting in Bethlehem. Afterwards a man approached him and asked if he could shake his hand. He explained that his brother had been a suicide bomber and that he respected the work that Rami and others were doing.

'I was happy to shake this man's hand. I want to speak to everyone. We need to understand the anger, understand the frustration and understand the narrative of the other. Understanding the anger is a tool that can be used to prevent it,' said Rami.

We have launched a new campaign – Sponsor Our Partners For Peace.

Please help support the forum members to continue their vital work, which is changing so many hearts and minds on the ground, by printing out the attached standing order form and giving just £5 per month to support this work. If you have other fundraising ideas please let us know.

Thank you.

Diane Taylor

(FBFF manager)



Above: A Parents Circle-Families Forum visit to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem.

Photo: Natasha Newrock-Steren

Shared recollections of our sufferings and fears

One of PCFF's groundbreaking projects is the History Through The Human Eye project. This brings together groups of Palestinians and Israelis from similar backgrounds to listen to each other's narratives about their lives and the conflict. Groups involved so far include grandmothers, farmers, mental health workers and artists.

Part of the programme is for Israelis and Palestinians to visit the now deserted Palestinian village of Lifta on the edge of Jerusalem. The aim of the visit is to help Israelis better understand the suffering of the Palestinians and the loss of their homes. Palestinians fled from this village in 1948.

This visit is followed by a visit to the Holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem. The aim of this visit is to help Palestinians better understand the suffering of Jews in the Holocaust and their fear of not being secure.

The day I visited, Palestinian and Israeli artists went to Yad Vashem together. Both groups were visibly moved by what they saw. The visit was followed by lunch and discussion in Beit Jallah. Both sides spoke honestly about their feelings and at the end of the session both groups said they had bonded so well that they wanted to find a way to continue meeting.

Many moving comments were made during the discussion. All the artists wore headphones and Palestinian translator Ahmed Jafary did a superb job of



Palestinian artists on their visit to Yad Vashem.

Photo: Natasha Newrock-Steren

simultaneous Hebrew to Arabic and Arabic to Hebrew translation.

Israeli artist: 'What stops us from talking to each other is the fear. We have to understand that first.'

Palestinian artist: 'What I noticed at Yad Vashem were the Israeli soldiers who were visiting. Usually when I see Israeli soldiers they are coming to do something terrible to us. I'm for human beings and human peace.'

Israeli artist: 'We are not here to make comparisons. Both sides have their pain and if we start doing a comparison of pain nothing will happen. You have got your story and we have got our story. We have to find a third story or we'll never come to the end of this.'

Palestinian artist: 'Muslims can help Jews. If someone comes to kill a Jew I'm willing to hide him in my house.'

Palestinian artist: 'I would like us to be together for longer. I was so moved by the Israeli and Palestinian stories. I hope we can go on a journey together and get to know each other more deeply.'

Palestinian artist: 'I learnt in the Koran that Jews were with us in Saudi Arabia. We have co-existed for a long time.'

Israeli artist: 'We are here together and I'm sorry that we are not the majority. Our role is to influence the people in our own communities. With our art we can find an indirect way to talk about things without using words. It's so important that these things are said to the ears of the people who don't want to hear them.'

Palestinian artist: 'We are all here to build a small dream together. We have to make a combined symbol as Israeli and

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'Both sides spoke honestly about their feelings... they had bonded so well that they wanted to find a way to continue meeting.' Photo: Natasha Newrock-Steren

Palestinian artists that we want peace.'

One of the Israeli artists who took part, Omer Golan, had previously been seriously injured by a suicide bomber who came up behind him and grabbed him before detonating his device on 21st December 2000. He was apprehensive about taking part in the project – but at the same time was determined to do so.

'All the participants gave chilling testimonies of their encounters with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was felt that all the artists who took part were there not for the sake of apportioning blame but in order to find a starting point for the future – a future without violence, occupation or bloodshed. We learnt at close range what perhaps seemed obvious to

most of us beforehand, but was better understood in Beit Jallah, namely, that people and their actions are a direct product of their lives' circumstances,' said Omer.

He added: 'I want to tell you that through this project I met people who are similar to me as far as religion, a wish for secular state for both people and conceptual art are concerned.

'In fact, in many ways the similarities exceeded the differences. I met people who are interested and willing to cooperate in artistic and social matters, do not believe in boycotts and want to be creative and be active. I hope we will exhibit our art jointly, here in Israel and in Palestine, and in the world.

'After all, we have much more in common than just a tragic history, a blood-saturated earth and perhaps a few genes.'

Archbishop at Synod fringe

We organised a fringe meeting at the Church of England Synod on 8th February. Approximately 25 clerics attended. We were honoured that our patron, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was among them.

Two of our patrons Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg and Imam Usama Hasan addressed the audience. They spoke powerfully of the need for peace and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians and the challenges of this work. The Synod kindly supplied lunch. Many thanks to John Dinnen, Francis Bassett and Charles Reed for all their help and support in making the meeting possible.

Support flows in from many quarters for FBFF

We are delighted to report support for our work from a range of bodies. The Muslim organisation **Radical Middle Way** has asked us to take part in an online campaign which targets young Muslims and recommends inspiring, innovative organisations for them to engage with. They have asked to profile FBFF.

The Liberal Jewish youth movement **Netzer** have chosen us as their charity for 2012. The Masorti youth movement **Noam** have raised money for us with their Three Peaks Challenge.

Racheli Woolfson is running a quarter marathon to raise funds for us. We have met the **Encompass Trust** to discuss forging links. The trust brings together young Israelis and Palestinians as well as young people from other countries to work on conflict resolution.

We are hoping to organise two visits by Forum members in the coming months and will be working with other organisations on this.

UK Friends of the Bereaved Families Forum (FBFF)

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