

UK Friends of the Bereaved Families Forum (FBFF)

Newsletter 24

May 2012



Dear Friends,

Welcome to the May edition of the FBFF newsletter. We are very much looking forward to a visit from two of our speakers next month – Palestinian Seham Abu Awwad and Israeli Robi Damelin. We hope as many people as possible will be able to attend at least one of the events scheduled so far.

The first is the UK premiere of a remarkable new film from the forum called *Two Sided Story*. It documents the reactions when Israelis and Palestinians from different generations, backgrounds and political persuasions met, talked and got to know each other as human beings. It shows what happened when hardline Israeli settlers met Palestinian activists resisting the Israeli occupation, when Israeli soldiers met Palestinians who had served time in Israeli jails.

It's not always easy to acknowledge the story of the other, to show empathy and to express the desire to reconcile. But, as this moving film shows, it is possible. Directed by Emmy award winner Tor Ben Mayor, the 80-minute documentary will be screened at the Phoenix Cinema in East Finchley at 2pm on Sunday, 17th June. The film will be followed by a Q&A with Robi and Seham. Payment (£15) can be made at the door. To reserve tickets please email info@familiesforum.co.uk

Woolfson & Tay Bookshop in Bermondsey is hosting an event with Robi and Seham on Wednesday, 20th June. For more information follow this link: www.woolfsonandtay.com/bridgingthedivide.html

We hope you will come along to one or both events.

Diane Taylor

Early Day Motion in parliament supporting the forum's work

We are working with MPs across all three of the main parties who have sponsored an Early Day Motion supporting our work. The EDM was launched just before parliament went into recess and is being relaunched following the state opening of parliament. The aim of the motion is to raise awareness about the important work of the forum and to encourage the government to support this work. We hope that as many MPs as possible will sign the motion. Please contact your MP and urge him or her to sign the motion. You can find an e-mail address for your MP by clicking on this link: www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/

'That this House recognises the need to provide a framework for a reconciliation process as an integral part of any future peace agreements between Israel and Palestine; believes that reconciliation is a necessary condition for ensuring a lasting peace in the Middle East; applauds the work of the charity Parents Circle-Families Forum (PCFF) to make an emotional breakthrough; notes that the PCFF is made up of over 600 families, half Israeli and half Palestinian, who have all lost an immediate family member in the conflict; and supports the message of the Forum that if Palestinians and Israelis who have paid the highest price of a conflict can sit together and look for a way to peace, then surely others can.'



Mark Durkan, MP, who proposed the motion, said: 'This motion avoids any "whataboutery" of commenting on specifically Israeli or Palestinian actions. It also amplifies the conventional lines calling for a negotiated settlement by emphasising the need for a process of reconciliation to give integrity and endurance to peace when it is agreed.'

'The most telling point about this message is not that it is endorsed by MPs here but that it is inspired by the parents and families of victims of the conflict.'

A message from two 'moved' supporters

Two of our supporters, retired clergy Jim and Elaine Tipp, describe the impact of meeting Israeli and Palestinian forum members Robi Damelin and Siham Abu Awwad:

'We met Robi Damelin and Seham Abu Awwad in a chance encounter at London's St Martins in the Field church at a cartoon exhibition hosted by the forum. For both of us it was a life changing moment, an extremely emotional encounter that came out of nowhere but whose effects have remained with us.

'I wrote the poem "What's the Difference" on the underground directly after our meeting and it featured on the forum website for quite a few months. We both consider the work being done must be the hardest task for all involved and we have nothing but admiration for all who represent the forum and all who offer support.

'We were both moved and challenged by Robi and Seham and consider it a real privilege to have encountered them in our lives.'

Runner raises almost £7,000 for the forum

Runner Racheli Wolfson successfully completed a quarter marathon in Tel Aviv to raise funds for the forum.

She decided to run in memory of her daughter Rikki, who was killed in a tragic accident almost five years ago. She raised almost £7,000, a fantastic achievement.



Project aims to Crack The Wall of hostility

The forum has launched an innovative social media project called Crack In The Wall. It allows Israelis and Palestinians to chat to each other via

Facebook. Hebrew comments will be translated into Arabic and Arabic comments into Hebrew so that everyone can understand each other.

'The only way to end the occupation is for people to understand the *status quo*,' said Mazen Faraj, Palestinian manager of the project. 'Only when people see what happens across the wall will they unite to end the occupation and fight racism, hatred and inhumanity. We in Palestine believe that the project is important for both our peoples, our neighbourhood and the entire community of nations. All of us should unite to achieve a crack in the wall.'

This neutral platform allows both sides to tell their stories and to get to know each other. The project aims to create a crack in the wall of hostility.

'The project will serve as a catalyst for greater understanding,' said Ayelet Harel, director of grants and projects at PCFF.

When people click on the Facebook page www.facebook.com/crackinthewall they can browse through a range of subjects including education for change, a common struggle, protest culture, rights and women.



Please support our work by signing a standing order (last page). Or you can make an on-line donation:

DONATE NOW

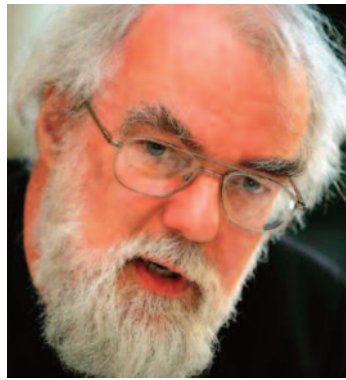


Archbishop urges 'wisdom, strength and justice'

We were delighted to receive a mention in the Archbishop of Canterbury's Easter sermon:

'These last months have seen a phase of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians yet again stalling, staggering and delivering little or nothing for those who most need signs of hope. Everything seems to be presented as a zero-sum game. And all who love both the Israeli and the Palestinian communities and long for their security will feel more desperate than ever. A visit to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, will convince you why the state of Israel exists and must go on existing. A visit to any border checkpoint will convince you that the daily harassment and humiliation of Palestinians of all ages and backgrounds cannot be a justifiable or even sustainable price to pay for security. Listening to a rabbi talking about what it is like to witness the gathering up of body parts after a terrorist attack is something that can't be forgotten; neither is listening to a Palestinian whose parent or child has been killed in front of their eyes in a mortar bombing.

'So how do we respond? By turning up the volume of partisanship, by searching for new diplomatic initiatives, by



'We have to prod and nag and encourage'

– Dr Rowan Williams

pretending it isn't as bad as all that after all? If we believe in a God who acts, we have to go beyond this. We have to put immense energy into supporting those on the ground who show that they believe in a God who acts – those who continue, through networks like One Voice and the Bereaved Families Forum, to bring together people from both sides and challenge them to discover empathy and mutual commitment... Small moments of recognition and kindness.

'We have to prod and nag and encourage the religious leadership in the Holy Land on all sides to speak as if they believed in a God

who acts, not only a God who endorses their version of reality. We have to pray, to pray for wisdom and strength and endurance for all who are hungry for peace and justice, pray that people will go on looking for a truly shared future.

'And we Christians in particular have to look for ways of practically supporting our brothers and sisters there through agencies like the Friends of the Holy Land or the Jerusalem and Middle East Church Association – to help them stay in a context where they feel more and more unwelcome, yet where so many of them remain because they want to play a full part in creating this unimaginable shared future.'

Blood Relations campaign wins UN award

Baumann Ber Rivnay, an Israeli advertising company which is part of Saatchi & Saatchi, has won a UN award for its Blood Relations campaign.

The campaign gets Israelis and Palestinians to share blood, instead of spilling it. Developed in collaboration with the Peres Center for Peace and the Parents Circle-Families Forum, the campaign brought bereaved Israelis and Palestinians together for a blood drive.

The donated units from the Israelis then went to Palestinian patients, and *vice versa*. The project raised a simple question: Could you hurt someone with your blood running through their veins? The project inspired similar blood drives that were held by Israeli and Muslim communities worldwide.

'Winning the award is a great honor for the firm and the state,' said Yossi Lubaton the firm's CEO. 'In a time when we feel Israel's isolation in the world and the UN, winning a prize doled out by the UN makes us proud.'

'We wanted to raise awareness about the fact that beyond any political conflict, no matter how difficult and drawn-out, the people who live here are tired of bloodshed and violence. We are pleased about the recognition that the project is getting across the globe.'

Support from youth movement

On 15th-17th June Jewish youth movement LJY-Netzer is running an event for teenagers which will include a ten-mile sponsored hike to raise funds for the forum.

Members of the movement voted for the forum to be their chosen charity for 2012. When paying for an event, members have the choice of adding a donation for the forum.

If you would like to sponsor the young hikers, please click on this link:

www.justgiving.com/LJY-Netzer

Huge thanks to LJY-Netzer for choosing us.

UK Friends of the Bereaved Families Forum (FBFF)

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Patrons: The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams • The Chief Rabbi, Lord Sacks • Juliet Stevenson
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