

UK Friends of the Bereaved Families Forum (FBFF)

Newsletter 26

August 2012



Dear Friends,

Welcome to the August edition of the FBFF newsletter. This edition contains news about a private member's motion about Palestine and Israel that was discussed at the July meeting of the Church of England Synod. The motion praised the work of organisations working for justice and peace in the region and mentioned Parents Circle Families Forum.

The motion attracted some controversy. It provided us with an opportunity to re-state our core message that we do not take sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: we are focused on being pro-solution.

There is also news about some of the recent developments in PCFF and some new and innovative projects.

Despite the continuing challenges Israelis and Palestinians in PCFF are determined to work together to promote healing and reconciliation.

Have a great summer.

Diane Taylor

FBFF Manager



WOMEN GET TOGETHER TO HELP SOLVE CONFLICT

Tucked away in the mountains of Beit Sahor in the West Bank nearly 60 Palestinian and Israeli bereaved women came together recently as part of PCFF's narrative project, to learn about each other, to share their stories and to find a way to take forward the good will created and the mutual desire to prevent others from experiencing the pain of loss they have suffered.

They watched clips of how women on the ground in Liberia, Yemen, Ireland and South Africa managed to shift the mood

and pushed their leaders to a solution. The new, younger faces in the group brought in a breath of fresh air and energy as well as hope for the future.

'I wish all Israelis and Palestinians could have been flies on the wall. It might have inspired them to realise that the violence must stop and that we have to find a way to reconcile with each other for the safety of our children and grandchildren and all future generations,' said Robi Damelin, who took part in the event.





FUN – AND FOOD FOR THOUGHT – AT ANNUAL SUMMER CAMP

The annual PCFF summer camp was a resounding success and many of the teenagers who participated left the camp with lots of fantastic memories as well as a great deal of food for thought about the conflict.

At the end of the five-day camp the Israeli and Palestinian young people gathered with their parents in the Arab city of Um-el-Fahem in Israel to discuss their experiences.

For some of the teenagers, this was the first time they'd ever met their Israeli or Palestinian counterparts.

Madj, a Palestinian student from Hebron, said: 'I have come to take part in this camp in order to learn about the opinions of the other side. Jews are not just Jews who kill.'

Romi Genosar, an Israeli student, said: 'I think a lot about Israelis having a stereotype of what Palestinians are like. But they're really fun to be around and really funny and nice, and they have a very strong opinion of the situation.'

The Israeli and Palestinian children have lost family members to the conflict between the two nations. Madj lost two uncles and one cousin, and Romi lost an uncle.

During the summer camp Madj and Romi worked together and produced a joint project reflecting war and loss.

'We took information from Arabic and Israeli newspapers, we took pictures of war and conflicts and we painted on them. And we also wrote a letter to our uncles on it.'

A hip-hop group was formed during the summer camp and members performed in both Hebrew and Arabic. The young people promised to keep in touch with each other via e-mail, Facebook and other social media.

◆ Follow this link to watch a short video about the summer camp: http://ntdtv.org/en/news_middleeast_africa/2012-07-21/israeli-palestinian-dialogue-at-youth-summer-camp.html#video_section

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CHURCH OF ENGLAND MOTION SPARKS CONTROVERSY

C of E Synod member John Dinnen proposed the motion on the right affirming support for a variety of initiatives in Israel/Palestine aimed at helping to end the conflict and fostering moves towards peace and reconciliation.

6 The path of choosing reconciliation rather than revenge is not a neutral decision... For those in our group who demonstrate together in sometimes very dangerous circumstances there is no element of neutrality 9

The reference to the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel proved controversial for the Board of Deputies of British Jews, which argued that the Programme focuses on support for Palestinians. FBFF

was approached to make comments but declined to do so; but we were keen to use the motion as an opportunity to emphasise our key message.

Israeli PCFF member Robi Damelin summed things up very well and emphasised the difference between being neutral and not taking sides:

‘For all those in our group who have lost an immediate family member in the conflict, the path of choosing reconciliation rather than revenge is not a neutral decision. For those working on the ground in Israel/Palestine 24 hours a day instead of remaining at home with their tragedy is not a neutral decision.

‘For those in our group who demonstrate together in sometimes very dangerous circumstances there is no element of neutrality.’

◆ Dr Giles Fraser, priest-in-charge at St Mary’s Newington in south London and the former canon chancellor of St Paul’s Cathedral, and now a *Guardian* columnist, wrote about the controversy on 12th July: www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2012/jul/12/church-of-england-silent-israel-palestine

PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

Dr John Dinnen (Hereford) to move:

‘That this Synod affirm its support for:

- (a) The vital work of the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), encouraging parishioners to volunteer for the programme and asking churches and synods to make use of the experience of returning participants;**
- (b) Mission and other aid agencies working amongst Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and elsewhere in the region;**
- (c) Israelis and Palestinians in all organisations working for justice and peace in the area, such as the Parents Circle-Family Forum; and**
- (d) Palestinian Christians and organisations that work to ensure their continuing presence in the Holy Land.’**

**155 signatures
July 2011**

The motion was voted on by bishops, clergy and laity and was passed by 201 votes with 54 votes against.

Thank you Helen

Many thanks to Helen Bramsted who has asked friends and family to make donations to FBFF on the occasion of her eightieth birthday.

If you are having a family celebration, please do think about using the occasion to raise some funds to support the peace and reconciliation work carried out by the bereaved families.

UK Friends of the Bereaved Families Forum (FBFF)

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