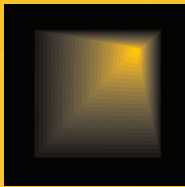


Parents Circle – Families Forum Impact Report 2022



**American Friends of the
Parents Circle - Families Forum**
Palestinian and Israeli Bereaved Families for Peace



Dear Friend,

We are pleased to share with you some of the highlights of Parents Circle –Families Forum’s (PCFF) activities over the past twelve months. This past year was full of activities and projects and as always, PCFF had to address the complex situation on the ground, staying loyal to its principles, fostering reconciliation and peace among Israelis and Palestinians.

The Parents Circle – Families Forum founded in 1995, is a joint Israeli-Palestinian organization of over 600 families, all of whom have lost an immediate family member to the ongoing conflict. Our founding families identified with a call to prevent bereavement, to promote dialogue, reconciliation, and peace. PCFF’s vision is to create a framework of reconciliation among Israelis and Palestinians in the absence of a political agreement and in preparation for an agreement to come. As part of our commitment to a fully and equally shared effort, PCFF is managed jointly through a Palestinian and Israeli staff.

THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The political situation in Israel is unstable. After one year in office, the parliamentary coalition fell apart and the Israeli government was forced to step down. Following the fifth round of elections in Israel in 3 years, a radical, right-wing government will take shape. Peace has been completely pushed out of the Israeli public discourse.

The Palestinian Authority, under Mahmoud Abbas’s presidency, is growing weaker. This causes significant frustration and encourages militant factions. Israel embarked on a military operation against the Islamic Jihad in Gaza in August 2022. Fifty-one Palestinians were killed in the action, more than half of them civilians and children. Palestinians are living under constant threat and violence from Jewish settlers in the West Bank preventing them from moving freely and safely and causing damage to their property, homes and physical harm and deaths.



DIALOGUE MEETINGS

In each Dialogue Meeting, two PCFF facilitators, one Israeli and one Palestinian, share their personal story of loss and opting for reconciliation and non-violence with the students, followed by a discussion about the conflict and the possibility of reconciliation.

We are pleased to report that the number of PCFF’s Dialogue Meetings in Israeli educational institutions, mainly high schools, and pre-military boarding schools, continues to grow. **This year we held 260 Dialogue meetings.**

PCFF’s educational team initiated new components in the field of Dialogue Meetings, the most prominent of which is **preparatory work with high school teachers**, preceding Dialogue Meetings with their students. Eighteen sessions were held. A second initiative is delivering Dialogue Meetings in teacher training colleges, to introduce future teachers to the Dialogue Meeting program before they enter the formal education system.

“
It was a very moving encounter. I grasped that there are many things I don't know. The session helped me see that there are people who want peace on both sides, while typically we only see the radicals. (Israeli student)
”

“
Hand on heart, it's one of the most valued activities we have to offer. If you want thoughtful, critical, moral and humane graduates, this is the activity you'll want your youths to take part in. (Israeli teacher)
”



DIALOGUE MEETINGS IN PALESTINE

Despite accusations of “normalization” threatening PCFF’s work with Palestinian communities, in 2022 we strengthened our work with West Bank Palestinian communities and revitalized Dialogue Meetings in Palestine. Twenty meetings were held in both urban and rural communities, beginning with a uni-national meeting with Palestinian PCFF members who tell their stories and explain PCFF’s work for reconciliation. These encounters are followed by a traditional Dialogue Meeting with an Israeli and Palestinian facilitator.

PARALLEL NARRATIVES EXPERIENCE

This project brings groups of Israelis and Palestinians together over several months, to learn about the personal and national narrative of the “other”. The learning experience in the meetings is based on a combination of historical national information and the personal and familial stories of the participants. PCFF held three cohorts made up of 80 Israelis and Palestinians including a group of freelance professionals, women and parents of teenagers.

We held 8 PNE alumni activities in 2022. A number of these were organized by the alumni themselves. The activities include olive harvests, film screenings like Blue Box and Tantara, a tour and Dialogue Circle in Jaffa and more. This December, an alumni conference for more than 200 PNE alumni is planned to take place in a Palestinian village in the Jordan Valley including a tour and supporting the village by joining their planting efforts in solidarity with the challenges they face in that area.

“

I am very happy to have joined this group. This is the first time I have spoken to Israelis. I had a distorted picture of the other side from the media and here I saw people reaching out and wanting to live in coexistence. (Palestinian participant)

”



SUMMER CAMP

We conducted the Youth Summer Camp for 51 Palestinian and Israeli teenagers, aged 14-18, at the Givat Haviva campus in Israel. The camp was expertly run by a staff of 11 counselors and coordinators, joined by 6 professional chefs, graduates of the prestigious Institute Paul Bocuse, through the Peace by Tourism scholarship program. Throughout the week, the campers played games, got to know each other, explored nature together, cooked together and spoke openly about identity and conflicting narratives

The camp was especially significant for Sidra, a 14-year-old Palestinian participant, who lives in the Deheishe Refugee Camp near Bethlehem. She told the group that it was the first time in her life she left the West Bank and crossed the Green Line into Israel. Initially, she was afraid of Israelis because until that point she had only met Israelis as soldiers. She spent the first night of the camp in fear of an Israeli attack on her. As days passed, she met other Israelis, her age, who share a vision of peace just like her. This was also the first time in her life that she saw the sea. She mentioned with great excitement the learning process she went through and the impact of her meeting with Israeli teens.

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY

The 17th annual Israeli-Palestinian Joint Memorial Day Ceremony was broadcast from Beit Jala, Palestine and at the Tel Aviv University in Israel. During the ceremony we heard the personal stories of PCFF members, Israeli Mashka Litvak, Palestinian member Ismail El-Hatib and a Palestinian Gaza resident, Nasreen Abu Eljadian, who lost relatives in one of the Israeli air raids. The speakers shared with the audience the loss they experienced and the path they chose to renounce fear and promote peace and reconciliation between the nations. The ceremony, co-hosted with Combatants for Peace, was broadcast online and viewed by 200,000 people in Israel, Palestine and around the world.



PCFF MEMBERS' ACTIVITIES

35 bereaved Palestinian families and 20 Israelis joined the organization in 2022 and their integration in PCFF's activities will be at the core of the organization's programming moving forward.

After COVID regulations forced us to postpone our annual members conference, the conference was planned to take place in the Bethlehem area of the West Bank. However, due to anti-normalization pressure and related events in that area, at the very last minute, we were again met with the threat of cancelation. Rather than once again put off this important event, PCFF staff quickly rallied to move the conference location, dealing with major last-minute logistical and security challenges that arose in the week before the conference, ultimately putting on a successful and meaningful weekend.

In March 2022, PCFF held its members' conference at the Biankini Dead Sea resort. There, **130 Palestinian and Israeli bereaved family members** gathered to meet and discuss the organization's work. Sessions included updates from the Co-Directors, roundtable discussions of issues



facing PCFF today, a "Playback Theater" performance, and hearing members' personal stories. Journalist Dahlia Scheindlin and negotiation moderator Ibrahim Enbawi shared updates on the reality in Israeli and Palestinian societies and the political conditions for peace. Members of PCFF's Young Ambassadors for Peace program joined the conference.

SOLIDARITY ACTIVITIES IN THE WEST BANK

PCFF members participated in diverse solidarity activities with Palestinian communities. The members traveled to remote, marginalized, Palestinian villages and Refugee Camps (Bardala, Jiftlik, Auja, Al Fawar and others) to deliver humanitarian aid and show solidarity with the locals. PCFF members, staff and alumni participated in an olive harvest in the Palestinian community of Al-Tuwani in Masafer Yatta. PCFF continues to work to provide aid to the Bedouin communities in Masafer Yatta and will host an event in solidarity with the residents of Silwan who are under threat of eviction.

PCFF members visited the family of Shireen Abu Akleh, the Palestinian-American Al Jazeera journalist killed in May 2022. Shireen's brother made a statement supporting peace and the work of the PCFF.

PCFF members also stood in solidarity with the Al-Halak family from East Jerusalem, whose son Iyad was shot dead by Israeli Border Police in Jerusalem's Old City two years ago. The family regularly attends court hearings in the trial against the shooter and PCFF members stand in front of the court and morally support the family.



PLANTING OLIVE TREES

On the Jewish day of Tu BiShvat, (Arbor Day), PCFF Planted 20 olive trees, 10 on each side of the Green Line, responding to the uprooting of Palestinian olive groves by violent Israeli settlers, and in memory of lost loved ones. We launched this new tradition of planting 10 trees on each side once a year as a tribute to peace, linking PCFF to the environment and to sustainability.

YOUNG AMBASSADORS FOR PEACE (YAP)

The YAP group is a home for young members of PCFF, aged 20-35, who engage in leadership training and engagement with the other side to become the next generation of the PCFF. Twenty Israelis and Palestinians participate in social activities, study tours throughout the country and a wide range of study and training sessions. YAP members undergo training to become facilitators in the various activities of PCFF.

The group toured the mixed city of Jaffa in Israel and met with activists in joint Israeli-Palestinian organizations. Another tour was dedicated to the Palestinian city of Beit Jala and its surroundings, a tour along the separation wall between Israel and Palestine, and an exposure to the impact of the military division into A, B and C areas of the West Bank on the day-to-day lives of Palestinians. The group visited Palestinian villages and the points of friction with neighboring Israeli settlements.



“

This year was so meaningful to me. It was the first time I took part in an Israeli-Palestinian group that undergoes a significant process together and learned how to facilitate other groups by working together. (YAP participant)

”



WOMEN'S GROUP

A Training Course with the Adam Institute

Inspired by United Nations Resolution No. 1325 to involve women in decision-making related to war and peace, members of PCFF's Women's Group embarked on a course to learn about peace and reconciliation through a feminist lens. The Adam Institute's experienced facilitators taught PCFF's members about the development of women's unique voice and their potential contribution to future negotiations.



Two Field Trips

Jisr A-Zarqa and to Um El-Fahm

The Women's Group visited the impoverished Palestinian village of Jisr A-Zarqa on the Israeli Mediterranean coast, to become acquainted with the Palestinian women in the village and learn from their experiences. Together with the women from the PNE alumni group, they also visited the Museum of Art in Um El-Fahm, a Palestinian city in the north of Israel. The women learned about the city of Um El-Fahm, and about the vision of the museum for the past 30 years to be a meeting point between Jews and Arabs through art and through the historical and cultural stories, through which the narratives, customs and traditions are shared.



“Wedded to Peace”

40 Bereaved Palestinian mothers, sisters, and daughters have decided to use their individual passions to generate income. It is difficult to advocate for peace when your mind is still occupied with putting food on the table or supporting your children to have a better education. Each woman has a natural talent and passion for different skills - dress designing, floral arrangements, photography, nails and make-up, baking, and sweets making. These exceptional members of the PCFF participated in vocational training courses and are working towards their long-term goal of creating a wedding business together.

REACHING OUT TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

PCFF has been very active in the international arena in the past year. Its representatives led workshops on restorative justice in Italy and were invited by the Spanish Minister of Justice to lead workshops. During our representatives' visit to Northern Ireland, we met with local communities and took part in an international forum with Palestinian and Israeli representatives and local representatives, Protestants and Catholics. We held webinars on reconciliation and nonviolence with SUNY Binghamton and an online seminar around the screening of the film *One Day After Peace* at Harvard University. PCFF Spokesperson, Robi Damelin, addressed the UN Security Council in May, 2022. Parents Circle members participated in a delegation to the South of the United States including New Orleans, Jackson, Selma and Montgomery to see what lessons can be learned from American racial divides.



ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

The Ministry of Education

The Israeli Ministry of Education accepted Dialogue Meetings in high schools to its approved list of external activities available to schools. Schools can now more freely invite PCFF members to speak to the students and share with them PCFF's unique standpoint.

The Ministry of Regional Cooperation

We were also pleased to receive unprecedented support from the Israeli government. Israel's Ministry for Regional Cooperation approved a grant for PCFF's Parallel Narrative Experience, which introduces members of the Israeli and Palestinian public to the narrative of "the other" through uni-national and binational meetings, tours, and interactive education. This represents a significant milestone for PCFF.

RIGHT-WING ATTACKS

While PCFF's messages of reconciliation have always prompted public disagreement, PCFF saw an increasing number of challenges directed at the Israeli schools that hosted the Dialogue Meetings. Many of these attacks spread disinformation about PCFF's activities and members.

In one recent instance, objections from high school students' parents to PCFF's activities led to a right-wing extremist demonstration outside the school while the Dialogue Meetings were being conducted inside. The protesters called PCFF's Palestinian members 'relatives of terrorists' and demanded that the school stop the activity. Despite threats, this school continued with the activity as planned, with students reporting a meaningful and moving experience. It's important to note that many of our partner schools continue to offer Dialogue Meetings without any interruptions.





MIDOT - A SEAL OF QUALITY

Following an in-depth audit from Midot, an Israeli NGO that strives to help other NGOs maximize their impact, PCFF was awarded Midot's "Seal of Effectiveness", certifying to donors that PCFF is a strategic, effective organization for social change.

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American Friends of the Parents Circle

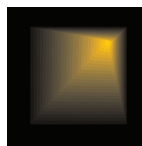
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