

# Parents Circle Families Forum Annual Report 2020



Bereaved Palestinian and Israeli  
Families for Peace and Reconciliation

## **The Parents Circle – Families Forum (PCFF)**

is a joint Israeli-Palestinian organization of over 600 families, all of whom have lost an immediate family member to the ongoing conflict. Moreover, the PCFF has concluded that the process of reconciliation between nations is a prerequisite to achieving a sustainable peace. The organization thus utilizes all resources available in education, community, public meetings and the media, to spread these ideas.



How do we write a report about an unprecedented year like 2020? How do we try to encompass all the emotions we experienced at the Parents Circle-Families Forum, like the fear of losing contact with each other? The fear of the unknown? The fear of how we could continue to spread our message of reconciliation and non-violence while the world's attention was on surviving the pandemic?

We were determined to continue with our mission and reach the Israeli and Palestinian public with messages of reconciliation, despite the public health crisis, lockdowns and political situation. While for a large part of the year our staff was forced to work from home and only see each other through computer or telephone screens, we were committed to provide our bereaved members, alumni and young ambassadors alternative ways to connect with each other.

We leaned into our creative sides. We relied on technology. We created webinars, started a film club, and saw our fellow bereaved members in Zoom boxes. For us, one of the extraordinary experiences was being able to cross borders and be in each other's homes without having to ask the army for permits or go through checkpoints. We could reach our supporters all over the world without getting on a plane. In some ways, this brought us together in a more cohesive group.

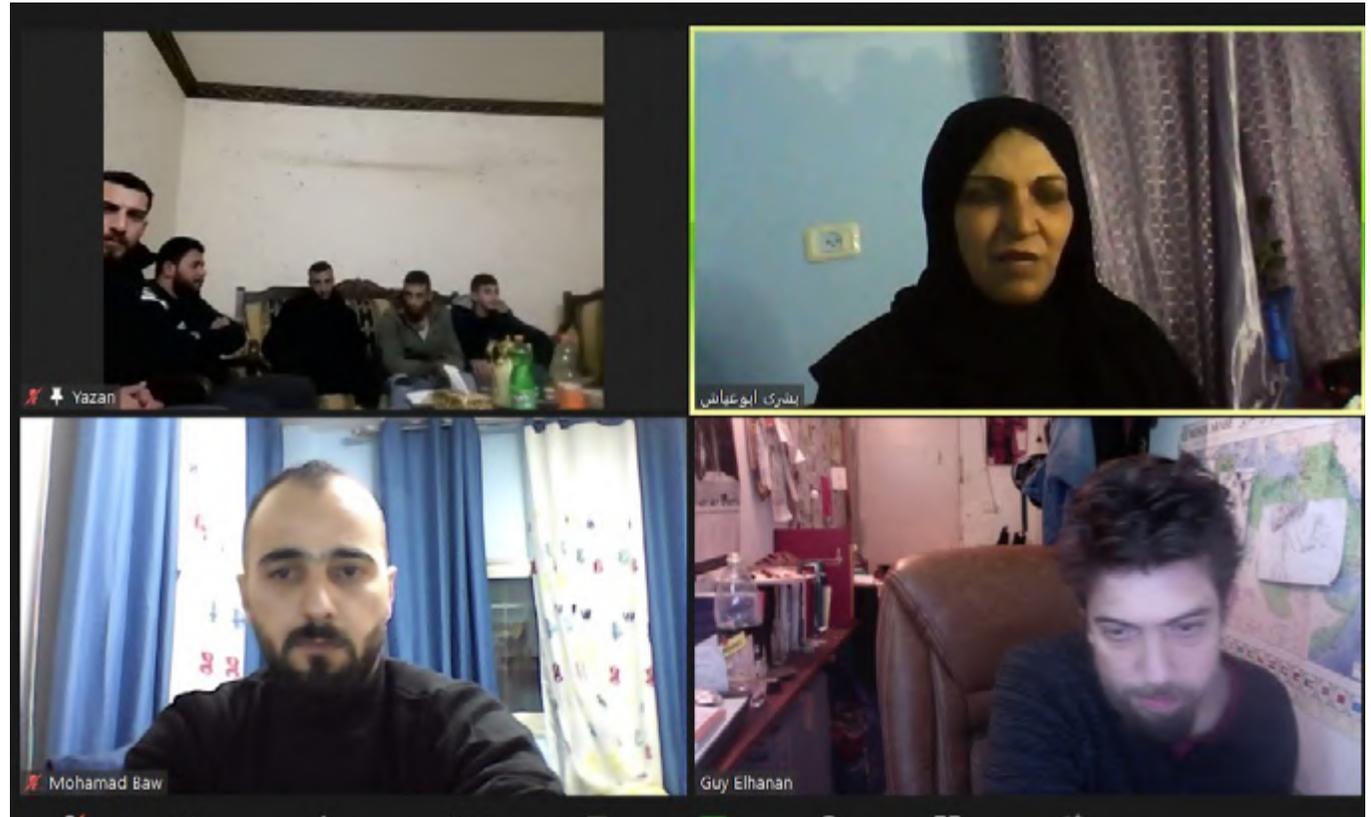
## Dialogue Meetings

2020 started with school closures, lockdowns and a total denial of entry permits for Palestinians to Israel, threatening the continuation of the Dialogue Meetings operation. To continue the program, we created an online format and trained all the Israeli and Palestinian facilitators on how to overcome the lack of physical presence of Dialogue Meetings. The quick and effective redesign of this program helped to keep our ongoing interaction with the schools which see our visit as a prime educational opportunity.

The Parents Circle held nearly **250 Dialogue Meetings** this year for approximately **6,250 Israelis, Palestinians, and internationals**. Half of these were held online, and the rest were held in person prior to the lockdown. We also trained 80 teachers to prepare their classes for the meetings and to conduct a processing discussion after the talk.

As a result of these meetings:

- 72% reported an increase in levels of empathy towards the other.
- 69% reported an increase in their optimistic feelings towards the possibility of peace.
- 76% reported a desire to know more about the “other side”.
- 80% reported that they will share their experience with friends and/or family members, showing the substantial ripple effect of this activity.



*“You all know my political views. When I heard the rumors yesterday that my school is bringing terrorists to speak in school, I was so angry. I was happy about the demonstration and wanted to join in. But when I heard the bereaved, Israeli mother tell her story and the story of the Parents Circle and its goals – to stop the violence and that no more people will get killed – and saying “my tears crying over the son I lost are the same tears as the Palestinian mother crying over the child she had lost” I understood that their messages are not political but about humanity, values and accepting the “other”.*

*What happened today was a lesson I will take with me for life.”*

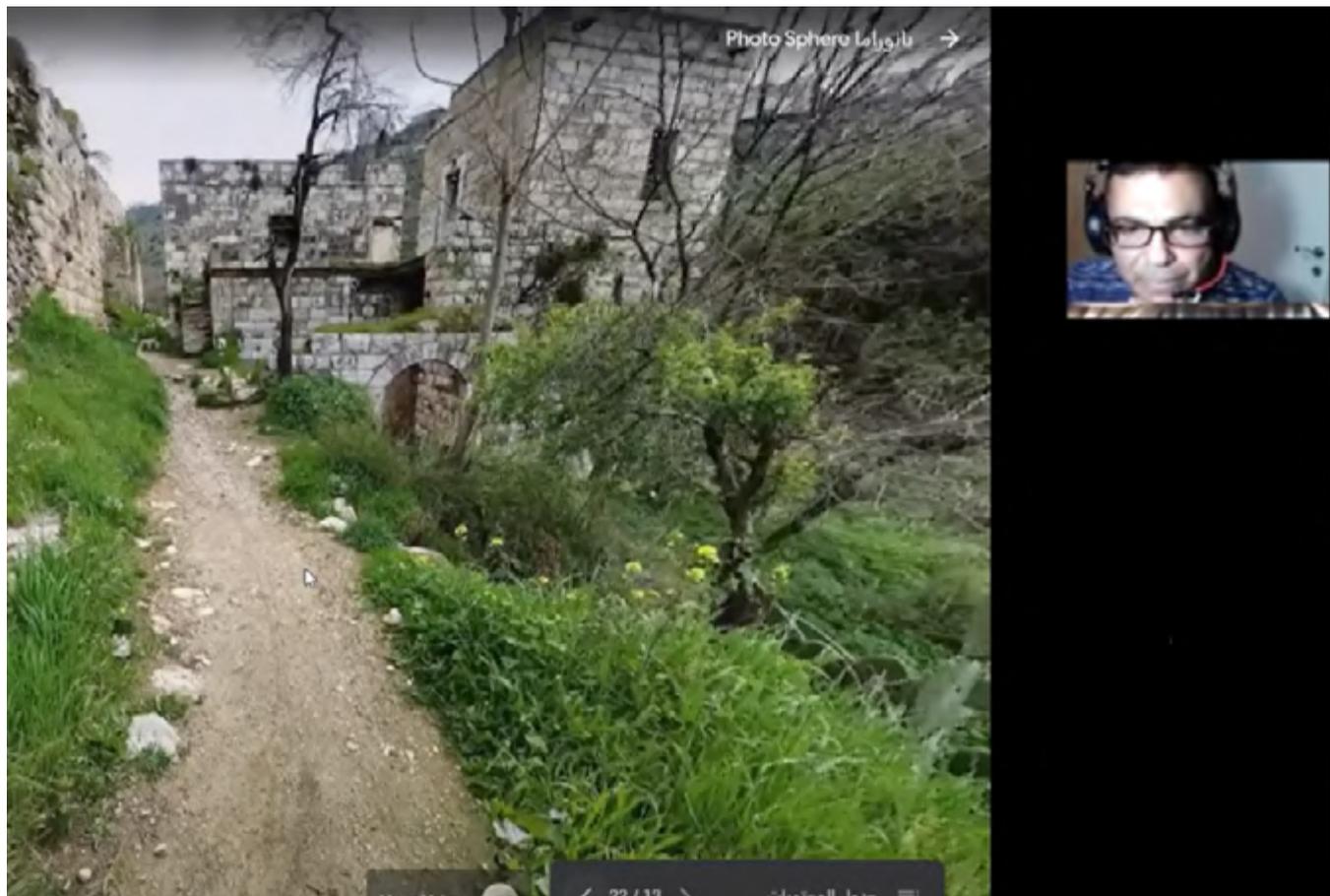
*- A student from a high school in Holon, Israel*

## Parallel Narrative Experience (PNE)

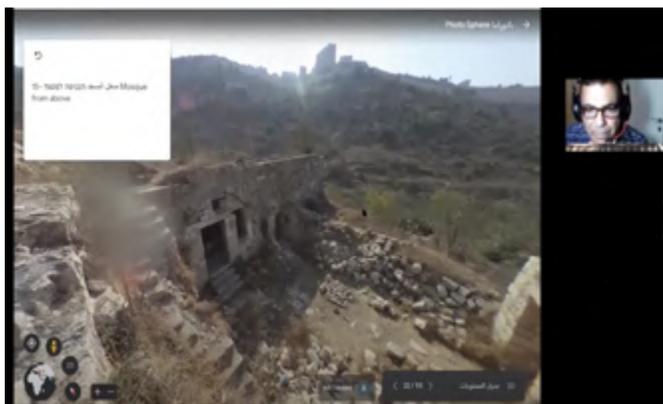
We started off 2020 with a full cohort of young adults for a PNE project. We even started the program and held separate Israeli and Palestinian uni-national meetings. The joint meeting was planned next, but a combination of a COVID-19 outbreak in Bethlehem, anti-normalization activism in Palestine fueled by Trump's peace plan publication and the threat of annexation, forced us to freeze the program.

But we did not give up. Over the next few months, our staff and educational team transformed this intensive, on the ground experience, into an interactive, online pilot project that incorporated new tools and applications to enhance the experience.

We can safely say that the participants had a transformational experience, and many new strong relations were formed. In fact, external evaluation of the new, online PNE program shows:



Israeli and Palestinian participants took a virtual tour of the former Palestinian village of Lifta.

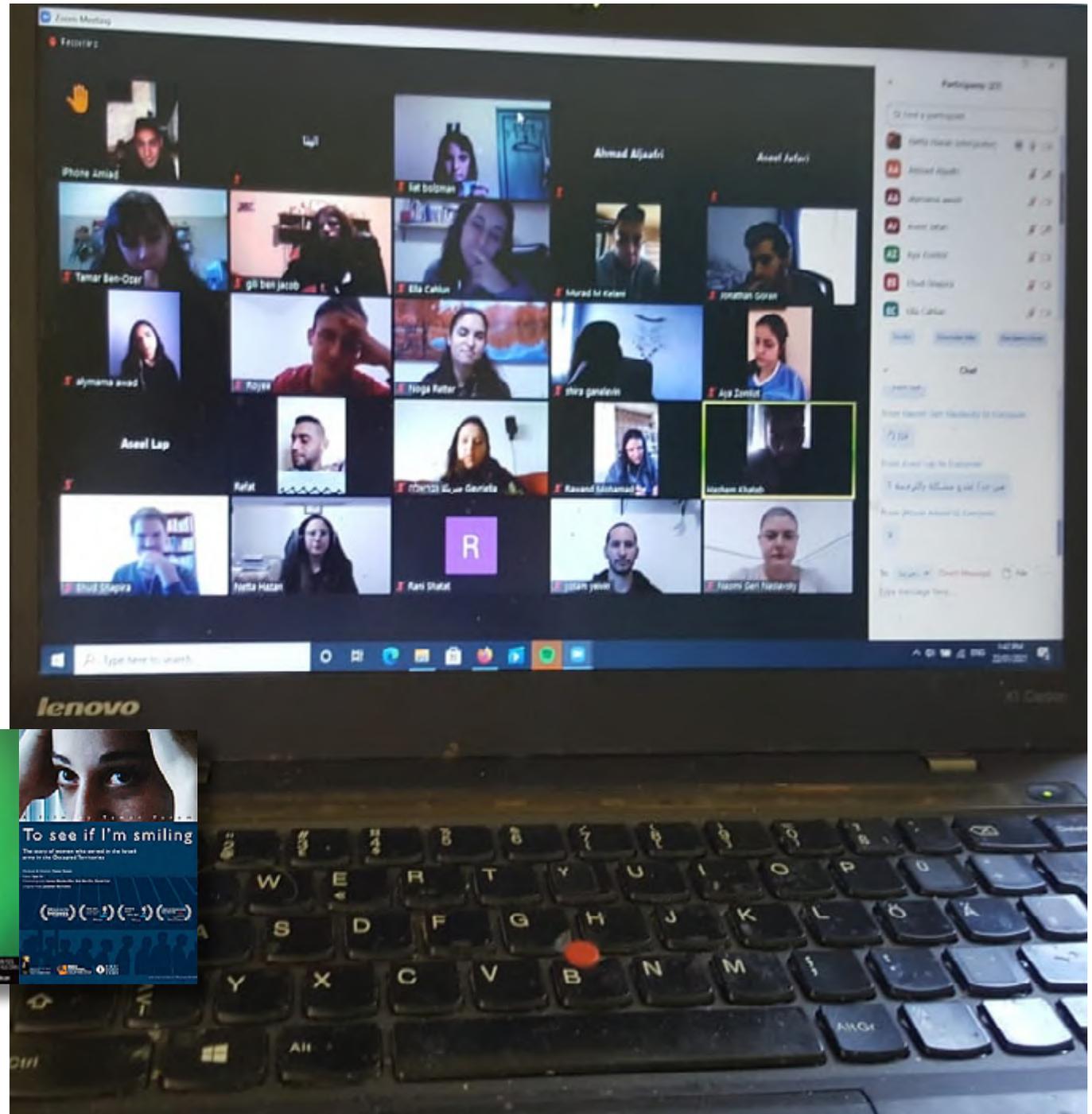


- **Belief in Peace increased:**  
*By the end of the program 94% of the participants reported they believe there is a partner on the other side to promote peace and reconciliation.*
- **Recognition in the other's narrative increased:**  
*By the end of the program 83% of the participants reported they recognize that the 'other' has a different national story than theirs and familiarity with that story.*

## Parallel Narrative Experience Alumni

Shortly after the pandemic reached Israel and Palestine, and as it became clear that physical activities and especially cross border activities could not take place, we reached out to our more than 1,200 PNE alumni so they could touch base and hear how their counterparts are doing. The alumni were very happy to meet each other and hear from one another, even if it was only via Zoom. They were also able to see the advantages saying that this allows them to “visit” each other’s homes, which is something they cannot usually do.

We organized a very popular Film Club and showed nine films including Five Broken Cameras, The Law in these Parts, Saving Nur and To See if I’m Smiling followed by discussions with guest directors and speakers.





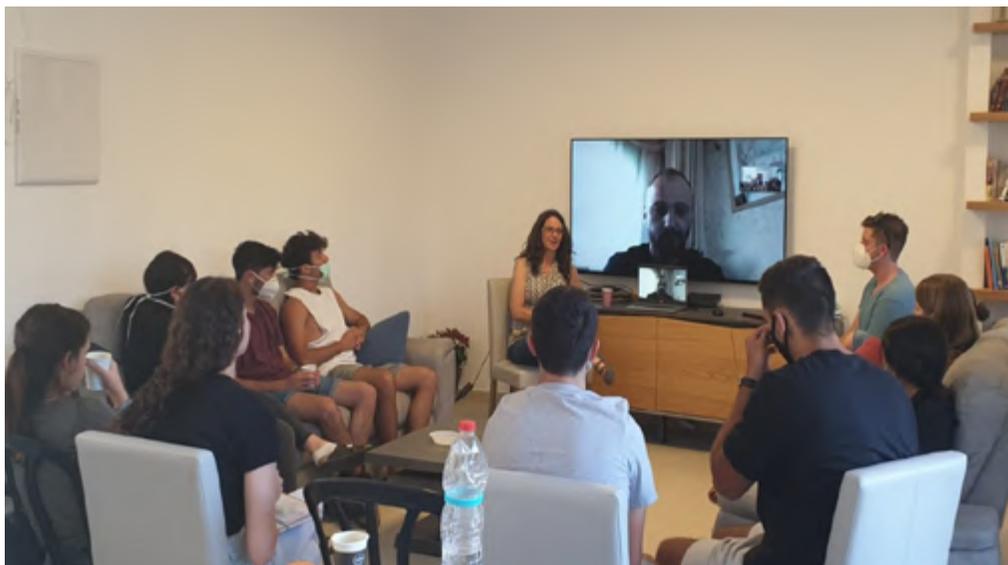
## Women's Group

The Women group's activity was struck hard by the challenges of the pandemic, but they were committed to maintaining their connections with each other and their joint work.

In early 2020, twenty potential leaders from the group began learning peace activism and leadership skills. Only two uni-national and one joint meeting were held before the outbreak of COVID-19 and the restrictions that followed. The program halted.

After consultation with the women and the program leaders, we shifted gears and adapted the program to an online format. Not only were the women able to continue their training, but they were thrilled to host each other in their homes via Zoom.





## Young Ambassadors for Peace (YAP)

This is our group of future generation leaders. They are 18-28 years old and are being prepared for leadership and public outreach roles within the PCFF and their communities.

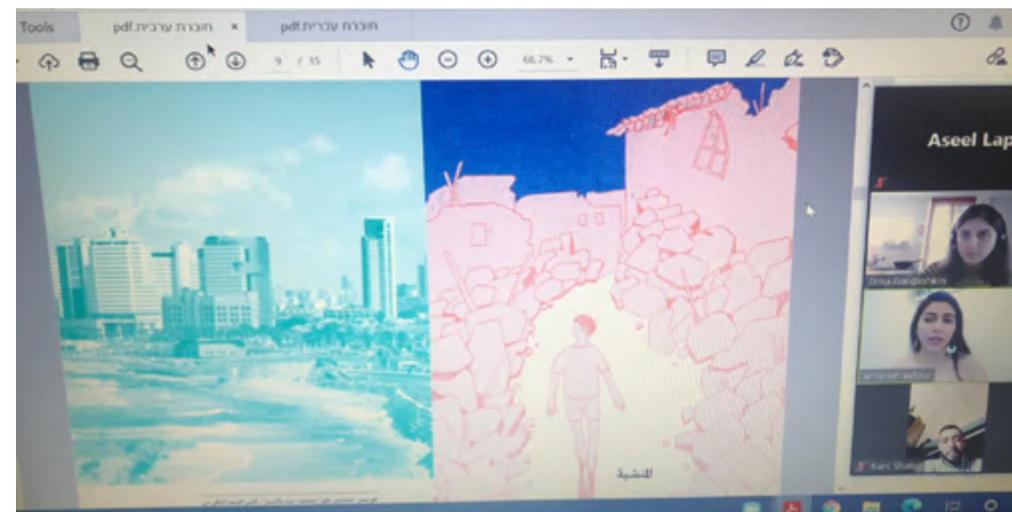
In early 2020, we continued our activities for a second cohort of Palestinian and Israeli bereaved young adults, including acquaintance and trust building activities, dialogue circles lectures and tours to learn about the personal and national historical narratives as well as the current reality.

This group's progress stopped abruptly due to the pandemic, but by late 2020, here too, program staff transformed the program to an online format and started recruiting the third group.

## Summer Camp

Each year, PCFF holds a Summer Program for 50 bereaved Israeli and Palestinian youth. This year, the participants were not able to meet in person due to COVID-19 restrictions and no entry permits were granted for Palestinians.

With relations that were built over time between the youngsters, who wait all year to see each other again, we could not let them down. So here again, we redesigned and executed several camp activities online.



*“I miss my Palestinian friends a lot more than the Israeli friends, I used to love this time of the year because we had the summer camp around this time every year.”*

*- Israeli participant*

*“I was excited as the time was getting closer to the summer camp, because during the quarantine I learned new recipes from my mom and the internet and I wanted to share that with all my friends at the summer camp.”*

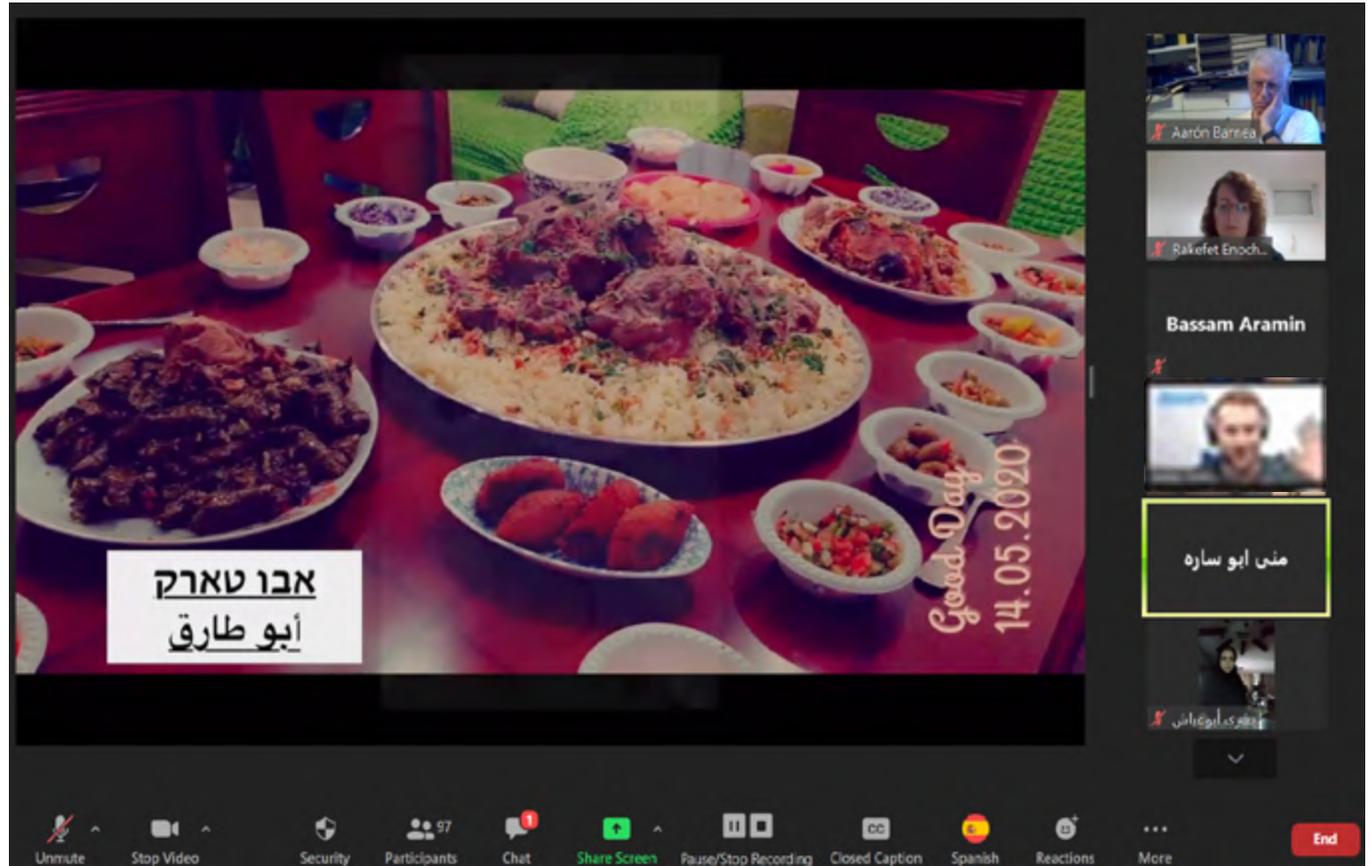
*- Palestinian participant*

## Member Meetings

The heart of the PCFF community are our Israeli-Palestinian members and their interactions with each other. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, members look forward to meeting, hugging and reconnecting with each other and getting updated about births, marriages, successes and pains.

This unusual year prevented all this. When we understood COVID-19 is here to stay for the foreseeable future, we employed a new way of meetings, and in the summer, we started to conduct monthly online community meetings. Members of bereaved families logged on to hear updates from each other, share their distress and anxiety about the current social and political situation, meet new members and get updates about PCFF's programs.

More than 70 members joined each time; meetings are translated simultaneously Hebrew/Arabic so all members can share and listen in real time.



Bereaved Palestinian members share pictures of the traditional meals they prepare for Iftar with their Israeli counterparts





## Joint Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day

This year the whole world was invited to participate in an extraordinary evening where Palestinians and Israelis who had lost immediate family members took to the stage to tell their stories of loss and reconciliation. Co-hosted with Combatants for Peace, the 15th Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day Ceremony shared beautiful music, poetry and speeches for a sense of hope. More than 200,000 people attended the 2020 online ceremony with more than one million views.

**It has been called the largest Israeli-Palestinian peace event in history.**



## Say No to Annexation

The first six months of 2020 brought with it the black cloud of annexation of parts of the West Bank. The Parents Circle quickly mobilized and participated in anti-annexation campaigns including demonstrations and protests. We created a "Say No to Annexation" video in three languages.

We were part of a coalition of Israeli NGOs that demonstrated in Rabin Square in Tel Aviv proclaiming: **"No to annexation and occupation, yes to peace and democracy"**. In June we initiated and participated, together with Combatants for Peace, a joint rally in which more than 350 Palestinians and Israelis demonstrated in Palestine against annexation. The rally was followed by a solidarity meeting with PA officials in Jericho.



## International Peace Day

This year, Peace Day coincided with 20 years of the Second Intifada. Many PCFF members lost their loved ones during this period, and true to our mission, we marked the day with Letters of Hope.

Each parent sent a letter to their lost loved one, along with a picture of the child's room with a plea for **No More Empty Rooms**.



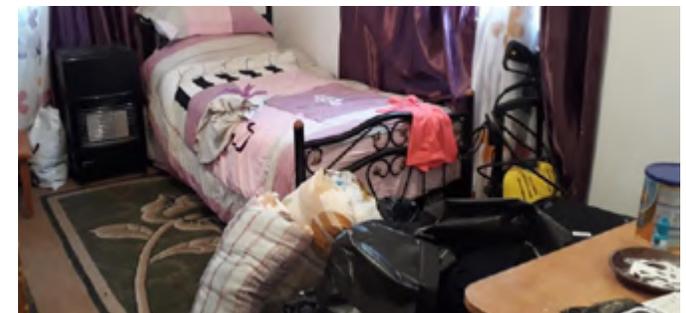
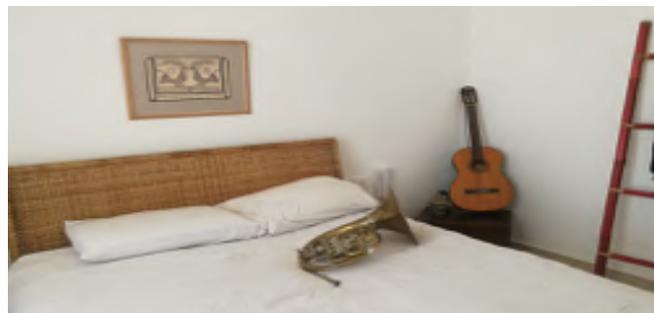
Mahmoud Awad's room in Beit Omar, killed in 2008.

“

I thought that this was the end of my world, and nearly died with you, but because of your brothers and sisters and your father, I survived, with all this terrible pain which never goes away.

”

–Bushra Awad  
Mahmoud's mother



# International Relations

2020 started with a strong U.S. program around the publication of award-winning author, Colum McCann's novel, *Apeirogen*, which tells the true stories of bereaved Israeli and Palestinian fathers and members of the Parents Circle, Rami Elhanan and Bassam Aramin. The media around the publication of the book in major news publications, coupled with the book tour to six major U.S. cities promised unprecedented exposure for the Parents Circle.

Our American Friends hosted 6 webinars, including two with award-winning author Colum McCann, a webinar on the findings of an important study on the pivotal role that hope plays in bringing about peace and a webinar about Comfort Food during Difficult Times with special guest chefs, Reem Kassis, Michael Solomonov and Gil Hovav. We partnered with other like-minded organizations, such as TELOS, J Street, Boston Partners for Peace, and hosted 8 virtual Dialogue Meetings.




## A Look Ahead to 2021

## Our Staff



**Osama Abu-Ayash**  
Co-General Director



**Yuval Rahamim**  
Co-General Director



**Robi Damelin**  
Spokesperson and  
International Relations



**Mira Edelstein**  
Ramat Efal Office  
Manager and Projects  
Coordinator



**Ronit Maor**  
Accountant

Our new Co-Directors, bereaved members Osama abu Ayyash and Yuval Rahamim have set member engagement and public outreach as our areas of priority for 2021. While the future of our activities is going to look quite different for the foreseeable future due to COVID-19, and as the political landscape continues to change, PCFF will continue to push forward its goals for extended impact.

We want to take this opportunity to thank our wonderful Palestinian, Israeli and international staff who make the impossible, possible.



**Nadine Quomsieh**  
Beit Jala Projects and  
Operations Manager



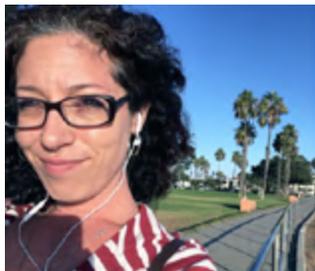
**Ahlam Abu Halam**  
Beit Jala Office Manager



**Rakefet Enoch**  
Ramat Efal Projects  
Manager



**Aisha Aqtam**  
Women's Group  
Coordinator



**Dikla Tuchman**  
Grants Manager



**Liat Bolzman**  
Youth Programs  
Coordinator



**Mohammad Albaw**  
New Media Manager



**Gili Meisler**  
New Media &  
Communication Manager

*“I had to bring my work home and suddenly my three children said. “These Israeli children on the Zoom are the same as us.”*

*“I am always thrilled to see the transformation after the Parallel Narrative Project, but this time it was even more moving to see that it is possible to change people even if the process is online.”*

*“It is so heartwarming to watch how determined the team is to continue the work online.”*

*“Listening to the story of a new mother who lost her child reminded me why I spend every day promoting the message of reconciliation and hope.”*

## **Our Supporters in 2020\***

American Friends of the Parents Circle-Families Forum

Anonymous from the United States

Anonymous from Israel

Amnon Birman [Israel]

B8 of Hope

Melissa and Bernard Bernstein

Nancy Bernstein and Robert Schoen

The Russell Berrie Foundation

Bread for the World

Broederlijk Delen

Douglas and Terry Cooper

Abigail Disney

Kimberly Duchossois

DVHL (German Association of the Holy Land)

The Empathy Fund

Friends of the Bereaved Families Forum, UK

Grosseres Denmark

GRoW @Annenberg

Ilan Hauser [Israel]

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

The Leo Model Foundation

Max and Pauline Zimmer Family

Mensile Confronti – Italy

Merle S. Cahn Foundation

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The Moriah Fund

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New Israel Fund

Niwano Peace Foundation

Monica Nogaro and David Wyler

Peace by Tourism

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Threshold Foundation

Samuel Rubin Foundation

SIVMO

Source of Hope Foundation

Splashdown

Threshold Foundation

Tony Shalhoub

U.S. Embassy Jerusalem's American Center

Frank and Juli Vitiello

Winograd-Hunter Family Fund

Nell and Victor Wyler

UK Friends of the Bereaved Families Forum

Zients Family Foundation

Zentrum für Mission und Ökumene (ZMO)

\*Gifts of \$5,000 and above

For donations, please check our websites: Bank Details: Parents Circle- Families Forum Account number: 293505 Bank name: Hapoalim (12) Branch: Asia House (567) Address: 4 weitzman st. Tel Aviv Israel Swift code: Poalilit IBAN number: IL 93-0125-6700-0000-0293-505 The PCFF Financial Statements reveal good performance and a healthy fiscal culture, in conjunction with a vision-oriented approach to programing. Parents Circle – Families Forum is grateful to its supporters that allow us to respond to the overwhelmingly growing challenges of the every-day realities in Israel and in Palestine.

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