

The background is black. On the left side, the numbers '2020' are written in a large, bold, olive-green font, stacked vertically. A thick, bright yellow arc starts from the bottom left and curves upwards and to the right, framing the text on the right side.

ANNUAL REPORT

PARENTS CIRCLE FAMILIES FORUM

Bereaved Israelis and Palestinians for Peace

Dear friends and partners,

This was a painfully dark year. In the face of unprecedented violence, death and bereavement, the Parents Circle strives to be a source of light. Our privilege lies in standing united, against all odds, bereaved Israelis and Palestinians, staff, alumni, and board members deeply affected by the conflict. Your solidarity with our mission confirms our validity, invigorates our wellbeing, and adds volume to our commitment to reconciliation and peace.

The path forward is not always clear. Conflicted feelings of fear, anger and suspicion, alongside empathy, compassion and genuine concern for each other can lead us down a rocky path. As the Israeli and Palestinian co-Directors, we hope to guide our staff, our alumni, our members and our societies, on a journey of healing and a return to our core values – the sanctity of human life above all else.

Before you turn the page, we ask that you take a moment to remember and honor all of the lives lost in 2023 and recommit to our mission of peace and reconciliation, no matter how difficult the path ahead. Thank you for your ongoing support,



A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Yuval Rahamim".

Yuval Rahamim
Israeli Co-Director



A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Nadine Quomsieh".

Nadine Quomsieh
Palestinian Co-Director

Parents Circle – Families Forum

The Parents Circle – Families Forum, founded in 1995, is a joint Israeli- Palestinian organization of over 750 bereaved families, all of whom have lost a family member to the ongoing conflict. We call to prevent further bereavement, to promote dialogue, reconciliation, and peace. As part of our commitment to a fully and equally shared effort, PCFF is jointly operated by Palestinian and Israeli staff.

THE CONTEXT

We talk about 2023 in terms of before October 7 and after October 7.

Before October 7, Israelis were living under the most extreme government in history. The Israel Ministry of Education banned PCFF's Dialogue Meetings from Israeli high schools, claiming the goals of the organization undermine educational and national values. We took an active role in the extensive Israeli protest movement against the proposed legal reform.

During the same period, Palestinians faced escalating cycles of settler violence, brutal army incursions, particularly in Jenin and increased army presence, especially after the brutal attack in Huwara. 2023 was the most violent year on record for such incidents.

On October 7, the military arm of Hamas initiated a violent and destructive attack on the region of Israel bordering Gaza, causing more than one thousand deaths and the capture of hostages. In response, Israel launched a military attack that inflicted immense damages and tremendous human loss in Gaza. At the same time, targeted army campaigns and settler violence took place in the West Bank.

At the end of 2023, it was harder than ever to foresee the scope of efforts required to reverse demonization of both sides in the eyes of the other. As always, we see that as our most important mission.

PROGRAMMING – IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS

Healing and recovery are the certainties that lie ahead. This report covers programming from January until October 7, 2023 followed by the adaptation of our work thereafter, to the uncharted, volatile reality.

DIALOGUE MEETINGS IN ISRAEL

We conducted a total of 300 Dialogue Meetings with 9,550 participants in 2023. They included 166 DMs for the Israeli population. Until the Ministry of Education ban was announced in August, the number of PCFF Dialogue Meetings in Israeli high schools continued to grow in comparison to previous years. Throughout the year, we also held 129 DMs for participants from abroad.



STUDENTS AT A DIALOGUE MEETING
PHOTO CREDIT: HADAS PARUSH, HA'ARETZ

Quotes by Israeli Participants

“The meeting really affected me. I left it feeling empowered. This was the first time I had the opportunity to speak with someone from the territories, and Ashraf is an inspiring person, as is Iris. I think this is the most important thing that I have learned in school to date. These are subjects that you can't learn about from a PowerPoint presentation or a paper for a history or civics course. You need the voice, the look in the eyes and the personal story that create a true human connection.”

“The only information I had about Palestinians was from the news and social media. The pictures and the items are about terrorists, suicide bombers. Meetings like this show how much we are all really people, here or there, under different life circumstances. Now, when I'll hear people speak in generalizations or exaggerated claims about Palestinians, I'll be able to help them refine their opinions, to see the bigger picture.”

THE FIGHT FOR DIALOGUE MEETINGS

In response to the Ministry of Education's ban on our Dialogue Meetings in Israeli high schools, we submitted an appeal to the Ministry of Education and took the case to court. Simultaneously, we launched a multimedia, public advocacy campaign, **"Yes, in our schools"** to counteract the deceptive and false impressions penetrating public opinion from the Ministry of Education's statements.

We were not going to be stopped by these restrictions. We found alternative venues such as public parks and community centers at times and locations that attracted large and diverse audiences. Every Saturday night, following the ministry's decision, and until October, we held Dialogue Meeting sessions right before the massive Saturday night protests of the government's proposed legal reform held in Tel Aviv and throughout Israel. We held a total of 24 of these public Dialogue Meetings, reaching an average of 200 people each.

Since October 7, Israel's closure of the West Bank has forced us to hold Dialogue Meetings online only. We held two Dialogue Meeting webinars for some 700 people following the outbreak of the war which included new bereaved Israeli and Palestinian members who have joined since having lost loved ones on October 7, 2023.

"Yes, in our schools!"

In a play-on-words on the Hebrew phrase, not in our schools, used to express disapproval for any stated behavior in a given setting, PCFF conducted this campaign in reaction to the Ministry of Education banning our programs from schools.



DIALOGUE MEETING IN THE PARK

“The Dialogue Meeting enables an opportunity for our students to meet a Palestinian eye-to-eye and not at a roadblock, and this involves a human encounter that manages to eliminate fear and stereotypes. We will not succumb to this, and we'll immediately schedule the program for next year.”

–Coordinator for External Programs at an Israeli high school

THE PARALLEL NARRATIVE EXPERIENCE (PNE)

Each group brings 20-30 Israelis and Palestinians together to learn about the personal, historical, and national narrative of the *other*.

A PNE group was held in the first quarter of 2023 and included lectures, dialogue circles and tours to learn about the national trauma of each side. Participants visited Lifta, a pre-1948 Palestinian village and Kibbutz Yad Mordechai, that houses the museum From Holocaust Resurrection. The process they went through changed their perception about the other, created empathy and trust and increased their belief in the possibility of peace.

The second PNE group was for a diverse group of Palestinian and Israeli women. However, we received threats the day before the first joint weekend and PCFF was compelled to cancel the gathering to protect the personal safety of the participants and the staff.

A third PNE was scheduled for mid-October but this would not come to be.

After the war began, we held virtual meetings for Israeli and Palestinian PNE alumni and we encouraged our alumni to engage in one-on-one conversations with the other side to show empathy.



LIBERAL PROFESSIONALS PNE GROUP AT KIBBUTZ YAD MORDECHAI MUSEUM, FROM HOLOCAUST TO RESURRECTION

At the conclusion of the first binational weekend,

A Palestinian woman said,

“ This meeting broke a lot of barriers between us. A lot of my thoughts were shattered and changed. I thought the Jews would be heartless, but that wasn’t the case. I saw that there are people like us on the other side. ”

An Israeli women commented,

“ I’m really happy I came and had the opportunity to hear about what life looks like on the other side. There were also difficult moments and I have to digest everything, but I’m glad I came. ”

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY

The 18th annual Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day Ceremony provides a platform for commemorating the shared loss of both Israeli and Palestinian lives. Participants bear witness to the profound human cost of the conflict, underscoring the urgent need for dialogue, reconciliation, and mutual recognition of each other's pain. Held in a Tel Aviv park, amidst the backdrop of perpetual tensions, and despite government attempts to prevent Palestinians' entry to Israel to participate, the ceremony demonstrated our unwavering commitment to reconciliation and peace. A record number of 15,000 people attended and were joined by close to 300,000 more online.



There were four speakers of PCFF – Anat Marnin, Yuval Sapir, Yusra Mahfud, and Adel Abu Badawi.

As candles flickered in remembrance of lives lost, the ceremony served as a beacon of hope, inspiring renewed determination to build a future of peace.

YOUTH SUMMER PROGRAM

The 2023 Summer Program was held for eight days at the Ben Shemen Youth Village in Israel. Despite attempts to cancel the camp by Members of Knesset and mountains of bureaucratic challenges, the Summer Camp program was declared a great success. There were 50 teenagers, 25 Palestinians and 25 Israelis, ages 14-18 who participated. The counselors were from our YAP (Young Ambassadors for Peace) program and the close relationship between them was projected on the summer program participants generating an atmosphere of honest and respectful dialogue.



SUMMER CAMP PARTICIPANTS, 2023

The program was conducted in collaboration with Peace by Tourism which brought Palestinian and Israeli chefs to cook with the youngsters and learn to prepare delicious food together that they shared with their mothers in a joint festive meal on the last day of the program.

All participants went to the beach for a day, and on September 21, International Day of Peace, they met at the UN building in Jerusalem to sign a charter calling for peace, dialogue, and reconciliation.

Quotes from participants on the last day of the summer camp summarizing their experiences:

“

I feel brave but also scared, surprised and pleased. But mostly – I feel HOPE. ”

–A Palestinian participant

“

I hope that now both sides can see their home on the map, but also the home of the “other” side. ”

–An Israeli participant

“

What is happening to us is inhumane, and what happened in the Holocaust is inhumane. Let us condemn inhumanity and leave the comparison aside. ”

–A Palestinian participant

YOUNG AMBASSADORS FOR PEACE

The Young Ambassadors for Peace (YAP) program included 20 young adults, 10 Palestinians and 10 Israelis, ages 20-26. They engaged in leadership training, social activities, and study tours throughout Israel and the West Bank to become the next generation of PCFF facilitators and leaders.

The annual program included a meeting in Jaffa, a multicultural weekend in Haifa, a weekend in Ujah, a meeting of sharing narratives, a joint Iftar and Passover meal. The highlight was a nine-day joint trip to Switzerland in collaboration with the Coexistences organization.

In Switzerland, the YAP group met with Swiss families, members of Coexistences, and lived together in a chalet in the Alps.

Participants spent two days at the Swiss IMD Business School in Geneva where they learned about activism, creating social media, online activism, and stress relief.

Immediately after returning to Israel, the YAPers joined the summer program as counselors, assistant counselors, logistics assistants, and photographers. After October 7, the YAP group held uninational meetings to process and support each other. They expressed desires to meet with the other side.



YAP 2023 PARTICIPANTS

WOMEN'S GROUP

The Women's Group continued its pursuit to learn from women leaders working to create change in their communities and strengthen their connections.

They learned about women's businesses like the bee project at the Sinsila Community Center in East Jerusalem, as an example of women's leadership and economic empowerment. The Palestinian members of the PCFF shared their experiences in the **Wedded to Peace** project with the Israeli PCFF women, an initiative in which Palestinian women gained vocational experience in wedding related skills like hairstyling, manicures, makeup, cake making. We held a ceremony in which they received certificates for completing the courses.



MEETING THE WOMEN FROM THE SINSILA

Another Women's Group activity took them to the northern Jordan Valley where they heard about how women there cope with imposed water shortages and settler attacks and harassment. The day ended with PCFF women visiting the center established by women leaders, for women, in the village, Bardalla where they planted flowers in the women's garden in solidarity.

MEMBER ACTIVITIES

We held a conference for 50 relatively new members who had never participated before. In an emotionally powerful experience, held in Jaffa, new members shared their stories. We had hoped to hold a conference for all members by the end of 2023, which became impossible after October 7.



Following October 7, with all necessary precautions and considerations taken into account, we have engaged new members in the work of the Parents Circle.

Many Palestinian members under closure in the West Bank since October 7 have suffered from the grave economic implications affecting the population. With the assistance of Rabbis for Human Rights, we delivered food packages to 250 Palestinian members.

SOLIDARITY ACTIVITIES

PCFF members engaged in solidarity activities throughout 2023, including:

- Visit to the Hallak family whose only son, Eyad, age 32, who was on the autism spectrum, was shot by an Israeli soldier in the Old City of Jerusalem in March 2020. The visit followed the Israeli court ruling which acquitted the soldier for shooting Eyad.
- PCFF members and PNE alumni visited the ruins of the Palestinian village, al-Tantura near Haifa. It was one of 500 villages destroyed during the war of 1948, the Palestinian Nakba. Our members met with Jihan Sarhan who shared her father's story of the massacre and expulsion of the community.
- A group of 35 PNE alumni visited the Ayalon-Canada Park, built on the site of an abandoned Palestinian village, Emmaus. They also visited Neve Shalom– the only town established in Israel for Jews and Arabs to live together, in partnership and equality.
- YAP participants met at Khan al-Ahmer, where they heard about the residents' struggle against the Occupation. They participated in a workshop on creating video content so they could post and spread residents' personal stories on social media.
- For Tu B'Shvat, the Jewish version of Arbor Day, PCFF members continued the tradition of planting olive trees on both sides of the Green Line, as a counteraction to the uprooting of Palestinian olive groves by Israeli settlers, and in memory of lost loved ones.

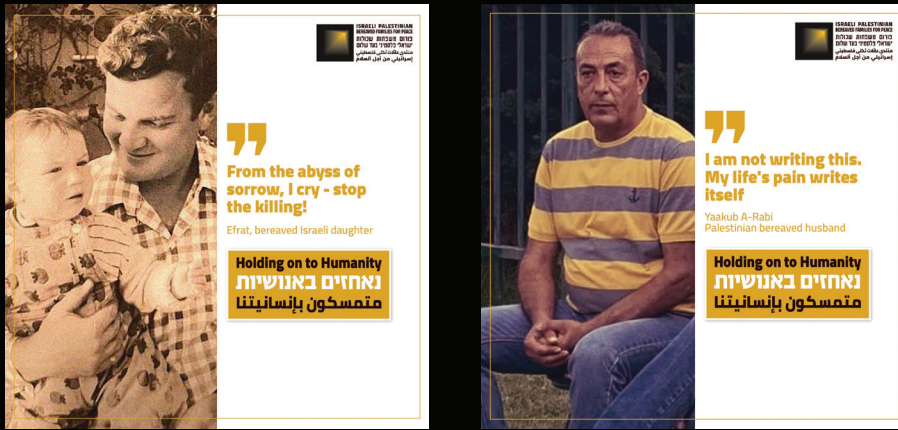


SOLIDARITY VISIT IN TANTURA



PCFF WOMEN PLANTING FLOWERS IN BARDALLA

MEDIA CAMPAIGNS – HOLDING ONTO HUMANITY



In order to amplify our messages even during the darkest time, after October 7, PCFF launched the Holding onto Humanity campaign to spread the belief that from the deepest pain, people can transform grief into meaningful action towards peace and reconciliation. We created a video clip called “We Must Save the Children” for International Children’s Day, and

weekly, postings of poems expressing hope, in Arabic, Hebrew, and English on social media.

Hundreds of people joined the campaign to spread these messages of hope and even newly bereaved members who lost loved ones on October 7th helped keep people’s hearts open, to be able to see the human side and hold on to humanity, giving people hope, despite their raw pain.

INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH, FRIENDS AND RECOGNITION

Many members represented PCFF internationally in Japan, Australia, Canada, the United States, France, Belgium, and the Czech Republic. After October 7, PCFF members spoke with unprecedented frequency at online gatherings, countless media interviews and in person events in the United States.

American Friends of the Parents Circle Families Forum has responded to hundreds of requests to help communities all over the United States to heal from the divisiveness of importing the conflict. They have led in-person and virtual Dialogue Meetings on dozens of college campuses, Fortune 500 companies, local townships, international NGOs and more. They have also renewed their partnership with Georgetown University to create an online program and curriculum to scale up the Dialogue Meeting program which will be promoted by a new partnership with the American Federation of Teachers and will be available in Spring of 2024.

The British Friends Forum recruited new trustees who will begin their term in 2024. Friends in Germany are exploring the establishment of a new entity for PCFF for 2024.



ROBI, LAILA, AND THE IRISH FOREIGN MINISTER

PCFF was awarded the prestigious Pax Christi Prize, followed by an unsolicited grant for emergency work at the end of the year, and individuals and organizations reached out to nominate us for international prizes and include us in events throughout the world.

A LOOK AHEAD

The war between Israel and Hamas continues and the death toll rises every day. Human suffering, trauma and grief is at an all time high.

Since October 7, we have focused on healing and recovery and also remaining committed to our values of ensuring the sanctity of life amidst violence and bloodshed. This is no simple task.

Both societies are traumatized. Both societies live amidst great uncertainty and people on both sides are full of fear, anxiety, and deep sadness.



YAP MEETING FOR IFTAR

We continue to engage with our groups – the youth, the Young Ambassadors for Peace, our alumni, our members – with great sensitivity. We are learning how to engage Palestinians and Israelis in dialogue in a post-October 7 reality.

Our unique character as an Israeli-Palestinian organization positions us to model the message of reconciliation and deliver it to the public, making it resonate and change attitudes in both Israeli and Palestinian society.



YAP IN SWITZERLAND

OUR SUPPORTERS*

David and Margaret Altschul
Anonymous
B8 of Hope
Jennifer Bellini
Annie Berdy
Melissa and Bernie Bernstein
Nancy Bernstein and Robert Schoen
Marcia Bordman
Bread for the World
Dr. Bronner's All in One
Captiva Foundation
Merle S. Cahn Foundation
Cookfire Trusts
Douglas and Terry Cooper
Naomi and Nehemiah Cohen Foundation
Broederlijk Delen
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland
Abigail Disney
Roy and Patricia Disney Family Foundation
Kimberly Duchossois
The Empathy Fund
Harold Erdman
Fet Zun
Fineshriber Family Foundation
The Fridolin Charitable Trust
Fundación Moisés Itzkowich
Gideon Stein
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Lauren Glant and Michael Gillespie
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Michael Goldstein
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Edward E. Haddock, Jr. Family Foundation
Lynne Hybels
The Institute for Socioeconomic Studies Fund
Jean Johnson

Kaleidoscope
Karl Kahane Foundation
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Welt Weit
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Lloyd Zuckerberg
**Indicates \$5,000+ Donors*



MIDOT - A SEAL OF QUALITY

Following a comprehensive evaluation by 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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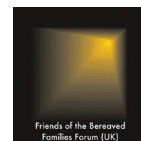
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פורום משפחות שכולות
ישראל-פלסטיני בעד שלום
ISRAELI PALESTINIAN
BEREAVED FAMILIES FOR PEACE
منتدى عائلات ثكلى فلسطيني
إسرائيلي من أجل السلام



**AMERICAN FRIENDS
of the PARENTS CIRCLE**
— FAMILIES FORUM —
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