



אגודת המפגש הבין דתי (ע"ר) جمعية اللقاء بين الديانات
INTERFAITH ENCOUNTER ASSOCIATION

Introduction to IEA's Activities

We believe that, rather than being the cause of the problem, religion can and should be a source of solution for conflicts that exist in the Middle East and beyond.

◆ Background

In the fall of 2001 – in the wake of over a year of needless bloodshed in the Middle East and the horrifying calamity of September 11th in the U.S. – the newly-formed Interfaith Encounter Association (IEA) set itself to the daunting task of building and strengthening a grassroots interfaith movement for peace, justice, and sustainability in the Holy Land and in the Middle East. Envisioning a society in which the "otherness" of the Other is not only accepted, but truly understood and respected, the IEA dedicated itself to promoting real coexistence and human peace in the Middle East through cross-cultural study and inter-religious dialogue.



The IEA was founded on the following principles and goals:

- ❖ Equal representation of all faiths in the IEA;
- ❖ Gender equality in the decision making processes and activities of the IEA;
- ❖ Outreach to individuals and communities from all faiths, age groups, walks of life, and levels of society;
- ❖ Outreach to individuals and communities across the religious-secular and political spectra;

- ❖ Continual recruitment through committed activists on the local and regional levels;
- ❖ Implementation of interactive programs that effectively change outlooks and attitudes, such as extended weekend seminars and ongoing study groups;
- ❖ Continual development of new models for effective encounter; and
- ❖ Ongoing evaluation of all strategies and programs.

Recognition and awards

In the years since its inception, the IEA has been amazingly successful at staying true to its principles while beginning to realize a tiny part of the society it hopes to create. In acknowledgement of the IEA's work, UNESCO has recognized the IEA as an organization that is contributing to the culture of peace and as an actor of the global movement for a culture of peace, a United Nations initiative. In 2006 the IEA was awarded ***The Prize for Humanity*** by The Immortal Chaplains Foundation. In 2007 Two of IEA's coordinators won the ***Women's Peace Initiative Award*** of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding. The IEA is the recipient of the 2007 ***INTR°A-Project Award for the Complementation of Religions*** of The Institute for Interreligious Studies.



International connections

The IEA also maintains connections and relationships with many international interfaith organizations and networks. The IEA serves as a Multiple Cooperation Circle (MCC) of the United Religions Initiative (URI) and each encounter group of the IEA functions as a Cooperation Circle (CC) of that organization as well. The IEA is a Member Group of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), a Member Group of Roots and Shoots of the Jane Goodall Institute and an Affiliate Member of the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations. The Jerusalem programs of the IEA also function as part of the Partner Cities Network of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR) and the Goldin Institute. Finally: the IEA is a member in the Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN and a founding member of the Partnership Committee for the United Nations Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace.

◆ Philosophy & Methodology

In the microcosms of the IEA's ongoing dialogue groups, seminars, and study sessions, fear gives way to familiarity, ignorance to understanding, exclusion to inclusion, discrimination to tolerance and respect, and strife to harmony. The goal is

not to blend all traditions into one undifferentiated group but to provide a table where all can come and sit in safety and ease, while being fully who they are in their respective religions. In this way the IEA aims to change the dynamics of a society crystallized in a culture of war into a society embedded in a culture of humanized engagement. Thus the IEA views interfaith dialogue not as a goal in of itself but as a tool through which society can be *re-crystallized* into a culture of peace and harmony. By engaging ordinary people – not just their religious, spiritual, or political leaders – the IEA is creating *extraordinary* transformations in the way grassroots people perceive and encounter the Other – the seeds of a new crystallization capable of transforming society as a whole. The IEA believes that peace is a stool that stands on three legs: human, economic, and political. The IEA is helping to create, encounter by encounter, the human component to that peace – the component so sorely missed in previous peace-initiatives.



The IEA accomplishes its work through its unique programmatic method. The IEA operates within three concentric circles of interfaith work, each with the power to grow and impact the circle encapsulating it. In the first and most preeminent circle – the **Inner-Israeli circle** – the IEA focuses on the promotion of respectful relations between Jews, Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Baha'is living in Israel. This process in turn impacts and enables the second circle – the **Israeli-Palestinian circle** – where the IEA works in cooperation with 8 Palestinian organizations across the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). The work of the first and second circles aids the work of the third circle – the **Middle East region** – where the IEA has been a major founder in establishing the Middle East Abrahamic Forum, along with similar organizations from Egypt, Iran, Jordan, the PNA, Lebanon, Tunisia and Turkey.

Additionally, the IEA maintains three interconnected programmatic sections. The **general program** is accessible to all segments of society, regardless of age or sex. Owing to the nature of many cultural religious practices in the Middle East, women are often times left out of the circle of interfaith dialogue initiatives. Issues of modesty for men and women in the four faith-traditions (Judaism, Islam, Christianity, & Druze) as well as the disparity between male and female representation in each tradition's higher clergy surround such interfaith encounters. These issues present themselves as obstacles that particularly affect female participation, resulting in the further marginalization of women from such initiatives. Consequently, it is especially important that women have their own space to come together across religious traditions and engage in interfaith peace-building work equally. The **Women's Interfaith Encounter (WIE)** was launched in the winter of 2001 to address this need and to rectify this potential pitfall in grassroots inter-religious work. For the women

in the WIE, interfaith study also serves as a source of strength and empowerment to recognize the values and challenges they share with women outside their particular tradition.



The third programmatic section, the **Youth Interfaith Encounter (YIE)**, designs and implements programs specifically for young adults. Similar to the challenges facing women are those facing youth. Young people's lack of religious or social authority often results in their marginalization in religious and inter-religious circles. Moreover, the dynamics of new and creative thinking that typify young people's approach to the issues are especially vital to grassroots interfaith work. In order for such a movement to truly grow and spread out of the individual encounters into society at large, it is imperative that today's youth be given the space and the opportunity to develop themselves, foster their visions for the future, and enable themselves to achieve it. The IEA responded to this imperative through the YIE in the spring of 2002.

Lastly, the IEA employs three different program formats through which it facilitates its interfaith encounters: **inter-religious study sessions**, **multi-day conferences**, and **desert seminars**. In bringing Jews, Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Baha'is together to study topics of relevance from their own religious perspectives, interfaith study is used to achieve two main goals. Primarily, it serves as a vehicle towards understanding, acceptance, and respect for the Other, but it also serves as a way to deepen awareness of one's own religion.

Program Chart

Circles of Interfaith Work	Programmatic Sections	Program Formats
❖ Inner-Israeli	❖ The General Program	❖ Inter-religious Study Sessions
❖ Israeli-Palestinian	❖ Women's Interfaith Encounter (WIE)	❖ Multi-Day Conferences
❖ Middle East Region	❖ Youth Interfaith Encounter (YIE)	❖ Desert Seminars