

# Parents Circle Families Forum Annual Report 2019



Bereaved Palestinian and Israeli  
Families for Peace and Reconciliation

## THE PARENTS CIRCLE

### – FAMILIES FORUM

Is a unique, grassroots organization made up of more than 600 Israeli and Palestinian families, who have lost an immediate family member to the conflict.

Our long-term vision is to have a reconciliation process as an integral part of any future peace agreement. We can no longer be satisfied with political agreements, which bring temporary ceasefires. We want a permanent, sustainable peace. By creating understanding and humanizing the “other side”, we lay the foundation for reconciliation. We educate the general public and our leaders to understand that reconciliation is possible and essential to stop the bloodshed, prevent future bereavement and achieve a lasting peace.

Photo credits:  
Yifat Yogev, Kobi Wolf, Rami Ben Ari and PCFF members

## 2019 – A Year of Tests

2019 was a year of tests. The first test came in January, when the Trump Administration abruptly withdrew all funding for cross border peace and reconciliation programs through USAID. This move severely affected PCFF’s annual budget for programming. PCFF lost core funding for the Parallel Narrative Experience, its flagship program. Hope among Palestinian peace activists reached an all-time low. The entire ecosystem of peacebuilding NGOs in Palestine was impacted in some way.

The next test came when we had to determine how to continue the work, with budget and staff constraints. We found a way to continue because we understand that the only way to end this impasse to the peace process is to continue to spread our message of reconciliation and non-violence in ever widening circles of Palestinians and Israelis. This report illustrates the miracles of intensive work of bereaved members and staff all over Palestine and Israel even in these uncertain times with many who try to stand in the way of what we do.

Before we immerse you in our unique and in many cases, challenging, yet rewarding and successful projects, we would like to take time to thank all our generous supporters who have helped compensate for our loss of funds and enabled us to continue the struggle on the ground. It is indeed heartwarming to know that our work is recognized throughout the world as a catalyst for hope important enough to maintain and support.

Our work this year, has taken us to all the corners of Palestine and Israel, and much of the globe. Wherever we go, we recognize that the people are hungry for a message of hope and when they see a bereaved Palestinian and a bereaved Israeli standing together, telling their stories of transformation and loss and speaking in the same voice, even the hardest of hearts experiences a feeling of hope.

Hope – that is our secret weapon.



International Women's Day, Rothschild Boulevard Tel-Aviv



## Dialogue Meetings

The Parents Circle conducts dialogue meetings both in Palestine and in Israel – in schools, private homes, women’s centers in Palestine and many groups visiting from overseas. What we have gathered from these extraordinary meetings is that we as two nations do not know the “other”. The majority of 17-year-old students in Israeli schools has never met a Palestinian, and the Palestinians we meet have never met an Israeli who is not a settler or in uniform. The experience of hearing a Palestinian and Israeli tell their stories is a unique experience for anyone taking part in a dialogue meeting.

- » We conducted more than **450 dialogue meetings**.
- » We **reached approximately 10,000 Israelis, Palestinians**, and internationals through Dialogue Meetings in Palestine and Israel.
- » We trained **90 Israeli high school teachers** to support approximately **2,250 high school students** before and after the Dialogue Meeting.



עד שנדבר

לن ينتهي هذا  
حتى نتحدث

כורום המשכחות השכולות הישראלי-פלסטיני  
حلقة الأباء-منتدى العائلات

خطوة من أجل  
السلام

צעדות  
למען השלום

Taking steps  
for peace

כורום המשכחות השכולות הישראלי-פלסטיני  
منتدى العائلات-منتدى العائلات

חייב  
את ה  
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כורום המשכחות השכולות הישראלי-פלסטיני



## Parallel Narrative Experience (PNE)

The Parallel Narrative project brings Israelis and Palestinians to participate in a narrative exchange workshop. This flagship program suffered the most from the budget cut. However we did not give up. With the help of very generous donors and overworked staff, we managed this year to complete 3 out of the 5 PNEs planned and secured funds for 2020.

We have more than 1,000 graduates from the project and they are taking our message out into their communities and are creating programs for the general public.

These alumni participated in 10 solidarity and experiential programs, including visiting unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev; taking a joint tour of the Gaza envelope; taking a tour of East Jerusalem neighborhoods; visiting the museum and art gallery in Bethlehem's Walled Off Hotel; touring the city of Jaffa to learn its history; attending a meeting with NGOs to learn about volunteer opportunities; visiting an art exhibition about the Palestinian experience under occupation; holding a solidarity visit in the threatened West Bank village of Jubbet al-Dhib; and joining an olive harvest. Some 200 Israeli and Palestinian alumni came to a village where the IDF had demolished homes. The alumni built a symbolic "Wall of Hope" in empathy and solidarity for the suffering of the residents of the village.





Listening to the horrific story of home demolitions in Sur Baher

## The Women's Group

We know that women must be actively involved at the peace table. A core of women went through an intensive course on the meaning of reconciliation and out of that group came women who want to have leadership roles in affecting change. International Women's Day found 140 Palestinian and Israeli bereaved women marching up Rothschild Boulevard in Tel-Aviv. They handed out flowers to the public with a note that said "we would rather give you a flower, than put one on a grave". A cadre of women who hold Dialogue Meetings both in Palestine and Israel and the emotional breakthrough they create is increasingly felt on both sides. Members and alumni held four dialogue meetings through embroidery workshops for Israeli women.

## Memorial Day Ceremony

We held the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day Ceremony in partnership with Combatants for Peace. This joint ceremony in Tel-Aviv commemorates the loss of both Israelis and Palestinians. This year once again the Prime Minister of Israel decided to try to prevent the Palestinians from attending, and once again we went to the Israeli High Court and won - and nearly 9,000 people attended. The ceremony was broadcast in many countries, including the U.S.A., England and Germany. It is almost impossible to believe that when we started out with this ceremony over a decade ago, not more than 400 attended. This joint message of the result of the conflict resounds with even the toughest of folk.



PNE women's group



Demonstrators against the Memorial Ceremony



9,000 attendees





## Summer Camp

This was the most successful camp ever. Approximately 50 bereaved 14-18 year old kids and their friends from Palestine and Israel attended. Palestinian and Israeli chefs from the Paul Bocuse Culinary Institute, Lyon, France came to work with the youth and teach them to make delicious dishes – together! This was the fun part. However there were many serious sessions where they had a chance to discuss difficult issues and for some to tell their personal stories, which illustrate how loss is passed on from generation to generation.

## Young Ambassadors for Peace

Young Ambassadors for Peace is our innovative program to create the next generation of leaders who will continue with the work of non-violence and reconciliation. These young adults are often graduates from the summer camp, who want to take the work and leadership further. A new group was formed in 2019 and has been working together -- we look forward to seeing the fruition of this project in 2020.



## Members Meeting

The Parents Circle's bereaved members had a chance to spend a productive weekend together to plan, strategize and determine the future of the organization. There were intensive workshops where people could express their opinions on the work we are doing, think about future projects and on how to cope in these very dark days. There were discussions on the vision of the organization and how to adapt it to the current climate. It was a wonderful opportunity to create a cohesive message. Several small committees were formed to deal with reconciliation, transparency and future projects.





## Look at Me

Powerful music video featuring bereaved mothers. This beautiful song was written by Noa (Ahinoam Nini, a well-known Israeli and international songwriter), and was inspired by our reconciliation work.

The music video features Robi Damelin, bereaved Israeli mother; and Bushra Awad, bereaved Palestinian mother.

## Media Workshop



Teaching skills for members to appear on all forms of media, both locally & internationally



## International Relations

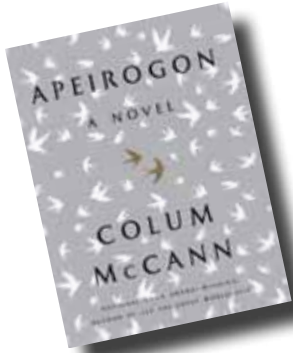
We are invited around the globe to share our message. Our message is not local, but rather universal, and no matter where we go, people are moved by our stories of transformation and hope. This year we were invited to Sweden, Germany, Ireland, Sri Lanka, U.S.A., France, Italy, Spain, just to mention a few. In the U.S., PCFF spokespersons lobbied members of Congress in an effort to advance the Partnership Fund for Peace Act of 2019. We spoke at J Street's annual conference about the possibilities of reconciliation. One of the highlights of this year was an extraordinary dinner at the James Beard House in New York. The wonderful chefs, Israeli-American Michael Solmonov and Palestinian-American chef Reem Kassis, created a fundraising dinner; the taste and atmosphere which will never be forgotten. Award-



winning actor, Tony Shalhoub, one of our generous supporters, joined us and our wonderful American Friends board saw to it that it was a more than packed house. We hope that Breaking Bread is just the first of many exciting dinners.

## 'Apeirogon'

Exciting breaking news  
for 2020



National book award winning author, Colum McCann named his latest book about the PCFF work for a polygon with an infinite number of sides, a fitting visual for the political and cultural conflict he evokes.

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

## Our Supporters in 2019\*

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In memory of Moisés Itzkowich  
In memory of Nahum (Herbert) Pundak

*\*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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