

Parents Circle Families Forum Annual Report 2021



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 believes 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.

2021 – the ultimate test of endurance, pandemics, war, storms, demonstrations, political upheaval and general chaos.... and yet, the Parents Circle – Families Forum never gives up.

The level of trust between our bereaved members was certainly put to the test. Both sides watched the violence of the war through the prism of its media and experiences. However, the ingrained belief in non-violence and reconciliation allowed the work to continue with extraordinary determination.

Webinars and Zooms opened our vision to a much wider international and local audience. It allowed Palestinians to enter Israeli schools and homes all over the world without having to get permits. The creation of a virtual Peace Tent brought a sense of camaraderie and allowed for the sharing of fears and sadness over the loss of life, especially for the innocent children who paid the highest price.

We managed to engage Israelis and Palestinians between the peaks of Corona; the youth summer camp is a perfect example of how the message works – against all odds.

Gathering all the material for this report can only leave us with an immense sense of pride; a pride that comes out of the conviction that we can never give up. We will bring the light and hope in these very dark times.

It seems that this challenging period calls for new creativity and it is our pleasure to share with you some of the highlights of the work of the Parents Circle.

None of this creativity would have been possible without the generosity of our supporters. We are so grateful for your contributions as this is what allows us to continue our mission of non-violence and reconciliation.

Notes from the Field – Every Enemy is Someone Whose Story You Do Not Know

Dialogue Meetings

More than 7,500 Israelis, Palestinians and internationals have been exposed to the personal stories of loss of our Palestinian and Israeli members. Whether it be in a classroom to 17 year-old Israelis who have never met a Palestinian before, or in houses and clubs in the West Bank, or virtually to universities like Harvard, Georgetown, Binghamton and many others, our Dialogue Meetings create an opportunity for people to be exposed to the humanity of the “other” and to ask difficult questions in an atmosphere of trust and empathy.

We trained 70 classroom teachers ahead of the Dialogue Meetings about how to prepare the students. This training, as well as a manual created by the Parents Circle, has been a great aid to the Dialogue Meetings.

91% of the students in Israeli schools reported a very positive experience

82% planned to share their experience with others thereby creating a ripple effect

“It was really meaningful to me as I never met a Palestinian before and I learned so much. I think that if we wouldn’t have this meeting in school we would probably never see both sides of this conflict”.

“This was a once in a lifetime experience- to meet, hear and speak to someone from the other side. I learned so much and it increased my desire for peace”.



Hybrid DM: Israeli facilitator in person and Palestinian on zoom



Dialogue Meeting – physical meetings resume

Changing Minds One Heart at a Time

Parallel Narrative Experience (PNE)

This project, created for an adult audience, allows a glimpse into how narratives differ as they are seen through the human eye. Groups of Israelis and Palestinians come together to learn about the personal, historical and national narrative of the “other”. The several-month long module is based on experiential learning, site visits, and deep dialogue.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, PCFF created an innovative online PNE module. After a successful pilot in 2020, we held 4 online PNE groups in 2021, one of which was a hybrid group. Being online has its disadvantages but it also allowed for the participation of people from Gaza and other areas of the West Bank and Israel where people are harder to reach. Hopefully in better times, these groups will be able to meet in person.

To date, more than 1,200 Israelis and Palestinians have participated in the PNEs. COVID-19 hardly allowed for PNE alumni in-person meetings but some of the PNE alumni still met online and visited Sheikh Jarrah together with PCFF members as an act of solidarity with the East Jerusalem Palestinians who are in danger of losing their houses. Other solidarity activities included an olive harvest in the A-Twani village, a solidarity visit to the Wadi Fukin village, and a solidarity visit to the Bardala village in the Jordan Valley.

“It was one of the most wonderful bi-national encounters I took part in. I learned so much about myself, about my group, and about the other side”.

“A virtual Green Line tried to separate us, but gradually the fears and partitions fell to the wayside. Both national narratives are so different in content – but so alike in what they are lacking. And once again, it seems that a nation is a mosaic of people who differ in opinions, faith and life story.”



PNE tour in Lifta – physical tour, after so many zooms...

Coming to the Table

The Women's Group

Nothing could prevent the 20 bereaved Israeli and Palestinian women who participated in the leadership training from meeting, even if it was online. Throughout the program the women acquired knowledge and skills on how to develop projects in a learning-by-doing program. They practiced speaking to audiences and developed ideas for diverse projects.

In July, 40 members of the PCFF Women's Group met in person in the West Bank. The joy of meeting again in person allowed for many hugs, Corona or not. This was a special opportunity to express some of the sadness from the latest war with Gaza and the loss of so many children.

In honor of International Women's Day, 24 Israeli and Palestinian women from the group created a beautiful book of pressed flowers and personal quotes in honor of their lost loved one to share with U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris. It was an opportunity for each woman to share why she picked a particular flower to press. Once again, we experienced the shared pain but also the joy of working together.

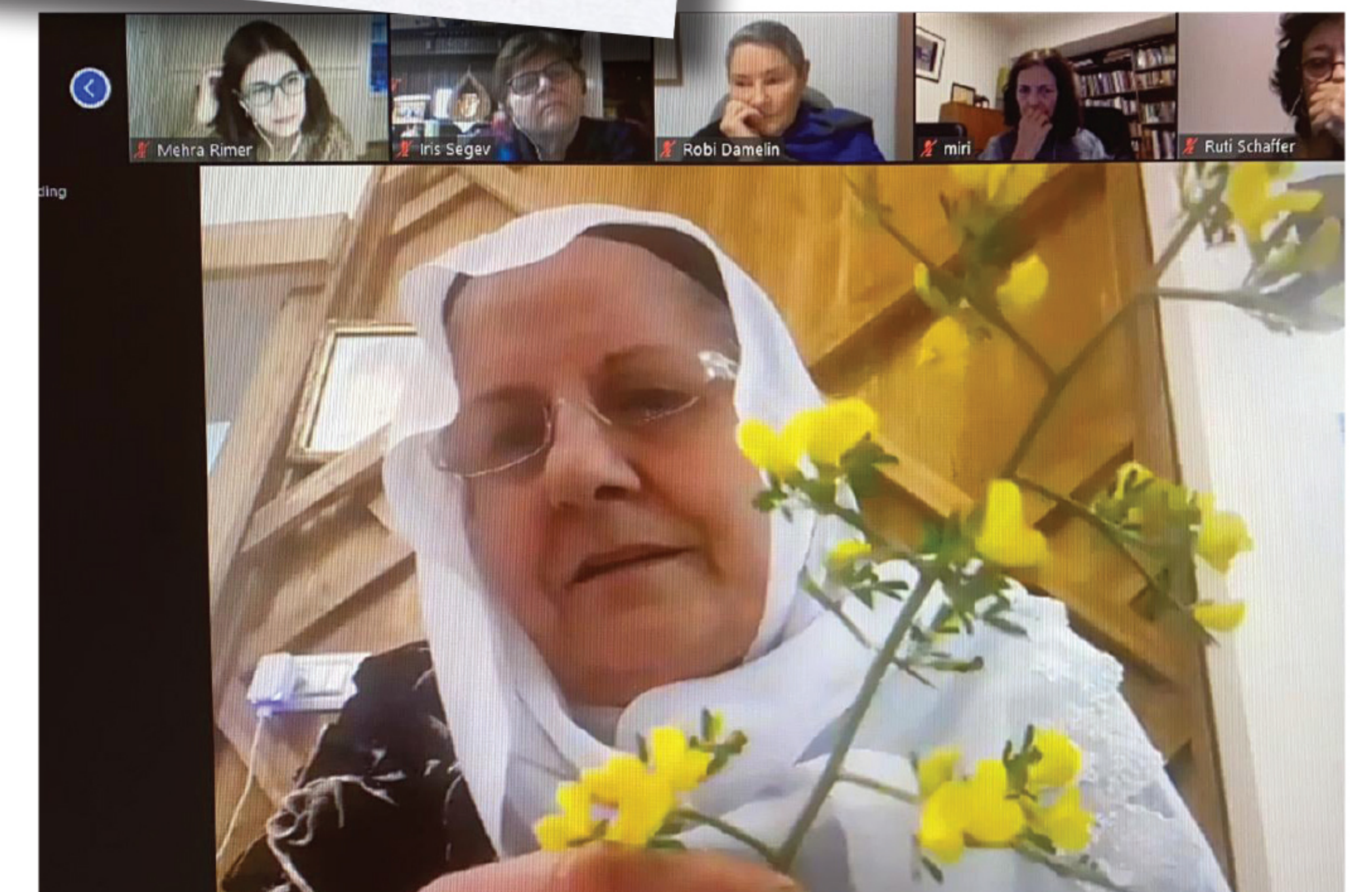
The Dried Flowers Album, delivered to VP Kamala Harris



A page in the Dried Flowers Album



Working on the dried flower album for U.S. VP Kamala Harris



Learning how to dry flowers

Summer Without a Camp – Not an Option

Summer Youth Peace Camp

The challenges were enormous but the wonderful team which created this camp pulled it off. We had to overcome the issue of not having permits for the Palestinians, staying safe in Covid times and a crisis with 6 Palestinian youngsters coming from a village where a young boy had been killed by an Israeli soldier a few days before. The grandfather of this young boy had already lost a son and is a member of The Parents Circle. Wisdom and the belief in our message allowed them the possibility to come to the camp venue at the Dead Sea and to once again reunite with their Israeli counterparts.

It was an emotional experience for all. Sharing a week of intense discussions, team-building and culinary training, allowed for a deeper understanding of the lives of the “other” and therefore the possibility for peace. The Summer Camp also was an opportunity for mothers from both sides to meet as they joined the activities on the last day.



Summer Camp - cooking workshop



Summer Camp activity



Summer Camp - dialogue circle

The Next Generation

Young Ambassadors for Peace

Young Ambassadors for Peace is an innovative program to create the next generation of bereaved leaders to continue the work of non-violence and reconciliation.

In 2021, 24 Israelis and Palestinians met on Zoom throughout the year. They began to understand and know one another through their personal stories and by listening to their diverse narratives.

At the end of June, the group emerged from Zoom into reality, and more layers of work commenced. They took part in a photography project via their camera lenses. They discovered what distinguishes them from one another, and how important it is to openly talk to each other, and primarily, how important it is to listen with empathy.

In August, members of the YAP program worked hard at the Summer Camp as counselors and assistants. The skills they acquired were put to work in additional activities they conducted with the summer camp youth, such as a tour in Jaffa, and leading children's activities at the Member's Picnic gathering. No doubt - they are our future leaders.



Leading activities for children at the members picnic



Card game



Dialogue circle



Group activity



Preparing for a tour of Jaffa



Touring an eviction of residents protest site in Jaffa

Violence Begets Violence

A Response to the War

Our reaction to the violence and war that broke out in May-June 2021, was to create an online “Peace Square”, also broadcast live on Facebook. Bereaved Israeli and Palestinian members and special guests gathered almost every night for 5 weeks to discuss the situation and to feel a sense of solace with the like-minded.

Each night a Palestinian and an Israeli bereaved member from the PCFF told their story. It was a way of reminding everyone that we share the same pain, even after watching the media on both sides.

This was the only venue of its kind. A unique “safe space” was created where people could meet together, albeit on Zoom. Hundreds of people attended and the fact that there was bi-lingual translation made it more accessible to all.



Virtual Peace Square



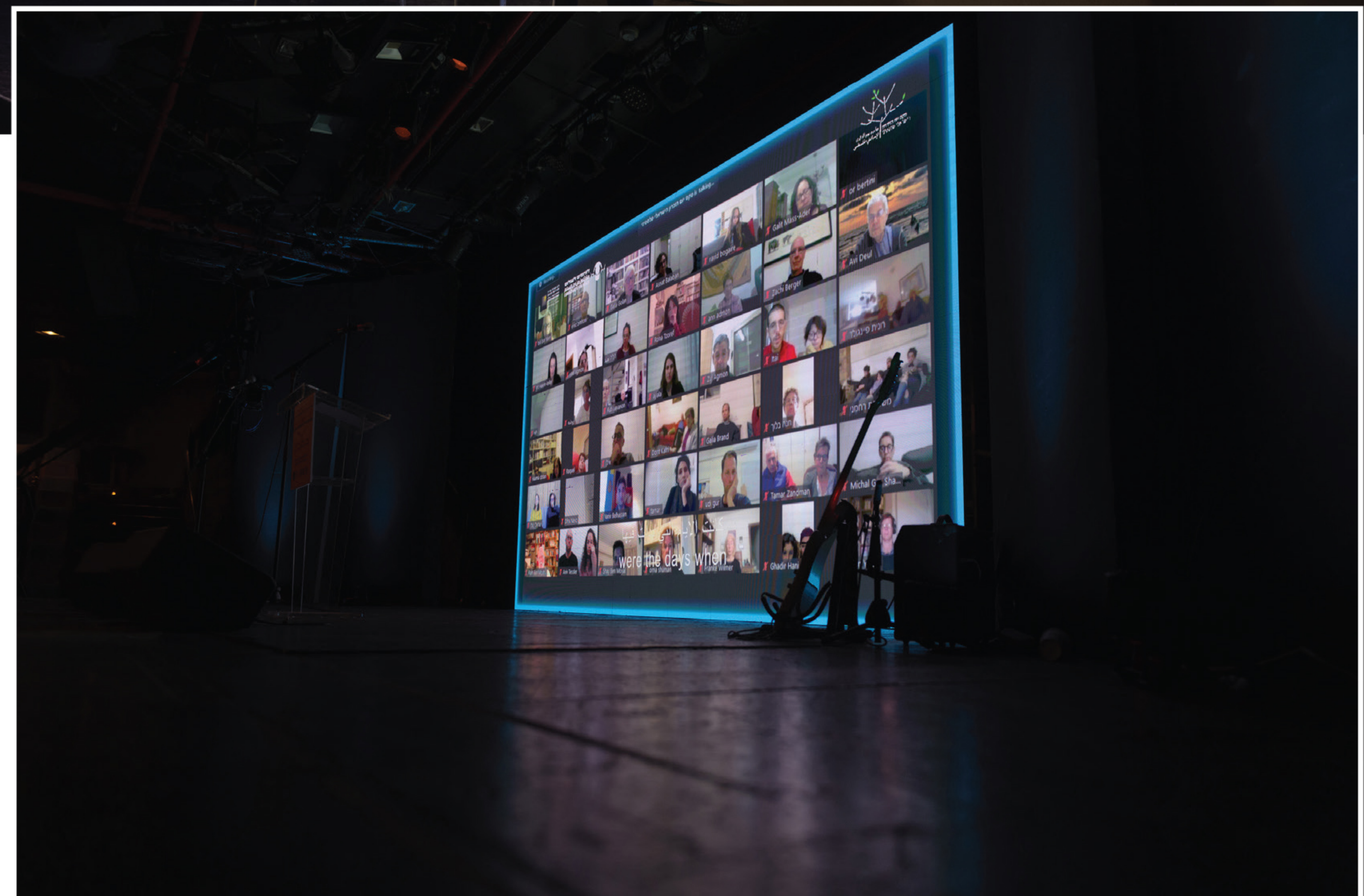
PCFF demonstrating against the recent violence

Together We Remember

Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day Ceremony

Who would have imagined that one day, 250,000 people would join online and watch the annual joint Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day Ceremony, which started years ago with our partner organization, Combatants for Peace. The Ceremony took place live, simultaneously at two broadcast locations, in Beit Jala in Palestine, and in Tel Aviv, Israel; both locations had a small, invited audience due to COVID-19 restrictions. The ceremony focused on letting go of the fear and connecting through a shared pain. Parents Circle bereaved members from both sides shared their stories of loss. Actor and activist, Richard Gere recorded a special message for the ceremony.

This was, without a doubt, the largest Israeli and Palestinian peace gathering, ever.



Joint Memorial Ceremony

In Solidarity

No Tolerance for Settler Violence against Palestinians

During 2021, the PCFF initiated visits to Palestinian villages which suffered from brutal settler attacks causing significant damage to Palestinian property, farmland and personal injury. In solidarity with these Palestinian communities, PCFF delivered relief assistance to several communities in the West Bank, and met with shepherd communities in the Jordan Valley and in the South Hebron Hills. In solidarity with their plight, we made it clear that those who have paid the highest price to the conflict, will not accept any form of violence.



Solidarity meeting with residents of Sheikh Jarrah



Solidarity activity - bringing much needed supplies to Palestinians in the West Bank

PCFF in the Public Eye

The Media, Demonstrations and Internationally

During the war between Israel and Gaza, the Parents Circle was invited to speak all over the media, both at home in Israel and Palestine, and around the world. Christiane Amanpour opened the door by interviewing two members on CNN. It was followed by PBS and the BBC and more than 40 global outlets. The Parents Circle was prominent in many demonstrations against the violence: "Jews and Arabs refuse to be enemies" and "Stop the Occupation" are examples.



PCFF meeting with journalists in Jerusalem



PCFF on CNN



PCFF in the media

The Power of Our Pain

Members Come Together

Keeping our members involved and interested was also a part of 2021. In a Corona window-of-opportunity, we celebrated Iftar in person this year, Israelis and Palestinians. We learned so much about the meaning of an Iftar meal and were delighted to be able to dine together.

Food was also great fun in the Picnic which was also held in person at the Dead Sea, and included dialogue circles, fun activities for the children, and just catching up with each other. Meeting again after such a long time was exciting and rewarding.

One of the ways to celebrate the Jewish Holiday Tu B'shvat, is by planting Olive Trees. This year Palestinians and Israelis planted 20 trees in memory of twenty family members of the Parents Circle. We intend to plant another 20 trees for 20 more members every year, signalling the beginning of an annual tradition. Olive trees are historically symbolic for both sides.



Tree planting - for the PCFF next generation too



Iftar in Beit Jala – finally together



Tree planting - PCFF plans to plant 20 trees, every year.



Picnic at the Dead Sea, great to see each other again



Peace Day in the North, attended by peace organizations, including PCFF



PCFF Members meeting - picnic at the Dead Sea, dialogue circles

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

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