



**Israelis and Palestinians Together:
A Consultation on Creating a More Peaceful Future**

**October 21-24, 2010
Istanbul, Turkey**

Introduction

In October 2010, a diverse and experienced group of Israelis and Palestinians gathered in Istanbul for a three-day consultation to explore potential contributions to a more peaceful and equitable regional future. The group was convened by Paula Green, founder of Karuna Center for Peacebuilding and professor at the School for International Training Graduate Institute. Paula invited Carol Kasbari of Jerusalem to share the facilitation role and to offer her skills as a leader of Open Space Technology.

The gathering aimed to build a trusting and mutually sensitive learning community for exploring and designing future engagement in the stalled and fractured peace process. We envisioned that in the process of meeting together, the group would be creating its own joint Palestinian/Israeli support and advocacy group, as well as exploring how other Palestinian and Israeli actors might convene to increase mutual humanization and find common ground for change. We hoped to challenge within us any signs of resignation, futility, despair, disempowerment, and/or hatred that could have arisen through the decades of bitter conflict and occupation, so that we could become productive actors in support of justice and peace.

Participants

Twenty mature professionals were carefully selected to attend, all of them comfortable in bi-national settings and familiar with dialogue and coexistence work. Group members came from Israeli Jewish and Israeli Palestinian communities as well as the West Bank. Our colleague from Gaza prepared to attend but was blocked from travel while en route. We had almost equal numbers of women and men and of Jews and Arabs. All participants work in education, psychology, NGO leadership, coexistence, and related fields, and all are fluent in English. Eleven participants are graduates of the CONTACT Program at the School for International Training, six others attended Karuna Center programs in Israel/Palestine, and three were introduced to the consultation through colleagues.

Each participant was personally invited to attend and asked to offer feedback on the shaping of the consultation, as well as to make a commitment to continuing the process if the goal and possible outcome felt resonant to them. Responses to the invitation were understandably cautious, given the levels of disappointment and despair surrounding peace work in the region, and also guardedly encouraging.

Why This and Why Now?

Everyone in our group opposes the status quo and is committed to a future of justice and equality in the region. Each recognizes that the current situation of occupation and oppression is both abnormal and intolerable, and that our obligation is to change it. All of the participants recognize that we each have a role to play, and that as one group member remarked, “giving up is not an option.” Our perseverance offers hope and inspiration to others, and keeps the dream alive. Citizen support and engagement is crucial to the achievement of any future political agreement.

“Human beings show a broad spectrum of qualities, but it is the worst of these that are usually emphasized, and the result, too often, is to dishearten us, diminish our spirit. And yet, historically, that spirit refuses to surrender. History is full of instances where people, against enormous odds, have come together to struggle for liberty and justice, and have WON—not often enough, of course, but enough to suggest much more is possible.”

The essential ingredients of these struggles for justice are human beings who, if only for a moment, if only while beset with fears, step out of line and do SOMETHING, however small. And even the smallest, most unheroic acts add to the store of kindling that may be ignited by some surprising circumstance into tumultuous change.”

- Howard Zinn, American historian and peacemaker
1922-2010



Our Process Together

Our first day was spent in building a trusting and respectful learning community. We began with a circle of lengthy introductions, allowing each individual adequate time to share his/her background and the challenges of both professional work and life situations. These were deep and poignant, revealing the profound suffering within the circle that surely reflects regional realities. Participants spoke of their frustration and despair, worried about many factions in the region whose behaviors create further fanaticism and narrowness on both sides of the divide. Group members also expressed gratitude for this occasion to speak honestly with each other, and to be gathered with such a developed, experienced, and serious group.

Later in the morning we divided into mixed groups of four who did not know each other well. Their topic for discussion was “the impact of years of bi-communal work and exposure on your heart, your understanding, your attitudes, and your behavior.” After time in these small groups, we opened the discussion in the plenary, reaffirming the need for bi-communal or bi-national work to increase trust, build empathy, reduce stereotypes, and enhance motivations for pressing forward with a peace agenda despite the innumerable impediments.

Group members articulated how much they need each other to be reminded of their shared struggles and visions. All of them felt these sorts of gatherings are beneficial and essential, although several confessed that they had been hesitant to come because of so many prior disappointments. It was evident in their ways of relating to each other that they had benefited greatly from years of knowing the “other,” and that separation is a loss and danger to everyone.

In the afternoon, we worked for several hours in uni-national groups to explore the needs and obstacles on each side. This exploration was difficult for everyone but seemed to be an important issue with which

to struggle. Israeli Jews met in one group, and Palestinians from West Bank and inside Israel in the other group. Each group drew up a list of challenges and needs which they then presented in plenary.

The Palestinians named the occupation and its myriad consequences on body, mind and soul, internal divisions, security, isolation and lack of connection to the larger world, limited participation of women, and disappointment with coexistence initiatives and the Israeli peace process among their obstacles. Their needs include survival, security, unity, freedom, respect, dignity, global support, uni-national capacity building work, and acknowledgement from Israelis about conditions in which Palestinians live.

For the Israeli Jewish community, challenges include denial of the extent of suffering of Palestinians, the Tel Aviv “bubble” of prosperity and self-concern, internal divisions, fears, a militaristic society, lack of critical media, non-support for peace issues, and a crisis of leadership. This group named Israeli Jewish needs for an integrated educational system and an inclusive and integrated state with Palestinian Israelis, global acceptance, positive reasons rather than war to unite, incentives for anti-peace groups and apathetic citizens to join peace movement, and a national conceptual move from win/lose to win/win.

Presenting these overwhelming challenges and critical needs made for an intense, transparent, and thought-provoking group conversation. The exploration furthered trust and empathy within the members and increased their commitment to the joint struggle that must be engaged for their children to have a secure and productive interdependent future.



The Format: Open Space Technology

Using Open Space, Carol Daniel Kasbari facilitated the second day and third morning of our consultation. The theme for the process was: **“Palestinian and Israeli Activists: Opportunities and Challenges in Leading/Guiding Our People to a Better Future.”**



What is Open Space Technology?

Carol Daniel Kasbari

This is a way to format a group meeting, retreat or conference that generates communication, collaboration, innovation, and other solutions to challenges and transitions. When your organization or community has a complex problem, you are completely out of ideas regarding a solution, you have a diversity of people that you can bring to the process, and the time for resolving this situation was yesterday, this is a great time for Open Space Technology (OST). Group members emerge from the process invigorated, refreshed, and proud of their individual and collective accomplishments.

Committees, task forces and design teams can take weeks, months and even years to accomplish their goal—or in some cases, simply to define their goal. Much of this same work can be accomplished by holding an Open Space. A half- or one-day Open Space can help people to quickly bring forth emerging issues and opportunities and to build mutual understandings and networking; a 2.5 day Open Space includes issues, opportunities and action planning, resulting in a complete written report of the proceedings for all participants plus identification and prioritization of next steps.

Open Space is an interactive process; participants meet in concurrent and overlapping mini-discussions around a theme or an issue, across departmental, hierarchal or historically opposite lines. The cross-pollination of moving from group to group and topic to topic in a non-linear way allows participants to jump quickly from familiar ways of thinking into innovation and action.

The use of Open Space Technology has been effective since the mid-1980's in a diversity of settings, cultures and countries. The method has been used by communities working towards peace, chemists designing new polymers, tribal and governmental leaders planning land use, community advocates and local government designing literacy programs, conference organizers holding conferences in this format, architects designing pavilions for the Olympics, an entire town having a simultaneous discussion town meeting, and community workers helping communities rebuild and heal after times of war. This tool can be utilized by groups of 5 to over 2000 and the dynamics and the results are always the same: input from stakeholders at all levels, new ways of thinking and working, large amounts of work done rapidly, bringing perceived competitors together on issues and projects, organizational flexibility, interdepartmental or intercommunity teamwork, a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of passion and energy for the challenges ahead.

Guidelines for an Open Space Meeting

The rules are simple, although setting up the parameters for a meeting or conference in Open Space is based on the theories of complexity, self-organization and open systems. Do you know how sometimes when you go to a conference or a meeting, the best ideas, networking, brainstorming and deal-making happen during the coffee breaks? Open Space Technology is designed to simulate that natural way people find each other and share ideas in all different cultures and countries. It is also based on the understanding that there is a great amount of wisdom and experience in any gathered group of people, that we are all 'experts' and can all contribute—a true democratic process.

It all starts with a circle of chairs, without a pre-designed agenda. The group sets their own agenda by identifying issues and topics that have heart and meaning for them, topics for which they have passion and interest and for which they are willing to host a discussion group. Small group discussions happen throughout the day, with participants moving from group to group whenever they feel that they can no longer learn or contribute to a discussion, or when they feel drawn to another topic.

There are four simple guidelines:

1. Whoever comes is the right person.

Rather than wait for the “expert” on a given issue, realize that whoever is moved to come to your discussion group has been moved by their passion for the issue, not just their organizational role. The best and brightest are convening to discuss something they really care about—across departmental or hierarchal lines. And what if nobody comes to your session? It may be that either you are a visionary ahead of your time, or there are so many great topics to choose... either way, you have the choice to either join in another discussion or spend the time writing your thoughts down to enter into the meeting proceedings.

2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.

Don't try to control the discussion—even if it goes off on a tangent. That may be exactly the direction for the breakthrough of new ideas. Follow the energy of the group. By the way, the

only time that Open Space does not work is when somebody in charge feels they must control the outcome of the discussion or the event.

3. **Whenever it starts is the right time.**

Don't wait for some specific person to arrive; begin with whoever is drawn to the discussion. It's a reminder that creativity does not happen according to a schedule but starts when it starts

4. **When it's over, it's over.**

You may settle the problems of the world in twenty minutes; on the other hand, you may wish to continue your discussion for longer than the allotted time. Creativity and intuitive thinking do not happen according to a schedule—take it where it wants to go. If you're done early you can join another group; if you take longer, just move your discussion elsewhere to make way for the next group scheduled.

There is only one law: **The Law of Two Feet** (also be called the Law of Motion and Responsibility):

If you feel you are neither learning from nor contributing to a discussion, you are required to get up and move to another discussion, without waiting for the group to complete its conversation. Your fresh insights and creative thoughts are needed elsewhere. Whereas in some cultures this may be seen as rude and disrespectful, in Open Space it would actually be disrespectful to the process and to the greater group to sit and stay in a discussion for which you felt you were not being useful. The result is a room alive with movement and animated discussion as people travel from group to group to use their best energy and thinking where it is most needed.

This Law creates two animals: **Bumblebees and Butterflies**

Since it is possible to be in multiple places at once, participants can become cross-pollinators. A bumblebee buzzes from group to group, carrying energy and information. A butterfly floats around, joining other butterflies in informal discussion, perhaps sharing learning and creating new dialogue topics. In open space, everyone is valued.

The final instruction is to **Be Prepared to Be Surprised.**

If you carry your preconceived agenda into a conversation, you may never receive the greater results and more intuitive thinking that can come from a group of diverse and passionate people taking a conversation where it can go.

Through the theme “Palestinian and Israeli Activists: Opportunities and Challenges in Leading/Guiding Our People to a Better Future,” participants identified and posted 16 ideas for sessions on a community bulletin board marketplace. There were 4 time slots throughout the day, each with 3 small groups meeting simultaneously and hosted/facilitated by a group member. Participants signed up for groups but were free to move based on “the law of two feet.”

Open Space Sessions

Here are the topics that you, Palestinian and Israeli Activists in search of a better future, found worthy of discussion:

Criteria for defining a good Peacebuilding Program

This session assessed general strengths and needs of the peace movement in Israel and Palestine, envisioned a “dream peacebuilding program,” and identified peacebuilding strategies that they would like to incorporate into the existing peace movement. Participants also proposed bringing the idea of incorporating self-reflection within the peace movement, using Appreciative Inquiry methods – and possibly bringing this idea to the Peace NGO Forum. They discussed the need for more actions on the ground in addition to dialogue, more unified strategies, and more effective delivery of the movement’s messages.



Building a Constructive Nonviolent Struggle to End the Occupation and Achieve Equality for All Citizens of Israel, Jewish and Palestinian

Participants in this group discussed how peace and human rights organizations and independent activists in Israel can better join forces in nonviolent struggle. They talked about the need

to create a provocative campaign, to use the media, and to engage in consciousness-changing that includes targeting the silent majority at the center of the political map. A next step suggested was to hold a pilot session in mid-November to brainstorm with peace and human rights NGO’s and other activists to continue this discussion.

Using Media, New Technology, and Social Networking for Promoting Peace and Ending the Occupation

The media have great impact on the level of public awareness and framing of the issues at stake—though at the same time, it was pointed out that it is no substitute for real human contact. This session considered the importance of using personal stories, whether through film or newer media, to humanize and deepen identification with the other. Next steps included forming a focused working group to pursue this topic further, and developing a strategy, target audience and workplan in cooperation with other peace and justice organizations engaged in media work.

Encouraging the Jewish and Palestinian Diaspora Communities in Coexistence Initiatives

This session talked about how to build bridges between Jewish communities in the Diaspora and Jewish communities in Israel, such as the Russians—and connecting Palestinians from the Diaspora to their roots. The group identified the need to map Palestinian activities in the Diaspora in regard their relationships with Palestinians in Palestine; to find groups of Jews and Palestinians who agree to meet with the aim

of contributing to the political solution; to map Palestinian and Jewish organizations who work in Berlin among and within their communities; to try to identify groups that might be interested in supporting these Palestinian/Jewish meetings; and to find German institutions who could be approached to support this strategic plan.



Sustainability and Inner Development of Those Working for Peace

In this discussion of peace activists' personal development, the importance of patience, commitment, devotion, faith, and enthusiasm arose as themes. This session touched on creating space for feeling about the issues, the role of media in opening people up to the suffering of the other side, and the possibility of involving decision-makers and intellectuals in bi-communal activities.

Organizing a Mass Movement Against Occupation

This group talked about what constitutes a movement and what next steps for movement-building could be, considering the threat that people feel from Israeli institutions regarding participating in a mass movement to end the occupation. Next steps included constructing a group of people to strategize about movement-

building; recruiting people who are influential in the media or in economic and political spheres; recruiting women and kids; and learning from other successful struggles in the world.

Developing a Unified Palestinian Team for Dialogue

This session identified the root of the conflict as Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, and discussed the need to involve all Palestinian segments and factions in creating a solution for mutual peace and security—despite the geographic realities that make coming together extremely difficult. Participants discussed the need to include Hamas in any future talks, since they represent a wide part of the Palestinian people. They also talked about tackling the problems of the Palestinian refugees, drawing upon past international experiences in Africa and Asia.



How Can Joint German-Israeli-Palestinian Work Make a Difference in our Future?

Author Avrum Berg has written that everything motivating the peace process in Israel is driven by the memory of the holocaust. Could joint dialogue between Germans, Palestinians, and Israelis enable the core causes of the conflict to emerge and be placed directly on the table? This is deep process work, with important

psychological and symbolic meaning. Next steps would be to carefully consider and define which target groups to engage in this dialogue, and what the focus of the discussion should be.

Is It Possible for us to all Live in One State?

This session talked about the challenges involved in either a one-state or two-state solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict. The obstacles to either future can seem insurmountable. Though the group identified ending the occupation as a first step toward peace, other issues would still remain to be addressed, such as the concerns of Palestinian refugees.

Lessons Learned from Ideological Movements: Hamas and Settlers

How do we tap into the power of people's devotion? It may be easiest to lead when issues are painted as black and white, but we see a diversity of colors. This group made a list of what Hamas and the Israeli settlers have done effectively in their own movements. Their recommendation is to continue to evaluate which of these methods could work in a peace

movement, to analyze that list and write an article that publicizes those findings.

Palestinian/Israeli Relationships Twenty Years in the Future

20 years from now, good or bad, how will the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians evolve? This session considered the issues of conflict between Israel and other nations, possible environmental disasters, and the basic question: how long can the status quo live on?



The Next Steps: Solidifying Plans

On Sunday morning, group members suggested Action Plan groups that were to focus on specific next steps to achieve desired outcomes. We hope and expect that this work will continue from all the open space groups, not just those selected for action plans.

Action Plan groups:

1. Developing a Sustainable, Innovative Peacebuilding Program for the Region
2. Engaging the Diaspora in Bi-National Peace Efforts
3. Using the Media and Social Networking to Increase the Peace Movement in Israel
4. Organizing Nonviolent Mass Movements to End the Occupation

Developing a Sustainable, Innovative Peacebuilding Program for the Region -

Actions:

- Shiri will research related programs offered by internationals and local professionals in the region, as well as identify graduate programs in peace/conflict
- Kifah, Michal, and Hussam will investigate German Foundations for funding
- Shirley and Baruch will research EU funding sources
- Michal promised to investigate and produce a list of possible venues that would be easily accessible to Israelis and Palestinians and would not require flights
- Paula will work on developing the program with on-going input from the group and others at the consultation

Engaging the Diaspora in Bi-National Peace Efforts -

- Kifah will convene groups in Germany and seek German financial support
- Map Palestinian diaspora activities in regard to their relationship with Palestinians at home

- Connect Palestinians in diaspora to their roots
- Build bridges between Israelis/Palestinians in diaspora who will meet together and find sources of support for these encounters

Using the Media and Social Networking to Increase the Peace Movement in Israel -

Actions:

- Establish a focused working group/think tank that takes this issue as its focus and develops a strategy, target audience, and work plan.
- Develop a mission group that will specialize in organizing professional dialogue groups for different professions.
- Use films, especially with personal stories, to deliver peace messages.

Organizing Nonviolent Mass Movements to End the Occupation -

- Build a group of people to develop strategies
- Research and learn from successful international struggles
- Engage media and influential people
- Engage women and children

Closing Reflections

Paula Green

All the participants present in Istanbul expressed gratitude for the opportunity to discuss difficult issues together and to be in a venue removed from the tensions of their daily lives. They felt the consultation re-inspired them to continue to press for peace, with one of the group members reminding us that “giving up is not an option.” The members of this consultation, all mature and deeply experienced in intergroup relations, did not argue about politics or engage in blame. They understood that the differences in this circle were not the cause of conflict. All of them oppose oppression, discrimination, and occupation. Their capacity to be together is a poignant reminder of what is possible, yet at the same time, a sad reminder of much that they have lost.

As the convener of this consultation, I felt that the experience was well worth the effort required to create the program, and was honored to be with this group of dedicated and committed professionals. I especially want to acknowledge Carol Daniel Kasbari’s contributions and fine group skills; her presentation of Open Space was led flawlessly and was a perfect design for this experienced group. For me, seeing participants from a span of 11 years of my life as a peacebuilder was a pleasure, especially because all of them have remained engaged in the great tasks of creating cultures of peace in this region of so much suffering and violence.

I remain committed to the co-development of a peacebuilding training program for the region and hope that we have success in this difficult task. I also expect and hope that some of the action groups will follow through with their visions, because it is clear that there will be no peace process without strong and visible citizen activists demanding that their politicians make choices for peace. Each of us has a role to play, and each effort matters in the accumulation of energy required for change.



Participant List

Miriam Abdul-Dayyem	mariam4ta@hotmail.com
Farhat Agbaria	farhat_a@giveathaviva.org
Hussam Abu Bachar	hussam1@013net.net
Shiri Godeano-Barr	shirileaf@yahoo.com.au
Elhanan Blumenthal	blumenthal.e@gmail.com
Naim Daour	naimd@hebron.edu
Mustafa Elhawi	melhawi@hotmail.com
Michal Fox	michalfox@gmail.com
Ziad Abu Hamad	ziadabu@hotmail.com
Elham Mahoud Hamad	elhamad1957@hotmail.com
Nayef Al Hashlamoun	info@alwatan.org
Zidan Jwehan	zidanejwehan@yahoo.com
Batya (Betsy) Kallus	bkallus@netvision.net.il
Shirley Katzir	eden-manager@beitkama.org.il
Ilan Luttenberg	i.luttenberg@gmail.com
Kifah Massarwi	kafemr@hotmail.com
Baruch Shalev	shalevbs@netvision.net.il
Dorit Shippin	dorit@giveathaviva.org.il
Rebecca Sullum	rebeccasullum@hotmail.com
Ezra Weinberg	wezrox@gmail.com
Paula Green, <i>Convener</i>	paula@karunacenter.org
Carol Daniel Kasbari, <i>Co-facilitator</i>	carol@kasbari.net

Karuna Center for Peacebuilding

447 West Street
Amherst, MA 01002
(413) 256-3800
www.karunacenter.org

Karuna Center for Peacebuilding, a US-based NGO, is committed to the development and implementation of innovative, sustainable strategies for community transformation and reconciliation in societies where ethnic, religious, and sectarian conflicts threaten the possibility of stable democracy.