



## *Dialogue, Engagement and Conflict Transformation at Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, the “Oasis of Peace”*

Dear Friends,

The events of this past year have created a situation where reconciliation and healing are high priorities. **The community of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, the “Oasis of Peace,” demonstrates reconciliation and understanding through dialogue, engagement and conflict transformation.**

At Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam (NSWAS), a community where both Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel are living together in equality, dialogue takes place across many national and religious borders and cultural and gender boundaries. Dialogue is one of the central aspects of the community of NSWAS and its educational institutions.

*“My experience in NSWAS was significantly different from my previous experiences in dialogues where I simply got to know other participants, to know they were human like me,” explains Norma Mousi, a facilitator trained at the School for Peace. “I realized that I would need to rethink and develop a critical and new way of perceiving the basic truth...I would have to review my opinions and the way I present them.”*

The “Oasis of Peace” is not isolated from the conflict. The community engages with the conflict, using even negative events as opportunities to meet with the other side and demonstrate the power of non-violent cooperation.

Children who attend the **bilingual, binational Primary School at NSWAS** have a rare and special opportunity to learn of each other’s histories, holidays, languages and experiences; it was the first school to create such an opportunity and remains a model program.

*“Children share the beauty of the festivals of the three religions – Islam, Judaism and Christianity. They also engage in informal activities together – dance, art, yoga, archery, music, etc. These activities are important,” says Hezy Schuster, a Jewish-Israeli NSWAS resident, parent and teacher at the PS.*

*“It is a healthy, quiet environment where our children could be what they wanted to be. There is sharing and cooperation, a goal that everybody wants to get to – Arabs and Jews – so that together we build a better future for our children,”* adds Raida Hatib, a Palestinian-Israeli NSWAS resident, parent and teacher at the PS.

The **School for Peace (SFP)** is central to the community of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam’s ability to spread its message to others and to demonstrate Jewish-Palestinian cooperation beyond its own borders, receiving numerous requests to conduct workshops throughout Israel, the West Bank, and internationally. Its four primary programs include: university courses, the women’s department, facilitator training courses, and youth encounter workshops. Recently, the SFP has been conducting workshops in the professional sector as well.

*“This meeting marks a turning point in my life. It has affected my personal interactions with others, and, since the meeting, I have been working towards advancing dialogue as a means of conflict resolution,”* explains Rakefet Ginsberg, a Jewish participant in a women’s course at the School for Peace. *“I have been developing joint projects for young Palestinian and Jewish women. I have created support groups for Israeli women who live in conflict between their positions regarding the conflict and Israeli society’s expectations of them as women and mothers.”*

Created in honor of the founder of the village, the **Father Bruno Hussar Pluralistic Spiritual Center** reflects the original aims of Father Bruno who envisioned a place where people of all faiths could live together and appreciate one another’s diverse beliefs. Programs at the Spiritual Center are focused on inter-religious recognition, truth and reconciliation, and the role of memory and narrative regarding conflict.

*“In the spiritual center, we are developing and exploring this subject [reconciliation], not in an academic way, but in a more practical way,”* explains Palestinian-Israeli resident Abdessalam Najjar, who was among the first families to move to NSWAS. *“What does reconciliation do to people? Is reconciliation an act that occurs after the termination of a conflict or is it an endless process, a way of life or thinking?”*

The **Humanitarian Aid for Palestinians** program was initiated by residents in 2000 to provide important humanitarian and medical assistance to their neighbors in the West Bank in response to growing needs. In addition to providing food, medical kits and arranging medical treatment days in villages, the program also links Palestinians with Israeli hospitals and doctors – demonstrating the power of engagement and cooperation.

This summer, young Jewish and Arab adults from the village hosted a week long **Summer Camp for Palestinian children. The community also housed families fleeing Northern Israel at both its Guest House and Volunteer House.** Community residents focused their attention on the influence of peace work at a time of violence.

*“...Peace work is activity where the means and the end are intimately joined,” asserts Howard Shippin, resident of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam. “It is about preserving a humane view towards people on both sides of the conflict where there is subtle incitement to do the contrary. It implies the building of bridges rather than fences. It means remaining vulnerable, in order to be strong.”*

Ultimately, the dialogue, engagement, and activities at the “Oasis of Peace” work to support the possibility of creating meaningful change, or conflict transformation. As the community brings Jews and Palestinians together for bilingual education, youth workshops, adult dialogue and conflict management training sessions and interfaith workshops, it serves as a powerful example.

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Since 1988, the American Friends of NSWAS has been dedicated to dialogue, cooperation and a genuine and durable peace between Arabs and Jews, Palestinians and Israelis by encouraging, supporting and publicizing the projects of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, the “Oasis of Peace.” **We would not be able to achieve this mission without your support.**

We share your concern for security and justice in the region, as our work reflects.

*Highlights from this past year include:*

- Acquiring USAID (United States Agency of International Development) funding for the School for Peace to support “**Agents of Change: Conflict Management Training for Leaders of Israeli and Palestinian Civil Society**,” a program that began in December of 2005 and finishes at the end of this year targeting media, healthcare, government, and education professionals. Courses ran as scheduled, despite challenges this summer.
- Continuing to offer important support for the Primary School, including for its innovative extracurricular activities, such as new **Archaeology and Ecology and Environmental Studies Programs**, and existing programs like **Drama Therapy and the Goodwin-Golder Language Center**.
- Hosting a Roundtable Discussion and Luncheon, “**Israel-Palestine: Long Term Prospects for Coexistence**” honoring 35 years of coexistence at the “Oasis of Peace.” The event featured acclaimed speakers: **Sara Ehrman, Hon. Samuel Lewis, Shibley Telhami, Robert Satloff, Khalil Jahshan, Aaron David Miller, Hon. Richard Murphy, and General Brent Scowcroft**.
- Partnering with other like-minded organizations, through the **Alliance for Middle East Peace (www.allmep.org)**, to raise awareness among politicians and policymakers about the need for supporting people-to-people activities in the region.
- **Leading a tour to Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam**, and other sites in Israel and the West Bank, in which Americans were able to experience first-hand the work of the community and to see other peace organizations at work.



It has been a challenging year, full of accomplishments to be proud of, always with more to do. **The American Friends of NSWAS invites you to move forward with us.**

The work of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam is as important as it has ever been. Its rare ability to bring Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians together for unique training in dialogue, education and conflict management that has already changed lives, depends entirely on your support. The “Oasis of Peace” has shown us that its strategies of engagement and partnership are valued by both sides in the conflict.

***We hope that you will join with us here in the United States to make a difference in the Middle East.***

*With Thanks and Wishes for Peace!*

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**Take note that our New Jersey office is now closed.  
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*We can still be found on the web at [www.oasisofpeace.org](http://www.oasisofpeace.org).  
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