



Oasis of Peace واحة السلام Wahat al-Salam נווה שלום Neve Shalom

June 2021

Wahat al-Salam Neve Shalom

Dear friends, supporters and lovers of peace around the world,

For the past few weeks, we have felt the kind support of people all over the world who understand that for those of us who have chosen to live in peace and solidarity, the recent events have been particularly alarming. Even before rockets began raining on Jewish and Palestinian citizens alike; even before Israeli planes began to bomb Gaza day and night, the numbers of dead there rising with each assault; we watched in frustration as police attempted to evict people from their homes in East Jerusalem and provoked tension and incited violence around Al Aqsa Mosque. And then we saw ethnic riots, killings and lynch mobs around the country, much of it focused on the mixed Arab-Jewish cities of Ramle, Lod, Acre and Haifa. To our sorrow, we watched as Jewish extremists entered those cities, inflaming an already combustible situation.

And yet, amidst the chaos, many of us have felt a glimmer of hope, a feeling that things have shifted, and cannot return to the way they were. While much of the world saw the destruction of property in Lod, or read about the state of emergency there, they may not have read about the peaceful, nationwide, one-day Arab strike or the public support this strike garnered from several large companies in the country. They have not read the statements issued by the medical system – in which Palestinian and Jewish doctors work side by side and treat all equally – or the Ministry of Education which began running “tolerance” ads with Arabic-speaking teachers (including one of our primary school teachers, Nadwa).

Of course, we cannot repair the damage of years of neglect and discrimination overnight, but we are well aware of the dangers if we stop trying altogether. Those of us who have chosen to devote our personal and professional lives to the nonviolent struggle for justice, equality and peace, who live in an intentional mixed community, who teach in our schools and graduate from our courses with the will to create positive change: We can be the ones to lead the way, to show how it can be done.

- For some of us in Wahat al-Salam Neve Shalom, our first concern was for parents, sisters and brothers in Lod and Ramle. Some left to help those whose homes came under attack from racist thugs, others shared the reports and unfiltered images: A Jewish civilian shooting four bullets into a crowd, one of those bullets killing an Arab civilian.
- Members of the village protested the killing in Gaza in their own way, peacefully demonstrating at the nearby Latrun junction.
- We relied on Dr. Raid Haj Yehia to provide us with updates on what was happening in Gaza, which he passed on from his colleagues in Physicians for Human Rights. Although we could

not stop the bombing, we could renew our efforts to provide humanitarian aid to Gaza, and we organized a shipment of medical supplies for hospitals, thanks to a generous donation from the American Friends and supporters from the village.

- The images we received from our own sources were radically different from those shown in Israel's mainstream media, which sanitized the destruction in Gaza. Images of dead children, people left homeless – these were left out, only “alleged” in many reports. Samah Salaime, head of Wahat al-Salam Neve Shalom's Communications and Development joined a group of activists and enlightened journalists who had created a working group dedicated to changing the reigning narrative in the Israeli media. [Samah appeared on TV](#) the evening news magazines, among others, to talk about the skewed reporting on the war and the racist policies that are destroying our shared spaces from within.
- Dr. Roi Silberberg, Director of the School for Peace, joined the effort as well. He and Samah gave two interviews to the BBC, as well as speaking with media in the Netherlands and
- Rita Boulos, Chairperson of the Municipal Society, wrote an opinion piece on the events for the Haaretz Daily, as well as signing a “good neighbors” accord with the heads of Arab and Jewish regional councils.

Once the ceasefire took effect, we were back to our offices and schoolrooms. Here too, we feel the need to invest extra effort to ensure our message of a binational, peaceful society is passed on to our children. The parents have come together in a dialogue circle and they are planning a “tolerance festival” with local performers and family-friendly activities for June 18th. We are pleased to report that despite the conflict, there were no dropouts from those who have registered for first grade next year.

- The School for Peace alumni drafted [a position paper](#) on the conflict. At the same time, the facilitators in the School have been busy providing [organizational advice and guidance](#) to nonprofit organizations in which Palestinians and Jews have been returning to work side by side with the recent images of violence and hatred fresh in their minds. [The Center for the Study of Multiculturalism and Diversity](#) at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is one such organization, as are groups in other Israeli universities.
- Alumni of the School for Peace are currently in the process of choosing and forming proposals to promote peace and dialogue in the mixed cities of Lod and Ramle.

The recent events were emotionally challenging to us all, and they continue to present new challenges. We hid from the rocket fire, Arabs and Jews huddled together for safety. We wept at the heavy cost, in lives, spirit and property, that we all – Palestinian citizens of Israel, Jewish Israelis and citizens of Gaza – have paid. But the conflict is not new, and our resolve to provide an example of a just, equal and peaceful society has not wavered.

Yours,

Samah Salaime