

# Partners for peace

## MORE INFORMATION

From the Partners for Peace website (<http://www.partnersforpeace.org>): a 501c(3) founded in 1991, strongly advocates a connection between means and ends. We think that for the good of both Palestinians and Israelis the occupation should end, but believe this goal is best advanced by nonviolence rather than attacks on civilians. Attacks on Israeli or Palestinian civilians warrant criticism and do significant damage to advancing substantive peacemaking.

“Three Jerusalem women – Jewish, Christian, and Muslim – crossed the border . . .” It sounds like the start of an un-PC joke, but the crossing commenced a nationwide tour called “Jurusalem Women Speak” organized by Partners for Peace. Their message, shared at nearby California Lutheran University, is fitting for this — and every — season.



**KAREN TELLEEN-LAWTON**

The current tour is the fourteenth since the project began in 1998. Each involves a different threesome, all of whom have experienced tragic encounters with “the other.” They met for the first time last month,

and travel together with the message that their land can be shared, if everyone works together for peace.

Hagit Ra’anan, a 57-year-old Jewish Israeli, was born in Tel Aviv. Her grandparents came to Palestine in the 1920s from Russia, Lithuania, and Poland. During the 1982 Lebanon war, Ra’anan’s husband was killed in combat near Beirut while serving with the Israeli military. Five months pregnant, she miscarried their only child weeks later. In time, she joined the Bereaved Families Forum, which brings together grieving Palestinians and Israelis to promote reconciliation and viable political solutions. “People pay a lot to be part of the Bereaved Families group,” she said acknowledged.

Ra’anan founded Bridges of Peace, whose many projects include visiting Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and coordinating permits for Palestinians to enter Israel. She also works with chil-

dren in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim schools within Israel to build bridges among these three communities. She encouraged the audience to see every situation from each other’s perspectives.

Wejdan Jaber, a Muslim Palestinian, wears Western dress in Gaza as well as the West. Her ancestral home was Al-Majhar, where her parents owned two houses and a farm. They fled in the 1948 war, escaping only with their infant, Wejdan’s older brother. Al-Majhar was destroyed to create Tel Aviv. Wejdan and her siblings were born in the Al Burajj refugee camp south of Gaza City.

In 2002, Jaber earned a Master’s Degree from California’s Monterey Institute for International Studies. She was wary of Americans at first, but it was “the best two years of my life,” she remembered. “I had liberty to live and freedom to travel.” Nevertheless, it took her seven days to return home. As a stateless Palestinian, she missed flights while airport personnel dealt with her status. Wejdan’s two artificial hips, from a birth defect, tripped up the metal detectors and caused more delays. When she finally arrived in Tel Aviv, she was forbidden to leave the airport for the final hour of the journey. “Fly into Gaza Airport,” she was told, though the Israelis had long since destroyed it. Forced to return to the United States, she finally arrived home through Jordan.

Abir Kopty is a 32-year-old Christian

Israeli citizen proud of her Palestinian heritage. “Palestinians have one of the highest rates of education, despite the occupation,” she said. Kopty speaks Hebrew, Arabic, and English and lobbies in the Israeli Parliament. She wants to enter Israeli politics, envisioning, “Israel can be a safe shelter for Jews and Palestinians.”

Afterwards, the audience of over 100 peppered the women with questions. Someone asked about commonly-told stories she hears from her Jewish friends. Ra’anan said, “They are part of our narrative. Tell your friends to come listen. We need to acknowledge each other’s stories, not agree. Being an ostrich takes us nowhere.”

Kopty added that she encourages people to read reputable sources on both sides. “I give Israeli academic websites for Westerners to read, so they believe the facts. Ilan Poppy, for example, has access to Israeli archives. Information is power.”

Another listener voiced frustration at the inability of the governments to reach a solution. Ra’anan agreed, “There is no charismatic leader in Israel or the United States. That is why the grass-roots needs to take hold.” That is why she is part of Three Jerusalem Women.

Kopty told the audience that Israelis and Palestinians all understand that they have to find way to live in peace. She laid the task more squarely on the

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Israelis. “We need a brave leader in Israel,” she said. “We cannot expect Palestinians to act as ordinary citizens because they are an occupied people.” She argued that while the chaos in Palestinian politics is in major part a result of occupation, “I’m ashamed of the internal fights while we are under occupation. We need to marginalize the extremists on both sides.”

No one who claimed to be an extremist was in attendance. But one audience member was angered at what she considered to be anti-Israel sentiment, asking, “What do you mean, Occupied Palestine? It’s not even a

state.” Kopty assured her that the Israeli government itself talks about Occupied Territories; it is a recognized term in Israel.

Wejdan earned laughter when she added, “[You can call it an] occupation, or you can call it an Unwanted Long-Term Visit.” To the nods of her Muslim and Jewish colleagues, Kopty finished, “Optimism is not a choice but a necessity.”

*Karen Telleen-Lawton’s column is a mélange of people, nature, events, and observations transporting the reader around the world and back to Santa Barbara. Her writing can be found at [www.CanyonVoices.com](http://www.CanyonVoices.com), including excerpts from her book, Canyon Voices – the Nature of Rattlesnake Canyon.*

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