

SHARED SOCIETY SOCIAL JUSTICE

REGIONAL PEACEBUILDING

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACEBUILDING

**VOICES FOR
CHANGE**

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

GENDER AND SEXUAL EQUALITY

LABOUR FRIENDS OF ISRAEL

WORKING TOWARDS A TWO STATE
SOLUTION

**VOICES FOR
CHANGE**

LFI COLLECTION OF ESSAYS

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These essays were commissioned and written prior to October's ceasefire

VOICES FOR CHANGE

LFI's Voices for Change project gives those in Israel striving for democratic values, social justice and peace the opportunity to share their challenges, hopes and achievements.

Like almost every democracy today, Israel wrestles with polarisation and populism, and threats to its democratic values and institutions. In the Israeli case, these challenges are exacerbated by the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the devastating attack of 7 October 2023.

Yet countless activists and organisations work tirelessly each day to change Israel for the better, standing up to the dangers of extremism and working to unite rather than divide. Drowned out by an international focus on Israel's leaders and the tragic conflict in the Gaza Strip, their voices are barely heard outside Israel.

At the same time, we must never forget that while its democracy is, like our own, imperfect, Israel is the region's only democracy. The only state where the rule of law and the freedom of the press and the independence of the judiciary are upheld. And where civic society – from trade unions to feminist groups and LGBT, peace and environmental activists – can argue, and campaign, for change.

Our Voices for Change come from different backgrounds and work in different fields. But they share a commitment to the values of equality, democracy and peace envisaged in Israel's Declaration of Independence. They are working to advance the status of Arab citizens of Israel and a peaceful end to the Palestinian conflict; defend the values of liberal democracy and the rights of Israeli workers whether Jewish or Arab; and promote gender and sexual equality and a vision of cooperation with Arab states.

LFI supports a negotiated two-state solution for two peoples; with Israel safe, secure and recognised within its borders; living alongside a viable, democratic and independent Palestinian state. We support political, economic and civic society initiatives to further the cause of peace and a two-state solution. We advocate for peacebuilders in both Israel and Palestine in their work to achieve these vital goals. We work to strengthen bridges with political parties in Israel that share Labour values, and we foster a special relationship with The Democrats, a merger of Labour's sister parties, the Israeli Labor and Meretz parties. And we stand in solidarity with all those Israelis – Jew and non-Jew – advancing our shared values of equality, democracy and peace.

These dedicated activists come from every sector of Israeli society, and use all available democratic means to fulfil their vision for a more inclusive, peaceful and prosperous Israel and Middle East region.

LFI believes the change the world wants to see in Israel and Palestine is already underway, led by extraordinarily courageous civil society activists. At this lowest ebb of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and at a time when peace seems at its most distant, the Voices for Change project represents a hopeful mosaic of voices pushing back against the empty politics of division and fear.

INTRODUCTION: WE MUST LISTEN TO – AND STRENGTHEN – ISRAEL’S VOICES FOR CHANGE

MICHAEL RUBIN, LFI DIRECTOR

For over two years, Israelis and Palestinians alike have endured tragedy, suffering and grief that few of us can imagine.

Standing in the scarred ruins of homes in Kibbutz Kfar Aza, visiting the site of the Nova music festival massacre, and joining the families of the hostages seized on 7 October 2023 earlier this summer, I have witnessed first-hand the impact of the atrocities committed by Hamas.

I have met too with senior figures in the Palestinian Authority, Palestinian civil society groups and been briefed by the International Red Cross on the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Amid this darkness, however, there are flickers of light. In Jerusalem and Ramallah, I met with civil society organisations and Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding groups who are working to strengthen constituencies for peace amongst Israelis and Palestinians at the grassroots level.

These glimmers of hope for the future aren’t unique. Within Israel, a movement for change is rising up and strengthening. I’m proud that it is the focus of our major, new Voices for Change project.

Its goal is to draw attention to, and promote, energetic and fresh Israeli voices and movements promoting a liberal, inclusive and democratic vision for Israel’s future.

Their vision is rooted in Israel’s founding principles: a state committed to “freedom, justice and peace” and the promise of “complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex”.

Israel’s Declaration of Independence laid the groundwork for a Jewish and democratic state. One with a vigorous, and sometimes messy, democracy; a robust press; free trade unions which fight for the dignity of work; an independent judiciary; and a vibrant civic society which reflects the diversity of Israeli society.

But the task of realising the vision of the Declaration of Independence is far from complete. And – as in many other democracies – populism and extremism are presenting new challenges that must be confronted and overcome.

Our authors are Israelis working to do just that: to strengthen democracy; build a shared society between Jews and Arab-Israelis; improve gender and sexual equality; and secure social justice. We also feature Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilders and Israelis who are building bridges with the country’s regional neighbours.

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Their visions – and the practical steps they are taking to bring about change on the ground – are an example of the positive work that is being done.

“THIS IS AN ISRAEL WE SEE AND HEAR TOO LITTLE OF IN THE BRITISH

This series features, for instance, Liora Goldfeder discussing the work of Brothers and Sisters in Arms to protect Israel’s democratic foundations from the Netanyahu government’s attempted judicial overhaul.

Menucha Saitowitz writes about how Desert Stars is building a new generation of young Bedouin leaders “with the skills, vision and courage to shape not only the future of their own communities, but of Israeli society as a whole”.

Tal Hochmann describes the Israel Women’s Network’s battle for gender equality, while Peter Lerner outlines the work of the Histadrut, which, as he rightly says, is so much more than a trade union representative body (akin to the TUC); “a national platform for economic justice,” in his words, and a “source of social cohesion across ethnic, religious and political lines”.

Naturally, these Voices for Change are also concerned with how the conflict with the Palestinians can be brought to a close and the emerging opportunities to build the “new Middle East” – with Israel taking its place among its regional neighbours – as Shimon Peres envisaged three decades ago.

Naama Barak writes about Women Wage Peace – the largest grassroots peace movement in Israel – and its partnership with Women of the Sun, a Palestinian movement of women from the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

This is an Israel we see and hear too little of in the British media and in parliamentary debates.

But it is an Israel which many Israelis are working and fighting for day in, day out.

Nor is this a fringe minority removed from mainstream Israeli society. Ever since the 7 October attacks, polls have consistently shown a majority of Israelis want to see Benjamin Netanyahu resign.

Israelis also want to see a wider regional peace deal; one which, building on the success of the Abraham Accords, leads to a normalisation agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia; the forging of a security alliance to contain Iran’s malign influence; and a path to Palestinian statehood.

We are all desperate to see political change in Israel. As the Israeli historian and writer Yuval Noah Harari has suggested, in his near-uninterrupted 15 years as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu has “repeatedly preferred his personal interests over the national interest [and] built his political career on dividing the nation against itself”.

The essence of centre-left politics is our belief in solidarity – that by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more together than we achieve alone – and that is why British progressives should stand alongside our Israeli friends who are demanding – and working hard for – change at home.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Rubin is the director of Labour Friends of Israel

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACEBUILDING

A VOICE FOR THE REGION'S CONCERNED MOTHERS NAAMA BARAK WOLFMAN

Since 7 October 2023, our lives have been marked by fear, grief and pain. Recent days have seen anger and frustration added to this unfortunate list. But, at Women Wage Peace, we refuse to let despair shape the future. We do not represent governments; we are mothers, citizens and activists who seek not mere survival, but security, dignity and hope for all.

We envision a future where the cycles of violence, plaguing the region for decades, are finally broken; a future grounded in mutual recognition and the knowledge that, throughout history, bloody conflicts worldwide have been resolved. At the heart of our vision lies the conviction that mothers on both sides of the conflict share a common desire to protect and defend their children and to see them thrive. It is from this fundamental maternal instinct that Women Wage Peace was born.

In 2014, in the aftermath of yet another military escalation in Gaza, Women Wage Peace was established by Israeli women who recognised that true security requires a solution to the conflict, one which addresses its root causes. From the beginning, our message was clear: we cannot wait for others to make peace. We must build it – together. Since then, we have grown into the largest grassroots peace movement in

Israel, uniting tens of thousands of women – Jewish and Arab, religious and secular – from the width and breadth of Israeli society. What brings us together is the belief that this conflict must end through



diplomacy, not force. We strive for a future where both people can exercise their right to self-determination and security, and where the land can be shared in a way that honours the deep connections of both nations with it.

We work to advance a negotiated agreement that will help end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; one that ensures freedom, security and equality for both peoples. We demand an earnest and inclusive negotiation process that aims for a just, mutually agreed-upon and

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sustainable political agreement. We are a broad, nonpartisan movement and we do not endorse or promote a specific blueprint. We are here to be part of the conversation, to influence it, and to ensure that the voices of women and civil society are heard and lead. We offer a view of peace which places people at its centre: not just where the borders go, but how people will live, coexist and thrive.

“WE CAUTION AGAINST UNILATERAL STEPS BY

Women are not only advocates for peace – we are drivers of peace. Women tend to offer practical, complex and empathetic solutions rooted in empathy and listening. Our unique perspectives are born of care, resilience and deep familiarity with the consequences of war. We listen, we connect and we take responsibility. This is not only a strategic truth – it is an international obligation. Adopted in October 2000, UN security council resolution 1325 calls on all member states to ensure women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in peace and security decision-making. Women’s voices must be central to any sustainable

peace process; not just as participants, but as leaders who understand what is truly at stake: the futures of our children. We are not here to calm the room, we are here to lead it.

Over the past four years, we have built a viable partnership with Women of the Sun, a Palestinian movement of women from the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. Together, we launched The Mothers’ Call, a joint initiative calling on our leaders to end the war, release all hostages and return to negotiations. We demonstrate that partnership is not only possible, it is inevitable. Throughout the continuing conflict, cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians remains possible. Our joint vigils, marches and training provide concrete examples of what collaboration might look like and help sustain communication during challenging periods. This partnership is not merely symbolic, it is a statement: we aren’t enemies, we are the mothers of this wounded region – and we refuse to accept war as our destiny.

Our educational and advocacy efforts focus on promoting an understanding of diplomatic solutions and changing both the public and leadership discourse in Israel. We work to counter narratives that suggest military solutions are the only option, instead highlighting successful examples of conflict-resolution through negotiation and compromise. We demonstrate how meaningful security is based on political agreements, on binding accords such as our peace treaties with Jordan and Egypt, on the end of the conflict, mutual recognition, and a commitment to human rights. Military security is essential, but it is no substitute for a political horizon.



We are currently assembling a strategy based on interviews with over 130 Israeli, Palestinian, and international civil society experts. The roadmap outlines multiple real-world pathways to peace through diplomacy, civil society, economy, environment, religion, education, and more. These are not theoretical ideas or blueprints of geopolitical solutions, rather they are civil society initiatives already underway or ready to launch. The tools exist. The partners exist. What’s needed is the will to act.

The international dimension of peacebuilding cannot be underestimated. Continued advocacy for diplomatic solutions and for the inclusion of women’s voices in any peace process is crucial. We caution

against unilateral steps by either side that bypass negotiations. Whether through declarations, annexations, or uncoordinated withdrawals, these actions might deepen mistrust and undermine the prospect of peace. We are not opposed to the goals of such actions but to their unilateral implementation. Sustainable peace can only emerge from dialogue, agreement and mutual recognition, not imposition.

We call on our friends and allies in the UK and around the world: support diplomacy. Support women's leadership. Support efforts that bring Israelis and Palestinians together not in fear, but in cooperation. Your solidarity with both sides makes a difference.

Our work is grounded in a simple but radical truth: peace is security . Security means the ability to live without fear. It means freedom of movement, protection from violence, access to healthcare and education. It means the ability to raise our children in safety, with hopes for their future. The weight of the reality of the past 19 months has strengthened our resolve. To us, a political agreement is the highest form of security for all residents of the region.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Naama Barak Wolfman is currently serving as director on the board of Women Wage Peace

BUILDING THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR BUILDING PEACE

MEREDITH ROTHBART

Peace between Israelis and Palestinians seems more elusive than ever. Yet rather than simply giving up, we need to ask: has a holistic, coordinated effort to build a sustainable and more peaceful reality ever truly been attempted?

At Amal-Tikva, we believe it hasn't. For decades, efforts have either focused on political negotiations without public support, or grassroots initiatives without political buy-in. The evidence suggests that the approaches most likely to resolve the conflict haven't failed; they simply haven't been implemented in a strategic or coordinated way.



Public support for diplomacy had declined long before October 2023. Leaders on both sides claimed the other was not a viable partner, while failing to model cooperation themselves, even within their own governments. Over time, the word “peace” became politically polarising.

One of the central failures of the Oslo process was its inability to involve the broader public in its development or implementation. As a result, it lacked legitimacy among large parts of both societies, particularly those with religious or nationalist identities. The result was not only a breakdown of the process but a hardening of attitudes that persists today.

Peacebuilding organisations have long tried to fill the vacuum left by failed diplomacy, but they too have limitations. Many efforts repeated the same secular, liberal framing that alienated religious and conservative populations from diplomacy. But these are often the very groups that wield the most influence in both societies today.

Meaningful change requires challenging the deeper narratives, structures, and beliefs that sustain the conflict. This means working within each society to shift internal dynamics, reduce violence, and create more liveable alternatives in the present, not just preparing for some future agreement. This is especially important given the situation we currently confront, where, in both societies, the former so-called spoilers – individuals or groups that obstruct productive steps toward a peace process – have become each side’s leaders.

Amal-Tikva was founded to create the infrastructure needed for peacebuilding to become a professional, strategic, and scalable field capable of achieving lasting social change in both Israeli and Palestinian societies.

Through strengthening organisations, investing in leaders, conducting research and shaping discourse, Amal-Tikva helps donors, NGOs, academics, and decision-makers communicate and collaborate, monitor and evaluate, strategise and scale up. As a Jerusalem-based NGO, with Israeli and Palestinian staff and board members, Amal-Tikva works alongside the organisations and donors we serve.

So how do we work?

First, by building organisational capacity. Through our flagship Fieldbuilding360 programme, we provide long-term support to a diverse array of civil society organisations—from uni-national religious institutions to tech collaborations and youth engagement efforts. Each is equipped with the tools they need: from strategic planning and theory of change development, to monitoring, evaluation, and funding models.

Second, by strengthening leadership. While strong institutions are critical, building a more peaceful reality requires more than NGOs, it requires expertise and leadership. We equip emerging and established leaders with the skills, networks and resources they need to drive meaningful change in their communities. We call this the Amal-Tikva Leadership Institute (ATLI). We run a comprehensive, seven-month professional development programme aimed at strengthening Israeli and Palestinian NGO executives through mentorship, peer learning, and leadership skills development, while Emerging Leaders is a six-month intensive professional development programme for experienced Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilding professionals who have been working in the field for at least three years.

“DESPITE THE
TRAUMA AND
DISRUPTION
OF WAR, THE
FIELD OF
PEACEBUILDING

Third, by learning and innovating. Effective peacebuilding must be guided by continuous, evidence-based learning. Our research provides insights that can be used to shape strategy, influence policy, and deepen understanding across the field as we examine emerging challenges and opportunities. Our goal is to create a structured pathway for innovation in the peacebuilding field, where new ideas can be tested with low risks, evaluated, and scaled up with guidance and assistance from the Amal-Tikva consulting team.

Fourth, by cultivating resilience. The Resilient Peacebuilder Initiative is a new two-part programme launched in response to the 7 October attacks and the war in Gaza. We are currently being trained by the US-based Headington Institute, which is dedicated to promoting the well-being and resilience of humanitarian workers and organisations with staff working in challenging and high-stress environments. We aim to become an organisation that understands, and is sensitive and responsive to, the impact of trauma in our management, policies and programmes.

In the second phase of the programme, we will develop and integrate curricula into all of our programmes to help disseminate this training throughout the field. This includes training webinars on understanding trauma and its impact, workshops on trauma-informed approaches and leadership for peacebuilders, individual and organisational resilience assessments, as well as regular support sessions by clinical and organisational psychologists. One of the key outputs is to develop a series of handbooks on leading, managing, and facilitating through a trauma-informed, trauma-sensitive, and trauma-responsive lens.

“MEANINGFUL
CHANGE
REQUIRES
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THE DEEPER
NARRATIVES,

Despite the trauma and disruption of war, the field of peacebuilding has shown remarkable resilience. Most of the 38 NGOs surveyed by Amal-Tikva in late 2024 maintained or expanded operations during the first six months of war. They delivered humanitarian aid, reached new communities, and adapted to urgent needs, all while managing staff displacement, reserve duty, and personal loss. These are not symbolic gestures. Many of these organisations are binational in terms of both their staff and their reach; they are not just promoting coexistence – they are serving both communities, even in wartime.

Many NGOs are adapting to the realities of war and polarisation by focusing on peacebuilding within their own societies to build trust, promote nonviolent communication and develop leadership capacity. This shift is not a retreat from cross-border peacebuilding work but rather a strategic reconfiguration. Dialogue alone, especially during wartime, is not always possible or helpful. But efforts within societies – when done with a clear theory of change – can prepare societies for eventual political progress.

Amal-Tikva’s “diamond approach” to peacebuilding supports this model. It has four points: the top, representing political/diplomatic “top-down” peacemaking; the bottom, representing grassroots peacebuilding efforts; and the two sides representing each party involved in the conflict. The dotted line in the middle is where the two societies meet, and the people holding that dotted line represent those doing the peacebuilding work. It encourages engagement within societies, with the intention of sharing observations and developing approaches across national lines that will enable each society to see the development of a new nonviolent construct from within their religious and national aspirations.



Other conflicts offer valuable insights. For example, the International Fund for Ireland helped build what negotiators later called the “social peace” that made a political agreement possible in Northern Ireland. By funding and coordinating civil society work across divides, it laid the groundwork for the Good Friday agreement more than a decade later. Israeli and Palestinian societies need a similar long-term strategy. That means large-scale, sustained investment, but also serious coordination and accountability across actors. Amal-Tikva, a partner of the Alliance for Middle East Peace, is working to build that infrastructure.

Political negotiations remain essential – but without public readiness, they are likely to stall again. At the same time, peacebuilders on the ground cannot succeed alone. What’s needed is a coordinated effort: one that recognises each actor’s role, strengthens internal capacities, and promotes broader systems change.

Amal-Tikva’s model does exactly that. We invest in individuals, organisations, and networks – and help them grow into a cohesive, professional field. Peace will not come quickly or easily. But by building the infrastructure now, we make it more likely that when political opportunities do arise, both societies are ready to seize them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meredith Rothbart is founder and chief executive of Amal-Tikva

“WE SHARE THE LAND – CAN WE SHARE THE FUTURE?”

SAMER SINIJLAWI

With Saudi Arabia fast becoming the gravitational centre of Middle Eastern diplomacy, resolving the Palestinian question has never been more urgent. This is no longer just a moral imperative. It is a strategic necessity for Israel. Peace with the Palestinians unlocks a new regional reality: one where normalisation with Saudi Arabia becomes possible. If Saudi Arabia, undisputed leader of the Arab world, joins the Abraham accords, Israel will no longer live in a jungle, but in a stable environment.

“ONE DAY,
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DAMASCUS,
AND RIYADH.”

With all due respect to Egypt and Turkey, both know that Saudi Arabia is the leader of Sunni Muslims and Arabs. Once Israel is at peace with Saudi Arabia, it will be at peace forever with Arabs and Sunni Muslims. This would launch a new Middle East dynamic, allowing for a collective approach to the Iranian issue and forging a regional order built on collaboration and collective interest.

This step would open massive economic and political horizons for Israel. If I were Israeli, I would no longer celebrate independence on 15 May, but on the day peace is signed with Saudi Arabia and the Palestinians. That would be Israel's real independence – fully integrated into the region. One day, Israelis won't dream of Parisian vacations. They'll lunch in Beirut, dine in Damascus, and spend weekends in Riyadh. This is no utopia. It's a vision waiting for courage.

And courage might just come from the most unexpected place.

Donald Trump, for all his flaws, has changed the equation. Take January's hostage deal: Joe Biden introduced it in May 2024. The former US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, visited the region 10 times to finalise it. He failed. Trump secured it with a single tweet. No trip to the Middle East. No photo ops. Just blunt leverage and pressure.

Trump is a man no one dares to challenge or contradict—and he knows it. He understands he is the most powerful individual on earth, leading the world's greatest power. He doesn't care about the “rules-based international order”; the only thing that matters to him is American interests. Every decision is made with that priority in mind.

But that's not necessarily bad for the Middle East. In fact, it could be positive. American self-interest can align with peace in our region. A stable Middle East, integrated with global markets and insulated from extremist threats, serves everyone. And so we must think carefully about how to maximise the coming years to bring peace and positive change. If Trump, Emmanuel Macron, and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman push for a deal, we – Palestinians and Israelis – must be ready to meet them there.

Because this doesn't end thanks to summits or handshakes alone. It ends because of conversations – in homes, classrooms, streets – where ordinary Palestinians and Israelis reach out, and choose something better.

There was a time when hate didn't define us. When Palestinians and Israelis could sit across the table and exchange not vitriol, but ideas and dreams. When leaders weren't defined by how loud they could yell, but by how deeply they could listen.

That spirit still lives – and it must be revived. The cynics who say “there's no one to talk to” are wrong. Most Palestinians and most Israelis still believe in living side by side. Not divided by walls, but connected by a shared future. Peace hasn't disappeared. It's waiting for us to stop yelling and start hearing each other out.



A new generation of Israeli and Palestinian leaders is rising. They think differently. They lead differently. And they're done waiting. In June, just after Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia, these leaders gathered in Paris. Not for another round of tired negotiations but to remind the world that dialogue is resistance. Resistance to despair. Resistance to extremism. Resistance to the idea that we must forever be at war.

I have spent the past three decades as a political activist, building bridges between the two sides of the conflict. Aged 14, during the first intifada, I joined the Palestinian Fatah movement and a year later was sentenced by Israel to five years in prison for violence committed during the uprising. Like many Palestinian politicians, I learned Hebrew during this time in an Israeli jail.

After my release, I became the international secretary of the Fatah youth movement, bringing me into contact with representatives of Israeli youth movements. Initially, I met with youth from the left-wing Labor party in Ramallah, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, then later with right-wing Likud youth, who did not come to Ramallah; instead, we held joint meetings in Tel Aviv, Cyprus and the United States.

But more importantly, I have been holding private one-on-one meetings with high-ranking Knesset members from the ruling coalition and the opposition, including party leaders, including figures one would not normally expect to sit down with a Palestinian representative. I have succeeded in meeting 90 percent of the people that I asked to meet. Most of the Israelis are willing to talk to a Palestinian who knocks on their door.

The first meeting is always tense, short and cold. But the second meeting starts becoming more flexible. At the third meeting, you start seeing some type of personal relationship, and it opens doors. I sometimes joke with the Israelis that I know them better than they know themselves, because I talk to everybody, left, centre and right. They don't talk to each other.

This war will end. And when it does, we will still be here, together. Israelis and Palestinians: breathing the same air; walking the same streets; burying our dead in the same soil.

We already share the land. The question now is whether we can share a future. Most Israelis and Palestinians are capable of understanding the two sides of this conflict, of seeing things through the eyes of the other. The vast majority of both peoples are reasonable and humane. They don't buy into binary thinking, tribalism, or identity politics. They have the empathy and moral intelligence to appreciate suffering and pain and anxiety – whoever is feeling it.

We've lost so many lives fighting over who belongs more. Maybe it's time to ask: how do we both belong?

Coexistence isn't a fantasy. Denying it is.

“A NEW GENERATION OF ISRAELI AND

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Samer Sinijlawi is a Palestinian political activist and the founding chairman of the Jerusalem Development Fund

REGIONAL PEACEBUILDING

SOWING REGIONAL SEEDS OF HOPE ELI BAR-ON, DR NAJAH AL OTAIBI AND GHANEM NOSEIBEH

In May, at the historic Château d’Ermenonville outside Paris, something remarkable happened. Dozens of leaders from across the Middle East and North Africa – Israelis, Palestinians, Moroccans, Egyptians, Bahrainis, Jordanians and many others – gathered not to debate borders or assign blame, but to design cross-border solutions to two of the region’s most urgent challenges: food and water security.

In a region often framed by division, this was an act of cooperation, trust and hope.

The gathering, co-convened by MENA2050 and other partners, was grounded in a simple but radical idea: that regional resilience in the face of climate change cannot be built without regional cooperation. Over three days of intense roundtables, expert panels and collaborative workshops, participants shared promising models – like Morocco’s wind-powered desalination projects, Israel’s food rescue systems and Egypt’s regenerative agriculture innovations. Out of these exchanges emerged a number of potential collaborative projects aimed at expanding solutions across borders. But even more powerful than the proposals was the spirit in which they were conceived: one of partnership, solidarity and shared destiny.

This is what MENA2050 is about.

Founded by a diverse group of leading figures from across the Middle East and North Africa region, MENA2050 is a homegrown regional organisation committed to building a more stable, prosperous, integrated and cooperative Middle East and North Africa. We are a community of policy entrepreneurs, business leaders, young professionals, climate and tech experts, journalists, and civil society leaders working to transform a region long defined by conflict into one shaped by cooperation and possibility.

We start from the belief that the people of the MENA region – whether in Tel Aviv or Tunis, Beirut or Baghdad – share common challenges: water insecurity, youth unemployment, fragile food systems and unequal participation across all segments of society. These challenges cannot be solved within national

“THE GREATER
THE
CHALLENGE,
THE GREATER
THE NEED FOR
CREATIVE AND
DETERMINED

silos. They demand cooperation – cooperation that is practical, courageous and focused on the future. The same applies to countless regional opportunities that need stability and multilateral cooperation in order to materialise.

Our mission is to foster precisely that: cross-border collaboration to address shared challenges. We do this through three main vehicles: unofficial, non-state “Track II” dialogues that bring together regional actors across political divides and help nurture the next generation of regional leaders; working groups that design collaborative solutions in areas like climate resilience, water, food systems, AI and more; and public engagement to highlight the voices of those committed to cooperation and progress. MENA2050 is not only a think tank, it’s a platform for regional changemakers, built by, and for, the people of the region.

We are inspired by a vision of the MENA region in 2050 that is interlinked by clean energy grids and railways, not weapons shipments and proxy conflict. A region where people from across its societies lead joint ventures to tackle water scarcity, fight desertification, and connect their economies to global markets. A region where young people see their neighbours not as enemies, but as partners.

We are not naïve. We know the obstacles are immense. The war in Gaza, Iran’s destabilising behaviour, deep societal mistrust and political repression continue to weigh heavily on the region. But we also believe that the greater the challenge, the greater the need for creative and determined regional actors to step forward and offer an alternative.



That alternative is now more urgent – and more possible – than ever. Today, the Middle East stands at a historic crossroads. After nearly two years of tragedy and war that started on 7 October 2023, the region has a chance to achieve a pause in the violence. But more fundamentally, it opens a window to reimagine the region’s future. Two competing visions are vying for dominance: one built on militancy, proxy war and fear; the other rooted in cooperation, inclusion and mutual interest.

The choice is stark. And it is one the UK, and the government in particular, can help to influence.

MENA2050 believes the region’s future must be built not only by ending conflict, but by linking peace to prosperity. That means moving quickly towards reconstruction and integration across the region. We can invest in promoting frameworks whose foundations have already been laid, such as the IMEC (the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor) and the I2U2 group (which brings together India, Israel, the UAE and US). Such initiatives have established the groundwork for a new regional architecture focused on trade, energy and innovation. But these platforms can also be made more inclusive, incorporating not just Israel and the Gulf states, but Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians, and other states choosing a path towards peace.

Our recent Ermenonville gathering showed this is possible. Israelis sat next to Palestinians, Jordanians brainstormed with Tunisians. Practical solutions emerged not despite our differences, but because we were willing to bring our different strengths to the table. That spirit – of shared responsibility for a shared region – is the only path forward.

This is why the support of international partners like the UK is so important. For decades, Labour Friends of Israel has championed a vision of peace based on coexistence, democracy and mutual recognition. Those values are at the heart of MENA2050's work. We seek not only to promote dialogue, but to build shared systems of resilience. We work to create the regional structures that will make political solutions viable, by connecting Palestinians, Israelis, and their neighbours through joint initiatives that serve shared needs.

“WE SEEK NOT
ONLY TO
PROMOTE
DIALOGUE, BUT

To our friends in the Labour party: we believe your values – solidarity, internationalism and inclusion – have a vital role to play in the Middle East. At a time when hardliners on all sides seek to entrench divisions, there is a growing community across the region – young, pragmatic and courageous – working for something different. We ask for your support in amplifying these voices and investing in the regional initiatives that can help them succeed.

We are at a turning point now. We have a chance to change the course of history. And history will judge how we acted upon this opportunity: did we rebuild the same structures that brought us here? Or did we seize the moment to forge something new – a Middle East defined not by fragmentation and fear, but by integration and hope?

At MENA2050, we are choosing hope. We invite our friends in the UK, and especially those in the Labour party, to join us in building it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eli Bar-On is Israeli. He is the co-founder and chief executive officer of MENA 2050. Dr Najah Al Otaibi is Saudi. She is a member of the board of directors of MENA2050 and a Middle East policy consultant based in London. Ghanem Nuseiben is a Jerusalemite based in London. He is chair of Muslims Against Antisemitism. The authors are members of MENA2050, which is incorporated in the UK

WATER DIPLOMACY IN ACTION

GIDON BROMBERG

In a region shaped by conflict and division, EcoPeace Middle East offers a compelling alternative: cooperation through environmental diplomacy. For over three decades, this Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian organisation has been championing one of the region's most vital and politically charged issues – water.

Founded in 1994, EcoPeace stands as a rare model of regional collaboration. With offices in Tel Aviv, Ramallah and Amman, and a team comprised equally of Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians, EcoPeace has turned the notion of creating healthy environmental interdependence into a practical and strategic foundation for regional peacebuilding.



The Middle East faces a mounting water crisis driven by conflict, climate change, population growth, pollution, mismanagement, and competition for scarce water. Jordan, one of the most water-poor countries in the world, has seen its per capita water availability fall below 100 cubic meters per year; well short of the UN's threshold of absolute scarcity. In Palestine, communities face intermittent supply and inadequate infrastructure, with the resolution of water issues often held hostage to the conflict. And while Israel leads in water technology, natural resources such as the Jordan River and the Dead Sea are in severe ecological decline.

What unites the region is also what threatens it: water sources which cross borders. The Jordan River flows through all three countries. Aquifers stretch beneath multiple political boundaries. Pollution and over-extraction on one side affect communities on the other. EcoPeace's core insight is simple but powerful: environmental challenges transcend borders, and so must solutions.

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EcoPeace's work is grounded in the idea that environmental cooperation can open political pathways otherwise blocked by mistrust or stagnation. The organisation operates on three integrated tracks: regional advocacy and diplomacy; implementing tangible, community-based cross-border projects, such as joint sewage treatment facilities and water and energy exchanges; and grassroots education, focused on youth and young professionals from communities across the region.

“ENVIRONMENTAL
CHALLENGES
TRANSCEND

One of EcoPeace's most influential proposals is the “water-energy nexus”, a comprehensive framework for regional climate resilience. The initiative integrates water security with renewable energy cooperation, proposing an interdependent model where each party contributes and benefits:

- Jordan, with vast deserts, could produce and export large-scale solar energy;
- Israel and Palestine, with access to the Mediterranean, and for Israel advanced desalination capacity could export freshwater to Jordan;

- and, through mutual agreements, all three parties would secure what they lack creating a sustainable and stable exchange.

This innovative vision began to materialise in 2021 and 2022 with the signing of memoranda of understanding between Israel and Jordan on a water-for-energy deal called “Project Prosperity”, facilitated by the UAE and supported by the US. Although implementation remains at an early stage, these agreements mark a major breakthrough in regional environmental diplomacy.

Building on the water-energy exchange, EcoPeace has recently advanced a new framework known as the “IMEC Peace Triangle”, which is connected to the emerging India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). EcoPeace’s vision is to ensure that this economic initiative promotes peace rather than deepens inequalities. We advocate for IMEC to be grounded in sustainable, inclusive, and cooperative water and energy infrastructure that benefits all – Israelis, Jordanians and Palestinians.

The “IMEC Peace Triangle” includes three catalytic projects:

First, a regional water-energy exchange. EcoPeace proposes integrating Palestine into an expanded “Project Prosperity”. The goal is to construct a large desalination plant in Gaza to serve both Palestinian and Jordanian water needs in addition to the desalination planned for Jordan on the Israeli coast.

Second, renewable energy exports. Harnessing the abundant solar and wind resources of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan to enable large-scale exports of renewable energy through electricity and green hydrogen to Europe.

Studies undertaken by EcoPeace indicate that the Middle East could supply up to one-third of the electricity needs of southern and central European countries, from Greece to Germany. EcoPeace proposes adding Gaza as an energy export hub alongside existing plans for energy exports from Israel and Egypt.

Third, an electrified rail network. Research undertaken by EcoPeace suggests that a renewable energy-powered rail network linking the Gulf to the Mediterranean could be 40 percent faster in moving container traffic from India to Europe than alternative commercial routes such as the Suez canal.



EcoPeace proposes transforming Jordan into a central transport hub, where the planned railway will split - north towards Haifa and south to a port in Gaza. There is also the possibility of it running to Syria and Lebanon. Just as Antwerp, Rotterdam and Hamburg serve as major European trade ports, Haifa, Gaza and Beirut could serve as key Gulf ports from the Middle East to Europe, creating mutual economic and security benefits.

EcoPeace believes that IMEC can be transformed from an economic infrastructure project into a platform for inclusive regional cooperation that also advances security, climate resilience and peace. The “IMEC PeaceTriangle” is thus not just about infrastructure, it is also about creating conditions for peace through mutual investment and healthy interdependence.

Another flagship EcoPeace campaign has been the effort to rehabilitate the lower Jordan River, once a vital waterway that has been reduced to a polluted trickle due to conflict, overuse and sewage dumping. Progress has been slow but visible. Israeli authorities have begun allocating more freshwater to the river, and joint monitoring and restoration efforts have gained international attention. EcoPeace has framed the river not only as an ecological crisis zone, but as a shared asset that can support economic development, tourism and regional cooperation.

What sets EcoPeace apart is its ability to connect local realities with global priorities. It speaks the language of diplomacy, economic development and climate security – all while keeping its feet firmly planted in the experience of communities who depend on every drop of water.

EcoPeace's youth engagement strategy is not a side project; it is central to its vision. Through environmental education, inter-community dialogues and youth-led campaigns, the organisation is creating a new generation of environmental diplomats. These young leaders are often the first in their families to engage with peers from the "other side". They emerge from the experience with greater understanding, respect and a practical sense of what cooperation looks like on the ground. After participating in the programmes, the percentage of people who recognise the importance of regional cooperation on environmental issues jumps from 57 percent to 96 percent across all countries. In a region marked by political volatility and deep mistrust, this human infrastructure may prove just as vital as pipes and solar panels.

The work of EcoPeace demonstrates that sustainable development, when pursued collaboratively, can be a force for stability and peace. It also challenges the international community to rethink how it supports the region: not only through humanitarian aid or security measures, but by investing in shared infrastructure, long-term partnerships and grassroots cooperation.

The challenges are immense, but so is the opportunity. Water can divide – or it can unite. EcoPeace is betting on the latter.

**“THE GOAL IS
TO
CONSTRUCT A
LARGE
DESALINATION
PLANT IN GAZA
TO SERVE**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gidon Bromberg is Israel director of EcoPeace

SHARED SOCIETY

A NEW GENERATION OF BEDOUIN LEADERS BUILDING A SHARED FUTURE MENCHUA SAITOWITZ

At Desert Stars, we are building a new generation of Bedouin leaders – young people with the skills, vision and courage to shape not only the future of their own communities, but of Israeli society as a whole.

Our vision is simple yet transformative: a shared society in which every citizen, regardless of background, has the opportunity and responsibility to lead. The Negev's 320,000 Bedouin citizens – about one-third of the regional population – must not only be included in Israel's story, but be among its authors.

For too long, Bedouin communities have been on the margins: underserved by the education system, excluded from decision-making, and represented only in terms of needs or gaps. We are working to change the narrative, by investing in the leadership capacity of promising young Bedouin men and women, and preparing them to take their place as leaders and changemakers.

Desert Stars guides young people from adolescence into young adulthood, offering a developmental sequence designed to hone their leadership skills. At each stage, we provide not just services, but a clear message: You are not here to wait for change. You are here to lead it.

Our unique Youth Village and High School provides students aged between 14 and 18 with a rigorous academic foundation, social and emotional support, and intensive leadership training. Importantly, it brings together young people from diverse Bedouin backgrounds and tribal lines who would not otherwise meet, creating a microcosm of what a more inclusive society can look like.





These students are trained not only to succeed individually, but to return to their communities as catalysts for change and bridge-builders across Israeli society.

Following high school, young people aged 18 and 19 join a structured gap year programme of volunteering, civic engagement, and personal development. These programmes, which are separately tailored for young men and women, allow participants to deepen their understanding of public service and explore their role as active citizens in a democratic state. For many, it's also where they acquire Hebrew, which they unfortunately did not learn in

school.

Through our alumni programme – which caters to those aged between 20 and 30 – we support those who have participated in Desert Stars' programmes through higher education, employment and public involvement. Our goal is not simply to help individuals “succeed”, but to ensure they rise into positions where they can shape policy, discourse, and opportunity for others, while exuding the values of excellence, altruism, cross-tribal cooperation and building a truly shared society. Through scholarships, mentoring, career support and civic programming, we are nurturing a generation of leaders who feel responsible and capable of changing the Negev and the country.

Desert Stars now works with over 500 young people each year, and we are proud to witness the deep, lasting impact of our model:

First, our alumni are driving change and stepping into roles of real influence: launching grassroots initiatives, pursuing higher education in record numbers (78 percent of our alumni, vs. 14 percent in mainstream Bedouin society), and becoming role models within their communities.

Second, they are putting the vision of a shared future into practice. We invest in partnerships and dialogue between Jewish and Bedouin citizens; not through symbolic gestures, but through daily collaboration. For example, our Jewish volunteer programme brings young Jewish Israelis into our high school, where they live and work alongside Bedouin teens. These relationships foster mutual respect, language skills, and a more nuanced understanding of one another's identities. They are also a model of the kind of shared future we believe is possible: based on equality, respect and common purpose.

Third, we are working to empower women leaders. Against a backdrop where many young women face limited opportunities, our women's gap year programme is both a lifeline and a launchpad. These young women are not only advancing in their personal lives, they are also reshaping gender roles in Bedouin society.

Fourth, we seek holistic development. Many of our participants come from homes where resources – educational, financial and emotional – are scarce. We

**“WE ARE
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provide wraparound support: academic tutoring, mentoring, psychological care, and financial aid. But more than that, we offer a framework for purpose. We help young people envision themselves as public servants, changemakers, and thought leaders. This sense of meaning is a powerful engine for growth.

To those in the UK who share our hopes for Israel – a democratic, inclusive and morally courageous state – we offer an invitation and a promise.

In an era when polarisation and disillusionment dominate headlines, Desert Stars is planting seeds of connection, dignity and leadership. These seeds are already bearing fruit – in students who are choosing higher education over early arranged marriage, in alumni who are stepping into the public sphere, and in communities that are beginning to believe a different future is possible.

The promise is this: change is happening. Not abstract change, but tangible, daily, courageous action. We are building a new generation that believes there is room for all of Israel's citizens in its promise, and that true leadership means lifting others up alongside oneself.

Your partnership makes this work possible. Whether through philanthropy, storytelling, or solidarity, you help ensure that the voices of young Bedouin citizens are not just heard but heeded.

Let us build a future in which the question is not “How can we include the Bedouin?” but “What role will Bedouin citizens play in shaping the destiny we share?” At Desert Stars, we believe the answer is already unfolding. And it is beautiful.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Menucha Saitowitz is the director of development at Desert Stars

PURSUING EQUALITY AND DEMOCRACY FOR ALL ISRAEL'S CITIZENS

SHAHIRA SHALABI

The concept of democracy faces a profound challenge in today's Israel. The definition of the state as both "Jewish and democratic" creates an inherent tension in relation to its Palestinian citizens. Also referred to, especially internationally, as Arab citizens of Israel, this population, constituting over 20 percent of Israeli society, continues to experience systemic inequality across multiple domains of public and private life. The gap between democratic ideals and lived reality, raises fundamental questions about citizenship, belonging, and the future of Israeli society as a whole.

Palestinian citizens of Israel navigate a complex reality. They are often feted as a success story of Israel. Yet despite having formal citizenship, they often find themselves treated as less than full members of the state – facing barriers in housing, employment, education and public resource allocation; basically all areas of life. Arab localities receive significantly less government funding than their Jewish counterparts, resulting in inferior infrastructure and municipal services. The Arabic language, despite its prevalence, has been marginalised in public life. Political representation, while present, remains limited in its influence on core decision-making processes that affect the lives of Arab citizens.



This inequality does not exist in isolation from broader social dynamics. Public discourse frequently portrays Palestinian citizens as a demographic threat rather than equal participants in a shared society. Media coverage often reinforces negative stereotypes, while political rhetoric sometimes directly questions their loyalty or legitimacy. These narratives deepen social divisions and make the path toward genuine equality more difficult to traverse.

“PALESTINIAN
S IN ISRAEL
ARE UNITED
WITH JEWISH
ISRAELIS IN

The challenges have intensified in recent years. Political polarisation has emboldened voices that openly question the place of Palestinian citizens within Israeli society. During periods of regional conflict, suspicion and discrimination tend to escalate, placing additional pressure on intercommunal relations. The events following 7 October 2023, have highlighted these tensions, with Palestinian citizens facing increased scrutiny over expressions of empathy for civilian casualties in Gaza, which are falsely conflated with support for terrorism. Despite this, Palestinians in Israel are united with Jewish Israelis in supporting a ceasefire.

In this context, the question of what constitutes a truly shared society becomes increasingly urgent. Is it sufficient for different populations to coexist in relative peace while maintaining separate and unequal systems? Or does a genuine democracy require deeper engagement with the structural inequalities that prevent full citizenship for all?

The Abraham Initiatives has developed a comprehensive approach to addressing these challenges, based on the recognition that superficial coexistence is insufficient for building a stable, democratic society. Our work is grounded in three interconnected principles that together form the foundation for meaningful change.

First, genuine relationships between Jewish and Palestinian citizens must be cultivated through structured, meaningful interactions. Surface-level initiatives or occasional symbolic gestures cannot be a substitute for continuing engagement across community boundaries. We facilitate these connections through programmes that bring citizens together around shared interests and concerns, creating spaces where genuine dialogue can flourish.

Second, policy reform must address systemic inequalities in resource allocation and civic rights. The Abraham Initiatives conducts research to identify specific areas of discrimination, develops evidence-based policy recommendations, and advocates for their implementation at local and national levels. This work recognises that individual attitudes alone cannot overcome structural barriers to equality.

Third, shared civic leadership must become the norm rather than the exception. Palestinian citizens must be represented in decision-making positions across Israeli society – in government, business, academia and civil society. The Abraham Initiatives works to identify and nurture future leaders committed to shared society values, equipping them with the skills and networks to implement change within their communities and beyond.

This theoretical framework translates into practical programmes that demonstrate the possibility and benefits of a shared society.



In hundreds of schools across Israel, our Arabic language education programme integrates Arab teachers into Jewish schools, improving language acquisition while creating meaningful cross-cultural relationships. This initiative has reached thousands of pupils, changing attitudes at a formative age and challenging stereotypes through personal connections.

As in the UK, history and culture have led to some towns and cities being more diverse than others. In places such as Lod, Ramle and Acre – termed “mixed cities” due to the large numbers of Jewish and Palestinian citizens who live side by side – the Abraham Initiatives works with local authorities to ensure equitable services, housing rights and cultural representation. Our municipal equality index has become a reference point for measuring progress toward inclusive governance, providing data that both highlights gaps and celebrates improvements.

Safety and security concerns affect all citizens but these often manifest differently across communities. Our policing and public safety initiatives address these differences by establishing communication channels between police authorities and Arab communities. These efforts improve trust while ensuring that security measures protect rather than target Arab citizens.

Media representation significantly influences public perceptions and policy priorities. The Abraham Initiatives works to ensure fairer representation of Palestinian citizens in Israeli media and challenges discriminatory rhetoric in public discourse. By amplifying diverse voices and perspectives, this work helps reshape the narrative around shared society.

These efforts have yielded tangible results. Policy recommendations from the Abraham Initiatives have influenced government decisions, including the historic five-year economic development plan for Arab society launched in 2015 which directed billions of shekels to address gaps in infrastructure, education and employment. Educational programmes have transformed how Arabic language and culture are taught in hundreds of schools, and leadership programmes have developed a network of changemakers across sectors who implement shared society values in their professional capacities.

“ENGAGEMENT
WITH ISRAEL
SHOULD
REFLECT THE

Perhaps most importantly, we have created platforms for dialogue between communities during times of tension, helping to prevent escalation and build resilience. Through evidence-based monitoring mechanisms we have been able to track equality indicators, providing data and analysis that guide policymaking and hold institutions accountable. These concrete achievements demonstrate the effectiveness of a systematic approach to building a shared society.

For international observers, particularly those in Britain who share a commitment to democratic values, engagement with Israel should reflect the diversity of Israeli society and include partnerships with organisations working for equal citizenship. The Abraham Initiatives offers a model that addresses inequality while strengthening democratic institutions; a pragmatic approach that needs both support and amplification.

The path toward a truly shared society in Israel faces significant challenges, particularly in the current political climate. However, the practical models developed by organisations like the Abraham Initiatives demonstrate that change is possible when approached through systematic, evidence-based methods and a commitment to democratic principles. Through continued partnership with international allies who share these values, Israel can move closer to fulfilling its promise of equality and democracy for all its citizens.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shahira Shalabi is joint chief executive of The Abraham Initiatives

COLLABORATION CAN BUILD A STRONGER, HEALTHIER TOMORROW

MOHAMMAD DARAWSHE

The tragic war in Gaza is the longest and most brutal war we've ever known, and has shattered everything we've worked so hard to build – mutual responsibility, compassion, trust, and a shared society between Arabs and Jews in Israel.

But the war isn't the only force threatening the social fabric. Israel's most extreme government to date is weakening Jewish-Arab relations, inciting against civic partnership, and nurturing narratives of fear and hatred.

The Arab society in Israel is experiencing this war with deep, unbearable pain. Words fail to capture the helplessness, the despair in the face of such devastation, or the silent cry of a people bleeding without any way to stop it. Seeing the traumatic images on social media and foreign news, Arab citizens of Israel are left feeling increasingly alienated.

This is the reality in which Givat Haviva – Israel's largest civil society organisation working toward a shared Jewish-Arab future – works. Since the 1960s, our traditional path, as a home of the Hashomer Hatsair movement, has changed and we have added new goals focusing on mutual understanding and learning for Arabs and Jews. As part of the organisational update, the Institute for Arabic Studies and the Jewish-Arab Centre for Peace were established. Bringing Jews and Arabs together, by various programmes and projects, became our main tool. But – and this is important to understand – we do not operate in a vacuum.

“WE HAVE SEARCHED FOR CREATIVE WAYS TO STITCH THE



As an educational space, we offer language skills to those who never got a chance to acquire this basic knowledge. That is essential for communication between our two societies. We also offer opportunities for youngsters and adults who never had a chance to talk or play together. We know how unique and

important is our safe zone. We listen to what's happening outside of Givat Haviva, we've clung to the tools of partnership on "regular" days and throughout the war, and committed to working with Jewish and Arab children and educators who desperately need hope, healing, and a future. Because during the past couple of years there were so many more wounds, we have launched our educational programmers – bringing Jews and Arabs together – in emotionally attuned formats. We have searched for creative ways to stitch the wounds and generate dialogue from within the pain.

We have kept the doors of our international school, which offers leadership skills and excellent education to Arabs, Jews and children from all over the world, open, despite the rockets falling on Israel and the deep societal fracture. We have created safe spaces for kids to grieve, ask questions, and share their hearts. We have encouraged action – through art, sports and shared play – so they could experience the strength of partnership.

Surveys we have conducted during the war have confirmed that Jewish and Arab communities have closed off and distanced themselves from each other, avoiding the few shared spaces left in Israel. Against this backdrop, we have nurtured a healthy, thriving microcosm at Givat Haviva where partnership is not a necessity but a conscious choice. Jewish and Arab students arrive charged, angry, and hurt – but after 48 hours with children from the other society, they breathe easier. Thousands of emotionally wounded students came to us and left with friends and a smile. It's hard to express just how meaningful it is to witness this process unfold every day, and to know that not all is lost.

Our vision hasn't changed since the 1960s, when Israel lifted military rule over its Arab citizens and granted them equal rights. We took it upon ourselves to give meaning to that national partnership and promote true equality between the Jewish and Arab societies. It's no easy path – reality constantly collides with our vision – but when we're able to advance the value of partnership in the Knesset, in the media, in education, and in public life, it is immensely rewarding.

“REMINDE ISRAEL OF THE FUTURE IT HAS FORGOTTEN, FOR THE SAKE OF ITS

Even in 2025, despite this long war and despite an extreme right-wing government working to divide us, a shared society is still seen as a utopia worth imagining, and the vision that drives it still beats in many arenas. Today, it's no longer possible to claim that Israeli interests contradict the possibility of coexistence. Our societies are deeply interwoven – Jews and Arabs together build the social and economic foundations of the country, uphold the healthcare and education systems, and struggle side by side for a better life quality. After this long journey, we understand that collaboration is the key to a stronger, healthier tomorrow. In the face of continuing government incitement and division, believers in this vision insist on creating together, educating

together, and filling the void where the state has neglected its citizens.

Visitors to Givat Haviva often rub their eyes in disbelief: Jews and Arabs building deep, meaningful relationships every day, in every space, without denying their identities or narratives. Through our educational tools, mutual suspicion and fear are replaced with healthy curiosity and a desire to understand. Those elements can't be built on ignorance nor denying the pain of those living across the road.

What I describe here is not magic, but the fruit of hard, often Sisyphean labour. Israeli society was built divided, with little room for shared life. Without Givat Haviva, hundreds of thousands of Jews and Arabs would live their entire lives never meeting one another.

So I turn to you, our partners in the UK – raise your voice. Remind Israel of the future it has forgotten, for the sake of its citizens who so desperately yearn for it. The Jewish and Arab children playing basketball right now on the sunlit court at Givat Haviva are counting on us to succeed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mohammad Darawshe is director of strategy at Gavit Haviva's Centre for Shared Society

BUILDING A DEMOCRATIC AND INCLUSIVE ISRAEL

URIEL SIMONSOHN

This past year has tested the social fabric of Israeli society in ways we have not seen in a generation. Amid conflict and deepening divisions, it has become painfully clear that if we are to build a more equal, cohesive, and democratic Israel, we must invest in the people and processes that hold our society together. This is the very mission of the Haifa Laboratory for Religious Studies (HLRS), which I have had the privilege to found and lead since its inception.



HLRS stands at the intersection of academic inquiry and public engagement. Our work is guided by the conviction that religion – so often seen as a source of tension – can and must be harnessed as a vehicle for solidarity, empathy and shared responsibility. We see religious leaders, scholars and educators not merely as commentators on society but as key agents of social transformation. This approach shapes our vision of change: to weave together Israel’s religiously diverse communities into a shared society, where all groups – Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Druze and others – feel seen, heard, and empowered to create the public square together.

Our methodology is both top-down and bottom-up. It integrates rigorous research with grassroots organising, academic training with real-world application, and interreligious dialogue with structural change. In practice, this means developing long-term partnerships with municipalities, ministries, faith institutions and civil society actors – especially in Israel’s “mixed cities,” where Jewish and Arab populations live side-by-side, yet often worlds apart.

In Haifa, a city that embodies coexistence not as a slogan but as a complex daily reality, we launched our first multifaith council, an initiative that brings together rabbis, imams, priests, Druze sheikhs, educators, and civic leaders to address local challenges collaboratively. From Haifa, the model has expanded to Acre and Ramle, where HLRS now works hand-in-hand with mayors, civil servants and religious authorities to promote dialogue, mutual understanding, and educational reform.

We have also taken these efforts to the classroom. Our interfaith ambassadors master’s programme – the first of its kind in Israel – trains religious leaders in both academic study and community-based activism. The first cohort includes rabbis, pastors, imams and Druze leaders, who meet weekly to explore the intersection of religion, society and politics, and who then take this knowledge back to their congregations. They are not only learning about each other’s traditions, they are creating new frameworks of cooperation that can outlast the moments of crisis that so often drive communities apart.

“OUR WORK IS GUIDED BY THE CONVICTION THAT RELIGION CAN AND

“THE FORCES OF EXTREMISM, POLARISATION AND DESPAIR ARE REAL – BUT SO ARE THE FORCES OF

Our fellowship programme, intertwined worlds, supports early-career researchers across fields such as theology, anthropology, political science and law to critically engage with questions of interreligious life in Israel and beyond. Here, we create a space for rigorous interdisciplinary scholarship to inform social practice and vice versa. These scholars not only present their findings in academic conferences; they also walk the neighbourhoods of Haifa, meet religious leaders and build bridges between communities through engaged research.

This is also a deeply personal journey. As a historian of Islam and interreligious relations, I have long studied the complex legal, theological and social interactions between religious communities across time. Yet HLRS has taught me that scholarship must be rooted in empathy and solidarity, not only across faiths but across lived experiences. It is not

enough to study the past; we must shape the future. And that future must be built with those most affected by inequality, marginalisation and systemic exclusion.

One of our newest initiatives is led by Dr Marva Shalev Marom, a postdoctoral scholar who is developing educational models to expose high school students – Jewish, Muslim, and Christian – to Israel’s religious diversity through both textual study and experiential learning. These students will visit houses of worship, meet religious leaders and interview their own families. They will receive university credit – but, more importantly, they will receive an education in empathy, in coexistence, in the reality of the “other”. This is the generation that will inherit our society, and we are committed to equipping them with the tools to shape it wisely and compassionately.

Our work has begun to garner recognition both nationally and internationally, allowing us to build knowledge and capacity that extends beyond Israel’s borders. We are engaged in research collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh’s Centre for Governance and Markets on religious leadership in crisis management and, within Israel, we have launched a multi-disciplinary partnership with Haifa’s Al-Qasemi College focused on “authentic Islam in Israel”.



We need more allies and this is where friends in the UK come in. To those in the UK who share our values of inclusion, pluralism and equality, I say this: Israel is at a crossroads. The forces of extremism, polarisation and despair are real – but so are the forces of hope, resilience and interreligious solidarity. You have the power to amplify the latter. Whether through partnership, funding, research collaboration, or simply spreading the word, your engagement can make a difference. Not just for Israel, but for the broader global struggle to build societies where difference is not merely tolerated but cherished.

The HLRS model – rooted in academic excellence, social engagement and interfaith collaboration – can be expanded. It can be adapted to cities and contexts across the UK and beyond. We believe in mutual learning. We believe in shared futures. We believe that our work in Haifa can inspire parallel efforts elsewhere – and that your work can strengthen ours.

At HLRS, we are not naïve. We know the road ahead is long. But we also know that change is not only possible; it is happening already. In every interfaith meeting, in every high school classroom, in every research paper that bridges the gap between academy and community, we are sowing the seeds of a different Israel: one that is more equal, inclusive and just.

I invite you to join us. Let us build this future together.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Uriel Simonsohn is an associate professor at the Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Haifa, and head of the Haifa Laboratory for Religious Studies

SOCIAL JUSTICE

ISRAEL'S UNIONS ARE FIGHTING FOR ITS FUTURE

PETER LERNER

When I hung up my uniform after 25 years in the Israel Defence Forces, I thought I was stepping away from the frontlines. What I didn't expect was that the most decisive battles for Israel's future would not be fought with tanks or drones but with collective bargaining agreements, strike actions, and union organising.

As an IDF spokesperson, I spent decades explaining and defending Israel's most painful and complex moments to the world. Today, I find myself in a different kind of struggle, no less vital, at the heart of Israel's democratic, economic and social fabric.

I now serve as the international face of the Histadrut, engaging on behalf of Israel's workers in the name of Israel's largest and most influential trade union federation. And if you're looking for real hope for a more equal, inclusive, and democratic Israel, this is where you'll find it.

The question that keeps me up at night is this: Can Israel remain a democracy if millions of people feel abandoned by the state, shut out of opportunity and powerless at work?



In the army, we talked about deterrence and resilience. In the workplace, we talk about fairness and solidarity. But in the end, we're wrestling with the same problem: how to hold a society together when it's being pulled apart by fear, inequality and division.

That's where the Histadrut comes in.

Yes, we are a trade union. But we are also a civic movement. A national platform for economic justice. A source of social cohesion across ethnic, religious and

political lines.

In 2023, when Israel's judicial overhaul crisis sparked one of the largest protest movements in the nation's history, the Histadrut called a general strike – not for higher wages or better benefits, but to defend democracy itself. Because we understand a simple truth: weaken the courts today, and you weaken workers' rights tomorrow.

In 2024, we called a general strike again to help the government recalibrate its priorities, bring the hostages home and end the war. The general strike in Israel, not utilised for over 15 years, is a tool in the Histadrut toolbox reserved for unique and dire circumstances.

Outside of Israel, many still associate the Histadrut with its early roots, socialism, kibbutzim, and Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion. But the modern Histadrut is something else entirely. It's digital, dynamic and deeply diverse. We represent around 26 percent of the workforce, that's just above the UK, and it's nearly a million workers from every corner of Israeli society: Jewish and Arab, secular and religious, urban and rural, high-tech and transport.

We've organised both young freelancers and veteran bus drivers. We've negotiated pay raises for nurses and launched union drives in call centers and insurance firms. Our work isn't driven by ideology, it's driven by dignity.

Take, for example, our historic agreement with Egged, Israel's largest public transport cooperative. For the first time, workers will receive a share of company profits 50m NIS (£10.45m) over four years. That's not just a wage boost. That's economic democracy in action.

Through collective bargaining in sectors like construction and hospitality, we've raised conditions for both Jewish and Arab workers. In the public services, we've reversed long-standing neglect of professionals like psychologists. Across the board, we're building structures that give working people voice and agency.

And then came 7 October. While the world saw rockets, terror, and military mobilisation, inside Israel something else unfolded: solidarity. Twelve percent of the workforce disappeared overnight, 300,000 reservists were called up, and 100,000 Palestinians were banned from working in Israel.

As reservists were called up, the Histadrut moved quickly to protect their rights, fighting to secure their jobs, pay and benefits. We opened emergency response centres for workers displaced from the south and north. We launched aid operations, legal support, and financial protections for those who suddenly found themselves without homes, incomes or stability.

It's easy to talk about "resilience" in military terms. It's harder, but equally essential, to deliver it in the civilian sphere. And that's what we do. Because solidarity isn't just a wartime slogan, it's our daily mission.

What surprises many is that the Histadrut may now be Israel's most effective platform for shared society.

While political discourse grows toxic, we bring Jewish and Arab workers together around the bargaining table. We employ Arabic-speaking organisers. We foster mixed communities in the workplace, sports fields, and educational programmes. Why? Because economic justice builds trust and trust is a security asset, too.

Now, if you're reading this from London, Manchester, or Glasgow and asking, "Why should I care?", here's the blunt truth: If we lose Israel's democratic centre, we all lose something greater. We lose the vision of a Middle East where coexistence means more than ceasefires, it means shared prosperity. We lose the chance for a liberal, inclusive Israel built on common ground. And we lose a global model of pragmatic trade unionism, one that transcends identity politics to build real power from the ground up.

**“WHILE THE
WORLD SAW
ROCKETS,
TERROR AND
MILITARY
MOBILISATION,**

I know the global left is divided on Israel. The occupation continues. Peace feels far away. And 7 October revealed not only our pain but the world's disturbing silence in response to it. So here's my message to our friends in the UK labour movement: don't turn away. Lean in. Not toward Israel's extremes, but toward its builders. Not to the headlines but to the hard, hopeful work being done to repair what's broken.

Because that's what real solidarity means. This isn't your grandfather's Histadrut. Today's Histadrut is modern, inclusive, and prepared for the future. We know that rights without power are paper-thin. That inclusion without infrastructure is a photo op. And that hope without organisation is just noise.

After years of briefing the world on Israel's wars, I didn't expect to feel just as proud representing the frontline workers in daycare centres, factories, hospitals and schools. But I do. Because this – the bargaining table, the union hall, the shared struggle for dignity – is where Israel's future is being decided.

And we're building that future, one worker at a time.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lt. Col. (R) Peter Lerner is director general for international relations at the Histadrut

JUSTICE FOR ATROCITIES MUST MATTER

Yael Vias Gvirzman

As Robert Jackson, the chief US prosecutor, reminded the world at Nuremberg: "Civilisation cannot tolerate [these acts] being ignored, because it cannot survive their being repeated."

The trials at Nuremberg and, later, the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, stand as defining moments in modern legal and moral history. They weren't just about punishment – they were about truth. About ensuring the world could not turn away from atrocities. These trials gave voice to victims and established a vital principle: that law must rise above vengeance, and that atrocities must not go unaddressed.



Today, we must ask: Does justice still matter? Many people ask me with disbelief: “Can justice actually occur? Is an armed response or military force not the only way to secure redress?”

Appallingly, as we marked 30 years since the Srebrenica genocide this summer, a former attorney from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) reflected that in the five decades between Nuremberg and Yugoslavia, there was little expectation for accountability. Since the ICTY, the expectation has shifted – there is now a demand for justice, and a commitment to securing it. Fact-finding missions collect and preserve evidence before courts exist. Legal teams begin long before tribunals are seated.

As an international criminal lawyer with over 20 years of experience litigating atrocities in Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Ukraine, Darfur, Ivory Coast and more – and as the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors – I say yes to the sceptics, unreservedly. Justice is not a luxury. It is what makes freedom durable. It is what separates civilisation from chaos. And it is the only path we have when faced with horror – be it in Ukraine, Syria, Israel or Gaza.

“JUSTICE IS NOT WISHFUL THINKING – IT MUST BE

We are now witnessing a painful moment in our shared global history. The 7 October 2023 attacks by Hamas were not just acts of terror. They were systematic, sadistic atrocities carried out with clear intent: to destroy life and dignity. And yet, the attack continues. Forty-eight hostages remain in Gaza. Their captivity is a choice – a continued, conscious crime that unfolds by the hour.

At the same time, Israeli society is being internally fractured; fighting to preserve Jewish values, to which the sanctity of life and human dignity are key; as the saying goes: “Where there are no Men, be a man, a mensch.”

As defenders of rule-based order, and as human beings, silence is not an option. A call for action is not enough. Action is the only acceptable response.

In the immediate aftermath of 7 October, I founded October 7: Justice Without Borders, a public interest, Israel-based, not-for-profit, pro bono law firm focused exclusively on victim and survivor justice and the accountability of perpetrators and accomplices. Action began within hours of the attack, responding to calls from survivors displaced and families of the missing – there were over 330,000 internally displaced and 3,000 missing as a direct result of the attack – with action being undertaken for the long road toward authoritative judicial recognition, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition – in The Hague, Germany, France, Israel, the US, Geneva or elsewhere.

O7J is devoted to global, strategic impact litigation to end impunity on behalf of the 7 October victims and survivors. Our expertise is rooted in over 20 years of experience in international criminal law and in seeking accountability for atrocities committed worldwide. We begin with facts, then legal classification and then response. Our action is directly led and recognised by war crimes prosecutors and UN human rights mechanisms in at least five different jurisdictions. Justice is not wishful thinking – it must be rigorous, deliberate and principled.



The harm of 7 October is threefold:

First, the attack itself. This was a large-scale, systematic assault involving extermination, murder, rape, hostage-taking, torture, wanton destruction, and the erasure of entire communities. Disturbing features included: attackers reportedly armed with drugs to disinhibit their worst impulses; modified weapons, like rocket-propelled grenades weighted to cause greater suffering; the use of highly flammable materials to ensure destruction; and the live dissemination of atrocities: executions, mutilations and kidnappings broadcast via social media.

The body of Shani Louk, who we have the life privilege to represent, being paraded lifeless on a truck, became an emblem of these horrors. Her family learned her fate through Telegram videos; only later were they told she had been murdered in Israel.

Second, denial. Victims who lost everything – their lives, loved ones, homes and communities – are now being denied truth and recognition. In some circles, the atrocities are being justified or contextualised – as if mass murder could be mitigated by political analysis. Such denial deepens trauma and robs survivors of dignity.

Third, the grotesque violation of privacy and memory. The horror was not only committed, it was made public. Families were forced to witness their loved ones’ final moments. Sexual violence extended to forced nudity, desecration of the dead, and public humiliation. Denial forces survivors into an impossible position: to prove the truth of their suffering without further violating the memory of their dead. The tension between the personal and the collective; the private lives of survivors and their recovery, and national recovery are interdependent, as well as, conflicted; a dynamic that remains overlooked. At times, a survivor is faced with the cruel dilemma of wishing to internalise and process, or to bear witness vocally. The judicial process allows individuals to testify, while protecting the victim at their pace, away from the cameras.

One woman we represent lost both her 80-year-old mother and her 12-year-old daughter – slaughtered together. In her mother’s burnt-out home, still uninhabitable, she told us: “There was no mercy that day.”

This trauma will not fade in a generation. Our generation demands the October Trials.

Yet impunity endures: Hamas remains armed and the hostages remain captive. The international response? Often muted, constrained by politics. This is not due to a lack of legal mechanisms. It is fear. Paralysis disguised as neutrality. An erosion of moral clarity.

Justice cannot be selective. Civilians in Gaza are suffering deeply – since March 2025, access to basic needs has collapsed. Women and children suffer terribly. Their protection matters.

Extremist calls within the Israeli government since May 2025 to cleanse Gaza ethnically and resettle it have further strained domestic tensions within Israel. Up until then, a coalition of the reasonable, which included the opposition parties, effectively silenced and barred extremists from participating in the government’s war cabinet.

But these shocking voices have now become redundant following the announcement of President Trump’s 20-step proposal, backed by Arab and western nations, which is committed to Palestinians rebuilding Gaza under the temporary governance of a multinational force. It also demands all terrorist groups in Gaza disarm, a process of “de-Hamasification” and the renunciation of violence. Will Hamas agree to lose its power over the fate of 2.5 million civilians, or will it be forced to do so?

Within Israel, the reality is that, since the 7 October attacks, the nation has been fighting back – to eradicate jihadist, nihilist enemies who launched a full-fledged, multi-front war aimed at erasing us from the map. This attack targets every Jewish community worldwide and threatens every rule-based democracy. All this, while the hostages’ lives are hanging by a thread. Hamas called it “the Al Aqsa flood” but, as the scriptures teach us, love is stronger. “מים רבים לא יכבו את האהבה” (“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it” Song of Solomon 8.)

“WE MUST
HOLD MORAL
COMPASSION
WITHOUT
EQUIVOCATIO
N AND HOLD

We must hold moral complexity without equivocation and hold on to our values based on love and compassion.

The same moral clarity must apply to the atrocities committed earlier this summer in Syria, where over 3,000 Druze civilians were reportedly massacred and 80 women abducted. There are reasonable grounds to believe these were perpetrated by Syrian government forces and/or their proxies. These allegations against the Syrian government, which is strong backed by President Erdogan's Turkey, must be urgently investigated. If these crimes are not named and prosecuted, we risk repeating the mistakes of the past.

If we fail to name atrocities – whether they occur in Nir Oz, Kyiv or Sweida – we dismantle the very foundation of justice, a foundation of an enlightened society. Justice is not vengeance. It is restoration. It is truth-telling. It is, at its core, the moral infrastructure of democracy. In her call to bring the remaining hostages home, Rachel Goldberg-Polin, the mother of murdered hostage Hersh Goldberg-Polin, said with piercing clarity: “This is your WHY, Israel.” That refusal to let terror define identity is something we all must support.

Our response to atrocity must be law, not lethargy. Principle, not paralysis. I call on democratic governments, including here in the UK, to support initiatives like October 7: Justice Without Borders. To strengthen international accountability. To recognise the distinct horror of 7 October. To draw universal red lines. And to demand justice for all victims, everywhere.

Justice is not weakness. It is our shared strength. And it is our duty. Now – more than ever.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yael Vias Gvirsman is founder of October 7: Justice Without Borders. She is an expert in international criminal and humanitarian law, with a vast experience of 20 years in litigation and representing victims of crimes against humanity around the world

EMBRACING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND COMMON VALUES

MEHERETA BARUCH



I believe that the cornerstone of any liberal society is the principle of equality among all human beings. This belief is not abstract for me: it emerges from my personal biography – as a woman, a Jew, a Black person and an immigrant. Each of these identities represents a group that has historically been – and continues to be – subject to systemic discrimination in most societies. For this reason, I place the struggle for equality at the very heart of my personal and political agenda.

However, equality is a complex and multifaceted concept, especially in the context of immigration. At the age of 10, I arrived in Israel after a long and dangerous journey from Ethiopia on foot and a prolonged stay in a refugee camp in Sudan. Landing in a modern, democratic and liberal country created a profound clash between the world I came from and the values of the society I had entered. It took me years to understand that embracing liberal values – some of which directly contradicted those I had previously known – did not require erasing my past, but rather processing it, confronting it, and reconnecting with it from a mature and conscious place.

Over the years, and particularly during my tenure as deputy mayor of Tel Aviv–Jaffa, I became deeply aware of the challenges involved in integrating immigrants from non-liberal societies. These communities are often shaped by conservative or even anti-democratic religious frameworks, and they frequently struggle when confronted with the liberal values of their host countries. In many cases, integration does not occur at all. Instead, there is replication: the immigrant attempts to recreate the very culture from which they fled, sometimes exerting pressure on their surroundings, including community members, institutions, and society at large.

I see this phenomenon as a real and growing threat to the stability of democratic societies. When immigrants do not undergo a process of integration – one that does not forget the past but also does not idealise it – they tend to cling blindly to what is familiar. The sense of losing your identity can often lead to a nostalgic return to values and structures that were sometimes the source of their original suffering, and which are now reintroduced into a society attempting to offer an alternative.

The balance between preserving one's roots and adopting new values is difficult but essential. I myself would not have been able to fully embrace the liberal values that guide me today – the belief in equality, freedom, gender and religious pluralism – had I not remained connected to the traditions from which I came. It was through deep engagement with my own origins that I was able to choose a different path; one that also did not erase who I am.

Today, after building a mixed family with a native-born Israeli partner of European background, and after years of public service, I am convinced that successful integration requires a clear and deliberate policy:

one that does not compromise its core values, but also does not demand that immigrants erase their past. Only a thoughtful and conscious connection between past and present can lead to shared and sustainable citizenship.

Liberalism is not self-evident – not even for immigrants to whom it offered protection and refuge. That is precisely why it must be protected not only from external threats but from challenges within as well: through education, cultural engagement, and the cultivation of a complex but honest dialogue. Only in this way can we prevent a widening cultural rift between local societies and immigrant groups who struggle to integrate, and instead build a truly equitable society: one that embraces diversity while uniting around common values.

In my view, and this is the focus of much of my work, strengthening immigrants' sense of identity and connection to their roots is a fundamental and necessary step in building their psychological resilience. Only with that resilience can they truly engage with, and adopt the liberal values of, the democratic societies of which they are becoming members.

I work toward this goal through lectures and workshops that I lead in schools, organisations and companies, as well as through a dedicated unit within the Israel police. This unit was established to improve the relationship between law enforcement and the Ethiopian-Israeli community. Although immigrant absorption is a core ideological goal of the State of Israel – perhaps more so than in many other countries – there are still significant tensions and difficulties, particularly when it comes to embracing liberal worldviews among second- and third-generation immigrant communities.

The protection of a democratic-liberal society demands from us, as individuals and as a society, an uncompromising commitment to action. We must strengthen educational institutions to instil the principles of liberalism and pluralism from a young age, encourage critical and fact-based discourse, and consistently expose attempts to delegitimise minority groups or basic democratic principles. Furthermore, we must support civil society organisations working to strengthen human rights, governmental transparency, and the rule of law, and take an active part in elections and public discourse. Only through active civic engagement, without fear of confronting the challenges of the hour, can we ensure the resilience and future of liberal democracy.

“STRENGTHENING
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meherata Baruch served as deputy mayor of Tel Aviv. A former member of Meretz and the Israeli Labor party, she is now a member of The Democrats and is standing for the Knesset at the next general election

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

TAKING UP ARMS FOR ISRAELI DEMOCRACY LIAT WEISS SHAHAF

In a time of profound uncertainty, Brothers and Sisters in Arms has emerged as one of the most visible and determined forces working to protect Israel's democratic foundations. Born following the government's proposed judicial overhaul in early 2023, which would have endangered judicial independence and the rule of law, we are a nonpartisan, grassroots movement comprising Israeli army reservists, professionals, activists and everyday citizens who believe that Israel must remain both Jewish and democratic, and that these two pillars must stand together, not in opposition.

We are driven by the vision of an Israel where democracy is not just a form of governance but a shared and inclusive national identity. We believe in the values outlined in Israel's Declaration of Independence: liberty, justice and peace, with equal rights for all citizens, regardless of religion, ethnicity or gender. These values are the foundation not only of a functioning democracy but also of a resilient and secure society.

Since we were founded, Brothers and Sisters in Arms has become the leading civic operator of the democratic camp in Israel. We operate along four main strategic axes, each aimed at strengthening democratic norms and building civic infrastructure capable of resisting authoritarian erosion:

“WE BELIEVE
IN THE VALUES
OUTLINED IN
ISRAEL'S
DECLARATION
OF
INDEPENDENCE

First, community engagement. We aim to establish a national grassroots infrastructure that reaches all citizens, not just to educate but to create a movement where every citizen becomes an active participant in the democratic process. By instilling the values of freedom, equality and participation, our network will help forge a more inclusive, enlightened and engaged society. The strategy to bridge this awareness gap involves interactive, community-based education that engages citizens in activism and action under shared values and the practical implications of democracy in their lives. This grassroots-level education aims to transform people from passive observers into informed, active participants in the democratic process, making the concept of democracy a palpable and indispensable part of their social and political landscape.

Second, work on the legislative and parliamentary frontline. Our legal and parliamentary teams work to monitor and counter legislative threats to Israeli democracy. We are present in Knesset committee meetings to track proposed bills that could harm minority representation, civil liberties, or the independence of the judiciary. We file petitions to the supreme court, draft alternative legislation, and provide legal counsel to our organisation and its partners. We also defend our movement against smear campaigns and threats to freedom of expression, helping ensure that civil society remains protected in both the judicial and public spheres.



Third, media and narrative strategy. We are harnessing the power of digital platforms and mass media to create and share content that highlights the importance of unity and critical thinking. By producing engaging digital content, we aim to captivate and educate a wide audience, maintaining their attention through strategic mass advertisements that amplify our unifying message. Furthermore, we will actively monitor and expose any malicious content that aims to mislead the public, sow discord, or undermine democratic values.

Finally, civic education and leadership development. Democracy is not self-sustaining. It requires citizens who understand its principles and are prepared to defend them. That is why we run educational programmes in gap-year academies, universities and local communities. Through workshops, lectures and grassroots dialogue, we empower young Israelis to become civic leaders. Our programmes reach students across the country and across the political spectrum, instilling democratic values and building long-term resilience against extremist ideologies.

In just two years, we have demonstrated our capacity for rapid mobilisation and national coordination. During the mass protests against the proposed judicial coup of 2023, for nine months, we drove hundreds of thousands of Israelis onto the streets to fight for democracy in Israel week in, week out. We built a nationwide force of supporters and the infrastructure to match, that successfully managed to slow the momentum. We put upholding equal rights for all Israelis firmly on the national agenda. And we halted the proposed judicial coup ... for a while, at least.

In the aftermath of 7 October, we set aside an internal battle for an external one, pivoting in a matter of hours into a support infrastructure and assisting thousands of civilians and troops. We rescued over 12,000 civilians from communities under fire, distributed 500 tons of equipment, provided over half a million meals to evacuees, and found temporary homes for 12,000 families.

Our legal efforts have successfully delayed or blocked harmful legislation, and our field presence has deterred many attempts to advance anti-democratic laws. Our media campaigns have reached tens of millions of Israelis, changed the public discourse and provided clarity in a sea of noise. We work to replace fear and division with facts, hope and shared purpose.

We also believe that rebuilding is as vital as protecting. Through our Rebuilding Hope project, we've united thousands of volunteers and donors to restore shattered communities, such as Kibbutz Kfar Aza, the scene of horrific events on 7 October, and help displaced families in the north return home. By coming together to give, to help and to take responsibility, Israelis from all backgrounds are not only repairing what was destroyed, they're stitching back together the very fabric of our society. This is what national renewal looks like: collective action driven by solidarity and hope.

Following the outbreak of the war with Iran, we mobilised rapidly to meet urgent needs on the ground, focusing on those most at risk. In close partnership with local authorities, we supported communities that lack access to proper protection, particularly the elderly, low-income families and children. From upgrading public bomb shelters with essential supplies to converting city parking garages into safe communal spaces, we are turning fear into preparedness. Our fast response reflects our deep commitment to stand with every Israeli in their time of need. These efforts took place in central, northern, and southern cities with a high population density, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Our mission is a big and bold one. It is also crucial to the future of the Jewish state as a resilient democracy. As military veterans, we know that despair is not a viable option. As men and women who have faced war, our strategy is rooted in a profound understanding of the core issues facing Israel today.

We understand the scale of the challenge. Preserving democracy is not just about opposing harmful laws or reacting to crises. It is about building systems and a culture that make democracy resilient from within. That is why we focus not only on defence but on construction – forging the future leaders, communities and public discourse Israel needs.

We strongly believe that the civil society is the most powerful force for change, and we will continue our fight until a government that truly represents the will of the Israeli people—who are ready to rebuild and heal the country—is elected.

Since our founding, we have stood to protect the State of Israel. We did so on 7 October, and we continue to do so today – with an unwavering commitment and deep love for our country.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Liat Weiss Shahaf is head of external relations at Brothers and Sisters In Arms

DON'T GIVE UP HOPE

ORI KOL

Last October, Eran Nissan and his wife, Shir, were in the supermarket when they heard gunfire. Eran, who leads Mehazkim, called the police and stepped outside. In a nearby shop, he saw a young girl lying on the floor with a gunshot wound. He quickly realised this wasn't just another local crime. Trained as a volunteer medic and ambulance driver, he quickly helped carry her to safety and treated her injuries until emergency services arrived.

Later that evening, a photo Shir had taken of Eran, his shirt stained with blood, went viral. Soon after, he was inundated with requests to speak on the news. "Jaffa is a place where Jews and Arabs live together, sometimes feel fear together, and take shelter from rocket fire together," he told a panel of visibly stunned anchors on Channel 12 news. "In the ambulances, and in the hospital where the victims are now being treated, Arabs and Jews work and volunteer side by side to save lives," he added, speaking from experience. "All of us know there are those who want us to hate and fear one another. But the real struggle isn't Jews versus Arabs. It's Jews and Arabs who believe in a shared future, against those, Jewish and Arab, who believe in violence and in a place where there's room for only one people."

Eran's speech went viral almost instantly, helped along by the fact that he appeared on television wearing a "FCK BNGVR" shirt, a clear jab at the far-right national security minister Itamar Ben Gvir. Over the past two years, Mehazkim has produced and distributed thousands of these shirts.



Mehazkim was founded in 2016, just as social media began playing a more influential role in Israeli politics. Since then, it has grown into the country's leading progressive, digitally focused, movement. Built around a big-tent vision that includes Jews, Palestinians, progressives, activists and concerned citizens, Mehazkim runs campaigns, mobilises communities, and reaches more than 1.5 million Israelis each month with its content, all organically. Combining on-the-ground protest with digital strategy, Mehazkim works to strengthen the pro-democracy base in Israel. Its model aims to energise the progressive camp and, from that position of strength, persuade more mainstream audiences to connect the dots and imagine a different political future.

Mehazkim has collaborated with dozens of groups, organisations and protest movements to improve their digital communication and organising efforts. It has partnered with the Israeli Women's Protest, anti-occupation groups such as Peace Now and Breaking the Silence and with pro-democracy protests during the Netanyahu government's attempted "judicial coup". It also supports and empowers individual activists and local groups to lead their own campaigns, providing infrastructure for civil society, while delivering expertise, mentoring, workshops and training.

Our message to Britons who still believe in the possibility of peace in Israel and Palestine is simple: don't give up hope. Don't stop engaging with, and supporting, those in the region who are fighting for a shared future. Believe in the possibility of change, and in reason overcoming sectarian hatred. In Hebrew, "Mehazkim" literally means "to strengthen". We believe that, only with outside support, from Jews and non-Jews alike, can Israel's progressive camp help lead the region towards a more peaceful future. We call on you to help us fortify our voices, amplify our messages, and stand alongside us against those radical forces that seek only destruction. We call on you not to cower in the face of those extremists, such as in the current Israeli government, who falsely label any criticism of the Netanyahu government as "antisemitism". And we call you on you to join us, and stand with the millions of Israelis and Palestinians who have hope for a better future.

Mehazkim amplifies the voices of activists and campaigners across all major social media platforms. We have over 70,000 people in our WhatsApp groups and broadcast lists, more than 50,000 on our mailing list, 140,000 followers on Facebook, a monthly reach of over 350,000 on Instagram, and more than 15,000 followers on TikTok.

During the war, Mehazkim has been spearheading protests calling for the release of the hostages and opposing the messianic far-right's plans for mass deportation and resettlement in Gaza. Together with the hostages' families, we have organised thousands to demonstrate in support of ending the war. In the face of rising death and hatred across the region, Mehazkim has worked to uphold the moral lesson of our history: that only peace can guarantee real security, for both Israelis and Palestinians.

We have been at the forefront of challenging the think tank network behind the "judicial coup" plan in Israel, a campaign aimed at dismantling the Israeli state from within. One key player behind the planned overhaul, the right-wing, free-market Kohelet Policy Forum, which has links to settler groups, was the focus of a sustained and highly effective campaign by Mehazkim and its partners launched even before their plans were made public. This helped put the largest protest movement in Israel's history in the most effective political context.

We have campaigned heavily for Jewish-Arab partnership in resisting the occupation and opposing extremist government policies aimed at fuelling religious conflict. We've placed both Israeli and Palestinian flags across the country and fought back against government-backed voter suppression efforts. And we have consistently pushed for diplomacy and agreements with the Palestinian Authority, even when politicians from our own camp chose to sideline the issue.

We call on all supporters of a liberal Israel in the UK to join us in the fight for a fair and free future in the region, with peace and equality for all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ori Kol is the founder of Mehazkim

GENDER & SEXUAL EQUALITY

A JUST, DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY REQUIRES GENDER EQUALITY

TAL HOCHMAN

Last April, several months after the outbreak of the war with Hamas, Iran launched its first rocket attack on Israel. Panic spread across the country, and the government decided to shut down all educational institutions. But then, at 1 in the morning and just a few hours before the school day was set to begin, it reversed its decision.

As in many parts of the world, women in Israel are still the primary caregivers. Many of the women reading this will understand the chaos that such a last-minute change can cause. If your government suddenly shut down schools, you would scramble to find a babysitter, take time off work, or adjust your plans. When that decision is reversed in the middle of the night, there's no time to undo the arrangements already made. Money is lost, time is wasted, and effort goes down the drain.

This seemingly small case is an everyday example reflecting a much deeper issue: the absence of women in decision-making roles.

**“ONLY 25
PERCENT OF
THE MEMBERS
OF THE**

Only 25 percent of the members of the current Knesset are women, and many of them hold weak political positions, often placed low on their party lists. Out of 33 government ministers, just five are women. Of those, only one holds a high-impact portfolio – the Ministry of Transportation – while the others have been placed in low-budget roles or newly created ministries.

And here's another telling detail: out of 29 chief executive positions in government departments, there are no women.

This is our reality and this is exactly why the Israel Women's Network exists. As one of Israel's leading women's rights organisations, we've been advocating for gender equality for over 40 years. Our mission is to build a more just Israeli society by creating the social, economic, legal, and physical conditions for women to thrive. Over the past decades, we've led landmark efforts to increase female representation on public company boards; open new roles for women in the IDF; pass legislation to combat sexual

harassment; expand the legal interpretation of equal pay laws; and strengthen employment protections for female workers.

In the face of this unacceptable situation, we led, together with Na'amat and Forum Dvora, a petition to the supreme court demanding action. In a historic victory for gender equality, the court ruled in February that the government must fulfill its legal obligation to appoint women to senior roles in the civil service, including senior “loyalty positions” (political appointees made by ministers). The ruling recognised the systemic failure to ensure adequate female representation in leadership and ordered the government to establish a mechanism for compliance within six months.

While this is a crucial step towards dismantling the exclusionary “old boys’ club” and ensuring women have a seat at the table where decisions are made, there is still a long road ahead. The real challenge lies in ensuring that this ruling is upheld by the current administration.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that not all women’s voices are currently being heard. Two major political parties, the ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) parties, prohibit female representation altogether. As a result, Haredi women remain entirely unrepresented in the political system at the national level.



This is precisely where we step in. Our well-established hotlines include a dedicated line for Haredi women, offering support, information, and guidance to help them exercise their rights. Remarkably, 40 percent of the calls we receive come from Haredi women seeking legal advice. As one of the most marginalised groups in Israeli society, strengthening their ability to demand their rights in the workplace is a core part of our mission.

Through these calls, we identify recurring challenges and collect data that allows us to understand the broader issues affecting this community. This insight guides our advocacy efforts, both in the Knesset and in the courts. Just recently, we represented a class action on behalf of 2,200 Haredi women who worked in a kindergarten chain and were denied their employment and social rights for years. The petition resulted in a 7.5m NIS (£1.57) settlement in their favor.

Since the war began in October 2023, the lack of women in decision-making roles has seen not only Haredi women’s needs gone unheard, but also those of women directly affected by the conflict. In response, we opened a new hotline, similar to our dedicated line for Haredi women,

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specifically for women impacted by the war: reservists, spouses of reservists, displaced women, and others.

In just the first few months, we received around 1,500 calls. These calls revealed serious policy gaps, and thanks to this direct channel, we've been able to advocate for changes to laws and governmental benefits that had overlooked or harmed women's rights. Currently, we are working to amend regulations that deny benefits to ex-wives of reservists, even when they are the primary caregivers for their children. These changes are essential to ensuring women are not left behind during times of national crisis.

Another major step we took toward amplifying women's voices was the establishment of our international department. As the war unfolded, we felt that Israeli women were not being heard on the global stage. Our voices were often represented by politicians and diplomats who, in many cases, used the trauma of the sexual violence perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October for public diplomacy purposes - "Hasbara" - rather than focusing on justice for the victims.

Despite international conversations about the rape and horrific sexual assaults committed on that day, there have been no official investigations or reports issued by the Israeli government. Nor have international organisations been granted access to investigate or assist in the recognition and justice process for the survivors.

Recognising this void, we understood that women had to be our own voice in this critical arena. That's why we established an international department to advocate for both a wide-ranging national investigation that will lead to indictments that include the sexual atrocities and an international protocol that standardises how states respond to sexual violence used as a weapon of war. To strengthen this effort, we've partnered with global allies and organisations. Together, we are calling for accountability. Without justice, this horrific war crime is legitimised.

A central mission of this department is also to build connections with feminist and human rights organisations around the world: to collaborate, share strategies, and learn from each other's experiences. As we face a global backlash against women's rights, threatening to undo decades of progress, these alliances are more important than ever.

We are committed to resisting this pushback, both within Israel and on the international stage. That's why we were proud to be the Israeli women's rights organisation leading on this issue and participating at the recent UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York, where this issue was a central theme. We also hosted a dedicated event on the importance of including women in peacebuilding processes and at decision-making tables during conflict and resolution efforts.

At the IWN, we believe that a truly democratic and just society cannot exist without full gender equality. Whether in government offices, on the battlefield, in courtrooms, or around the negotiating table, women's voices must be heard, and their rights must be protected. In a time of deep crisis and uncertainty, we remain committed to ensuring that women in Israel have the freedom to be whoever they wish without any restrictions based on gender. We invite our allies around the world to stand with us in these current challenging times - not just for Israeli women, but for women worldwide.

**“AS THE WAR
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WOMEN WERE**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tal Hochman is the executive director of the Israel Women's Network

LGBTQ+ YOUTH ARE AT THE HEART OF DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL IN ISRAEL

YONI AVITAN

I often say that the story of IGY is the story of believing that change can – and must – begin from the margins.

When Israel Gay Youth (IGY) was founded more than 20 years ago, it wasn't designed as an institution or a service provider. It was born as a lifeline. A handful of young LGBTQ+ people – many of them isolated, closeted and afraid – finally had somewhere to go. A space where they didn't need to justify who they were. A room where being different didn't mean being alone. In



the early 2000s, LGBTQ+ youth in Israel were almost entirely absent from the public conversation. Schools maintained silence, families often responded with shame, and broader society treated queer adolescence as either a threat or an impossibility. IGY emerged as a radical alternative – built by youth, for youth, on the belief that visibility is power, and that young queer people are not a problem to be solved but a force for change.

Since then, IGY has grown into a nationwide movement. We operate in more than 50 cities, towns and local councils across Israel. Every year, thousands of LGBTQ+ teens – from every ethnic, religious and geographic background – walk through our doors. They come from Eilat and Kiryat Shmona, from Jewish and Arab communities, from religious households and secular ones, from the heart of Tel Aviv and from its distant peripheries. And yet, despite our expansion, our core belief remains the same: that democratic renewal begins where young people feel safe, heard, and equipped to shape their lives and communities.

At IGY, we don't ask young people to adapt to the world as it is. We invite them to imagine – and build – the world as it should be. Our programmes are designed not just to support, but to transform. Each weekly group session, each dialogue circle, each leadership seminar is a small act of civic education. We teach not only confidence and pride, but how to live alongside difference. We nurture the understanding that identity is not a barrier to solidarity, but a bridge between people with radically different life experiences. We work to ensure that LGBTQ+ youth learn to speak up, to listen deeply, and to take responsibility for the shared spaces they inhabit.

This is our theory of change: that democracy is not only defended through laws or elections, but through relationships: through the quiet, persistent work of showing young people that their stories matter, that

their voices count, and that they belong. When youth are met with dignity and recognition – especially in a society as divided and anxious as ours – they begin to act not only for themselves, but for others. And that is how social transformation begins.

Our commitment to youth stems from a deep understanding of how identity is formed. Adolescence is when the stories we tell about ourselves take root. If those stories are shaped by shame, erasure or rejection, the consequences last a lifetime. But if young people are welcomed into communities that affirm who they are –without conditions – they begin to write new narratives; narratives of courage, agency and belonging. In this sense, IGY is not simply about LGBTQ+ rights. It is about creating a new model of citizenship: one grounded in empathy, equity and inclusion.

This work is increasingly urgent. Over the past year, the political climate in Israel has grown more volatile. We are witnessing coordinated attacks on the judiciary, civil society, academic freedom and minority rights. The LGBTQ+ community has become a visible target – vilified in parliament, silenced in curricula, and treated by some as a threat to the so-called traditional order. But this is not only an attack on one community. It is an assault on the very idea of pluralism.

In such a moment, our work takes on new meaning. Every time we open a new group in an underserved town, or train a new cohort of youth leaders, or connect a transgender teen with resources they were previously denied, we are not only offering support – we are building an infrastructure for resilience. We are modelling a society where dignity is non-negotiable and where coexistence is not a slogan but a lived practice.

These moments happen daily. A 17-year-old from a religious background finds the courage to attend a group meeting in Jerusalem, and for the first time in his life, hears the words “you’re not alone.” A young Arab woman from the Galilee joins a leadership programme and decides to start a local LGBTQ+ youth group in her town. A transgender teen from the south, recently pushed out of her home, finds safety, mentorship, and the beginning of a new path. These stories are not isolated: they are part of the deep, steady work of building a democratic culture from the bottom up.

Our newest initiative, Marsha College, offers vocational training to young transgender adults – especially those from vulnerable communities – who are often shut out of the workforce. Through practical, dignified education in fields like culinary arts, design and bookkeeping, we are creating new routes toward economic independence.

And yet, we know we cannot do this alone. Social change is never the work of one

organisation. It requires alliances – across sectors, borders and generations. That is why we are so grateful for this platform. We believe that our partners in the UK –especially those committed to Labour values – understand that the fight for LGBTQ+ inclusion is inseparable from the fight for democracy itself. You understand what it means to struggle for justice when it is no longer fashionable, and to believe in young people even when politics tries to write them off.

IGY is proud to be part of Israel’s liberal democratic camp. We know that LGBTQ+ rights are not a fringe issue: they are a mirror held up to society’s soul. When we protect the dignity of those pushed to the margins, we strengthen the whole. When we invest in the agency of young people, we plant the seeds of a future no government can repress. That is why we do what we do. Not only for queer youth – but for a society we still believe is possible. And we’re not giving up.

“WHEN WE
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yoni Avitan is co-executive director of IGY, Israel Gay Youth

TURNING PAIN INTO POWER

LILI BEN AMI

In October 2019, my little sister, Michal Sela, was murdered in her home by her husband. Stabbed to death in her pyjamas, next to her baby's crib. Michal was just 32 years-old. A bright, vibrant social worker. A free spirit. The first to take you up to the dance floor. Our colourful butterfly.

I was the last person to see her alive. Her murder was like thunder on a bright sunny day. I was left with so many questions: How could this happen? Were there signs? Why didn't she say anything? And could her life have been saved?

I started digging and put the puzzle together. What I found was devastating: Michal's life could have been saved. The current approaches to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) are broken. IPV is an issue of life and death but, unlike other life-or-death threats, there are almost no tools for prediction or prevention. Only three percent of government resources for IPV is for prevention.



When we get into a car, we wear a seatbelt. We do early detection for cancer. Even in the commercial world, if you search for a flight, you're suddenly shown hotel ads. But with IPV, the solutions and tools are stuck 50 years in the past. We often only act after violence occurs. All the current solutions for IPV put the entire burden on the woman: report the incident to the police, go to the welfare authorities, or go to a women's shelter.

While we can't turn back time, we can bring the solutions to IPV into the 21st century. It's time for a revolution: one rooted in innovation, data, tech, security, solidarity and cross-sector collaboration. One that saves lives before the first blow. I founded the Michal Sela Forum (MSF) in May 2020 – just six months after Michal's murder. I was looking for an answer to this one simple question: Israel is famed as the “start-up nation”. We're a leader in homeland security. So, why aren't we using that expertise to save women's lives inside their own homes?

With that vision, I began building a new methodology: one grounded in prevention via technology and innovation. MSF uses a cross-sector approach to combat IPV, bringing together tech developers, security experts and IPV experts to create proactive solutions.

The MSF technological division centres on the annual Michal Sela Safe@Home Hackathon, held on Michal's birthday. Now the world's largest tech competition for IPV solutions, it has generated over 600 life-saving tech startups, many of which have been developed through The Michal Sela Startup Academy. Examples of projects produced through the Michal Sela Safe@Home Hackathon include RelyOn, a smart

voice activated panic app; and She Proves, an AI-powered tool for secure evidence collection, using blockchain to document threats and generate legal documents.

Together, we're building the world's first SafeTech vertical – a new frontier for violence prevention.

The MSF defence division developed an innovative and life-saving basket of practical solutions for threatened women. Through Michal Sela Canines and Michal's Watch, for instance, over 600 women and 2,300 children are currently protected by personal defence dogs, security cameras, panic buttons, safety apps and more. In 34 separate cases, these tools have directly saved women's lives.

The MSF awareness division is changing the conversation. In the case of approximately half of femicide victims, as in Michal's, there was no physical abuse prior to the murder. We focus on recognising early warning signs, and empowering bystanders to act. Every year, our campaigns reach millions through billboards, schools, and traditional and digital platforms.

And in the Knesset, we've achieved landmark victories including the Guardianship Amendment, which strips parental rights from a parent who murders, or attempts to murder, the other parent; the Electronic Bracelet Act, which mandates GPS tracking for IPV abusers; and the first-ever economic analysis of the cost of femicide – proving that prevention is not only a moral imperative, but financially smart.

“IN THE CASE OF APPROXIMATE LY HALF OF FEMICIDE

To the nations of the world: I call on you - let's join hands. Our goal is zero femicide per year. When you talk about IPV, change the narrative, from one of victimhood to one of empowerment; from problems to solutions and solidarity. Let's stop showing women crying in the corner. Instead, we should show an image of a strong woman, like Michal, like the daughter of your next door neighbour. After all, you wouldn't market a home security system with images of carnage after a break-in. We should do the same with women's safety. Issue a call to action and highlight practical, simple and relevant approaches. For example, we should

ask: how can AI save the next Michal and invite tech pioneers to join with us and build this future together.

Just as everyone now knows the symptoms of Covid-19, everyone should know the early warning signs of abuse – even when there's no bruise. We should learn how to identify control, gaslighting, manipulation and isolation. And just as importantly, we should know who to call.

Today, we in Israel are in a state of national emergency. Since the brutal Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023, and the ensuing war, violence at home has surged. In just the first half of 2025, 22 women and three children were murdered within their families, compared to 17 women in all of 2024. This horrific surge is a direct aftershock of the war, one we are still navigating. Despite this, policymakers have not yet issued an official statement on the issue of women's safety at home during times of war. IPV is a silent front of war. This is not a women's issue. This is national security. Women and men together acting against violence. Together we can save lives – not someday in the future, but now. Today.

Is saving lives a priority for you? Are you passionate about harnessing innovative solutions to address IPV? We are currently seeking a partner country to explore collaboration and replicate Israeli proven successes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lili Ben Ami is founder and chief executive of the Michal Sela Forum

PHOTO CREDITS

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Diagram illustrating Amal-Tikva's "diamond approach". Courtesy of Amal-Tikva.

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