

## Israel and Hamas. Yuval and Bassam (Parents' Circle) in Rondine: "Peace, not vengeance"

The theme of mutual trust was echoed in the words of two parents, one Israeli and one Palestinian, both members of the Parents' Circle Families Forum ([www.theparentscircle.org](http://www.theparentscircle.org)) that brings together 800 families, all of whom have lost an immediate family member in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in various circumstances - military, civilian, protests, terrorist attacks. "Our pain and sorrow run very deep. We believe that this should be an engine for peace and not for vengeance. That is why we have decided to dedicate our commitment, our resources and our time to building trust and dialogue between our two peoples", said **Yuval Rahamim**, the Israeli Co-Director General of the Forum, speaking via video link from Jerusalem.



"All of us who have remained decided at some point in our lives to devote efforts, resources and our time to building trust and dialogue between our two peoples, to show that they should sit down and talk to each other to resolve this conflict, to prevent further death, further losses and further suffering." In the thirty years since the Forum was founded, the families have built strong bonds among members, especially inside the working groups that bring Israelis and Palestinians together to collaborate on an ongoing basis, to develop educational, public and leadership programmes, and to promote a shared vision of dialogue and reconciliation. Rahamim said: "Ultimately, trust is built and nurtured by working together on common projects, and the bonds between our groups have grown stronger. In periods of war, these bonds, the mutual trust, are put to the test, as each side naturally tends to identify with its own nation." In his role as head of the organisation, Rahamim highlights the importance "to continue working together, to continue dialoguing, and no matter how painful it is, we continue to have our weekly meetings, our working groups. We have managed to overcome this situation and most of our projects are still operational, most of our members are in touch on a weekly basis and some of them on a daily basis. Therefore

mutual trust is a matter of resolve. It is a matter of principle.

It is the organisation's driving principle, but we must ensure that nobody is left behind. That's what we are trying to achieve: to promote mutual trust not only within a narrow circle, but extend it to the community in Palestine and Israel, in the hope that, as soon as the war is over, we will meet again and continue working together." **"This occupation is our common enemy"**. **Bassam Aramin**, a Palestinian who joined the Forum in 2007, is of the same opinion. Bassam lost his 10-year-old daughter "to the Israeli border police", outside her school in Jerusalem. "We are Israelis and Palestinians who have lost our loved ones and we are coming together because we know that we can't continue living like this."

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"We can't continue to be victims of this occupation. It is the common enemy of both peoples."

he said, speaking via video link from Jerusalem. "We don't want to see any more of our children being sacrificed on either side. That is why we, Israelis and Palestinians, are coming together to fight together through non-violent means for an end to the occupation, so that both sides can live in peace, security and stability. The ongoing war in Gaza poses further challenges, but Aramin is confident: "We continue to work for peace because we firmly believe that there is no place for killing each other forever. "For more than 25 years, we have shown that we can live together, that we can live side by side, as good neighbours, as good companions, without occupation, without oppression. We continue believing that peace is achievable, that reconciliation is attainable. Only Israel's recognition of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination can guarantee peace. The Palestinians will never accept this occupation and the Israelis would remain victims of this occupation. We want to deliver both peoples from the same occupation. **Standing together.** "We remain united, before and after 7 October, after the atrocities, the massacres and the policy of ethnic cleansing in Gaza. Because we believe in each other. We believe in the journey we have started. It is the only way to guarantee that we will stand together to save our children, our families and most of all the children on both sides. The Parents' Circle and its important message of reconciliation between peoples will prevail. After that, we will face up to all the possible criticisms of those who are against peace. Because we believe in peace. And coming together and remembering our children together is the only viable way to achieve that peace. I am convinced that everyone has to be free."

Daniele Rocchi