



**Only by joining forces,  
will we be able to end  
the cycle of violence**

## Combatants for Peace: 2009 Final Quarterly Review

The final quarter of 2009 has been marked by two opposing currents for Combatants for Peace. On the one hand, we have continued to grow and the two new field groups formed over the summer have been branching out. Conversely, the movement's financial difficulties have had an impact, and unfortunately we could not hold all of the events and activities we had planned. However, in the face of these difficulties, our Israeli and Palestinian activists have managed to continue meeting, lecturing, organizing open houses, demonstrations and even holding a unique protest event on the one-year mark of the Gaza War.

In addition to "external" activities, which are designed for the public at large in the occupied territories and in Israel, we have also focused on "internal" activities aimed at planning and regrouping our movement for the new decade. In Beit Jala we held two intensive weekends, during which the activists attended workshops designed to reexamine the movement's cooperative vision and to devise our course of action for the forthcoming year. All the while, we have been working on our new up-to-date website (coming soon), and tirelessly fundraising in order to expand our non-violent protest to the occupation and commitment to just peace in our region. In order to continue these efforts, we welcome anyone who is willing and able to donate, to do so via the website [LITROM](#) or through [our website](#). We remind you that Combatants for Peace is a volunteer-based non-profit movement, and our members are not paid for their work. All contributions go directly to the joint effort for a better future in the region. We invite you to read the following notes about our activities during October-December 2009 and recommend you to read more and keep track of us on [our website](#), [Hebrew blog](#) and on [Facebook](#).

### A Year after the Gaza War

On December 27, 2008, Israel opened a massive attack on Gaza, during which more than 1,000 Palestinians were killed, among them 250 children. Combatants for Peace held an event marking this date at the Arab-Hebrew Theatre in Jaffa. Distinguished speakers included former Israeli minister Shulamit Aloni, journalist Gideon Levy and attorney Michael Sefarad among others. Live performances from "War: A Rock Opera" as well as the play "Seven Jewish Girls" by Samih Jabarin were staged. See a [segment of the event](#) and read what Knesset Member Dov Hanin had to say that evening:

"Tonight many harsh and true things were said about Israeli society, its legal system and the media. I do not intend to add to these things. I just want to say a few words about Combatants for Peace. This movement has two great accomplishments: first is the joint message sent by the Israeli-Palestinian cooperation. It is not easy to overcome the separation on both sides and to create a joint message which transcends the anger, suspicion and mutual hostility. This kind of action is a test, a mission and a continuous challenge.



The Israeli-Palestinian joint work and the Jewish-Arab joint work are not easy. They are difficult and complicated. In our reality they swim against stream in both the Israeli and, as I imagine, the Palestinian societies. It is very hard to swim against the stream but also very empowering. Hearing Bassam Aramin speak, you must have felt that sense of empowerment. I can say that from my own experience, as someone who meets many Palestinians who live in the

occupied territories and also Palestinians who are Israeli citizens, that the other Jewish voice is vastly important. This voice is received with great excitement, creates hope and belief that things can be different. Therefore, this achievement, the joint work, is extremely difficult but also crucial to maintain and cultivate.

Another achievement of "Combatants for Peace" is of course, its challenge to the path of force and violence. Our society is caught within the cycle of blind faith in power as a solution. I do not want to wave a white flag; I realize that sometimes the use of force is necessary. I am not a pacifist. Yet I hold the firm belief that in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for many years now we have seen that the use of force never leads to a solution. Time and time again, it is itself the problem; the source of more strife, more hatred and an escalation of the conflict, the aftermath of which we are later left to untangle.

How true ring W.H. Auden's words in the poem *September 1, 1939*:

I and the public know

What all schoolchildren learn,

Those to whom evil is done

Do evil in return.

I want to say one word about the past and a few more about the future. One year ago, the brink of the Gaza war began was a defining moment not only for the Israeli society and its media, but also

for peace activists. We were called to voice our opinion even as all those around thought us insane. But this voice is vital and it is meaningful. In the Gaza war we stood up and let it be heard. On the first day of the war, I estimate that we had over a thousand people protesting in Tel Aviv. True, throughout the war, the media was manipulative and dishonest, but there were also alternative media outlets, bloggers and informal networks working together and exchanging information. In this way, we managed to recruit more people and the circle of those protesting the war in Israel gained momentum. I say these things in retrospect but also with my face to the future. I am afraid that the Gaza War will not be our final defining moment. We need to remember this event and also remember the importance of facing additional challenges, if need be. We must remember the importance of voicing an alternative at precisely those moments when it is needed. Looking at the future, I want to say that the greatest enemy facing us all, internally as well as externally, is despair. I think it is the biggest problem. When I think why more Israelis do not join our path, it is despair that comes to mind. Too many Israelis have given up on the ability to live differently, to have another future. And I believe that we must stand in the face of such despair and create hope with all of our might. There is a beautiful saying by Mahatma Gandhi "Be the change that you want to see in the world". I look at Combatants for Peace and I see, in this circle, the change that we want to see in the world; the Israelis and Palestinians that pick themselves up out of despair and hatred to build a better future together".

### Weekends at Talitha Kumi

During the month of November, we held two weekend-long seminars at the "Talitha Kumi" school and meeting center, located in Beit Jala. Some 50 Israeli and Palestinian activists participated in the [Kumi](#) workshops, which were designed to help redefine our joint vision and formulate operative strategies for the future. The experienced facilitators from Germany, Austria and the United States who specialize in conflict resolution, were helpful in approaching the most difficult issues. These issues are seldom honestly faced in our own societies, much less in a joint Israeli and Palestinian environment. We spoke, listened, agreed and argued. Mostly we discovered that even in the face of disagreement, our desires and the common goal are stronger than anything and are the reason that we continue to communicate and act together, with the sense of trust and camaraderie of those sure in their path. [Watch a clip from the second Kumi seminar weekend.](#)





## Good for You, Idan Barir!

The issue of IDF "Refusniks" is highly controversial in Israeli society. But when **Idan Barir** of Combatants for Peace Tel-Aviv-Nablus group, was called to serve in the occupied territories, he knew that as someone working alongside his Palestinian friends under the principle of non-violence, refusing to serve was his only option. He could not serve the occupation and stand in front of our friends and partners in a roadblock. He was sent to military jail, where most of the prisoners did not see eye to eye with his choice. But even they could not help but commend him and his fellow friends from the movement, who climbed a muddy ridge in front of the jail one rainy Sabbath in order to support their friend who listened to his conscience. Following is Idan Barir's summary of his time in jail

I was released from jail last Thursday morning, one day before the official end of my time served, due to crowding in the jail. Getting into jail also wasn't an easy process; the strongest army in the Middle East could not manage to put me – Private Barir – in jail due to a host of various reasons and it was only over a week after my trial that they finally had room for me (Mohand, from the Tel-Aviv-Nablus group wisely commented that had I been a Palestinian, they would've found room in jail for me even before I went to trial...)



The company in the reserves tent was interesting and very diverse: violent criminals, their victims, deserters, alcoholics, Haredim, it helped pass the time. It was striking that such a varied group of people were unanimous in their agreement that my opinions "make sense", but that it is also ridiculous to be so naïve in this brutal neighborhood called the Middle East.

One day a large group was gathered in one tent, and I had the chance to conduct a dialogue regarding my refusal to serve with prisoners who previously hadn't heard me. It was one of the highpoints of my time incarcerated- I had a big group surrounding me, amongst which an avid Kahane follower and a Beduoin soldier who was serving a long sentence for stealing sniper's equipment from a racist member of his unit (he had called him a "dirty Arab" and promised to "deal with him").

The Bedoin soldier told me at the beginning of the conversation that he would prefer not to speak in front of the Kahane follower, because at the end of the day, he needs to bunk next to him. But when one of the participants expressed the desire to push a magical red button and kill all of the Arabs, he could not contain himself. The Bedoin fellow jumped up, exclaiming that he is an Arab, a Muslim, he speaks Arabic and that he is proud to be all of these things. From that moment on, he was part of the discussion and did not hesitate to confront the Kananist.

The next morning I was surprised to see him on kitchen duty (he had told me that he is exempt from it because of a gastric condition). He explained that he had to speak to me. He said that he was extremely pleased after the previous day's discussion and that it had affected him greatly. He asked if I think that "Combatants for Peace" would accept him as a member once he got out of jail. So there was at least one good thing that came out of my "vacation" in the Atlit penitentiary.

Yet undoubtedly, the highlight of the fortnight was one Sabbath, when one of the prisoners yelled that he could see people climbing the hill and that they could be my group that came to protest. I looked over to the mountains and saw a slow train of colorful ants climbing it. Soon I heard them shouting "Good for you Idan Barir!" The sleepy soldiers went outside to see the wonder on the hill. All were mesmerized at the sight of the protesters with their megaphone. That's the reason that "count"- a procedure that usually took five minutes- lasted over twenty minutes.

When I met a prisoner from another regiment at the mess hall I understood the magnitude of this event. He told me that count also took more than fifteen minutes in their regiment and that the soldiers were humming "Good for you Idan Barir!" under their breath. I realized that it was a significant occurrence for people who do not know me nor agree with my opinions.

And on the day of my release, two prisoners opened the gate to freedom. When I told them my name, they both looked up and said. "Are you the Idan Barir from the protest? Man, your friends were amazing. We don't agree with them in the least, but good for them!"

I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for taking the trouble on a cold winter's day, to climb a muddy mountain and scream your heads off for me. Thank you for giving me so many reasons to be proud of my actions and proud of the amazing group that is supporting me; and most of all, thank you for planting the healthy seed of doubt, a new way of thinking and a little less disdain for the Israeli left, in the hearts of at least 250 people who were a (literally) captive audience that Saturday!

Yours,  
Idan

## Weeping Olive Oil

Poet Mahmoud Darwish, wrote "If the olive trees knew the hands that planted them, their oil would have become tears". But even though the trees cannot remember, we at Combatants for Peace will not forget, and as in every year, we hold a public display of solidarity for the olive harvest season. The Tel-Aviv-Nablus group, which was formed over the summer, chose to hold its first activity open to the public at the H'deer olive grove in Kfar Yatma, not far from the Tapuach Junction. The intense heat and the hard physical labor did not stop participants enjoying the unique opportunity to spend time together, getting to know the local people and also working the land. In this harvest, as in others, we once again witnessed the possibility of harmonious co-existence if only we intend it to be so (cultivating, instead of purposefully breaking the branches of this tree). The delicious meal served by the hosts in the shade of the olive trees, topped off the day and left us all with a sweet taste in our mouths.



## The Rubber Bullets Kill Quickly, The Wheels of Justice Turn Slowly

On October 14th, after several postponements, the Supreme Court held a hearing on the appeal against the decision of the State Attorney's office to close the case of the death of Abir Aramin. The hearing, scheduled for 9AM, finally commenced at 2PM, during which Salwa, Abir's mother, quietly sat in one place, her hands fiddling with a paper tissue, and her eyes red with tears. Bassam, the father, was pacing around the court, responding to those who wish to interview him, his face not giving away the turmoil inside.

The state attorney's representative explained once again why this case does not warrant hearing. A rubber bullet had been found on the ground, and no-one knows where exactly it was picked up, she claimed. Therefore there was no evidence that this was the bullet that killed the girl. The family's attorney, Michael Sefarad, explained that the bullet had been found directly underneath Abir's body, and was transferred to him under his instructions - but this fails to sway the state's



representative.

After a while hearing his argument, the state's representative concurred that there was some unease regarding this story, but added that nothing could be done since "it is impossible to determine with certainty what happened there."

The Justices asked to receive the investigation materials from the military attorney general's office, and the Aramin family now have no choice but to wait once more, after 3 years of waiting and mourning, for someone to be held accountable by the law for killing their 10 year old daughter.

In the meantime, at least, they have had with them members Combatants for Peace and additional demonstrators, who came to support them outside the court, proving that there are still people here who think that the loss of a 10 year old's life is not something that can be disregarded.



(Photo: David Grossman with CFP members outside the Court house)

## Workshops, Lectures and Tours

Combatants for Peace continues to hold in- house workshops and lectures on a regular basis in homes, youth and culture centers. At these meetings, lecturers from both sides speak about how they came to choose a path of non-violent resistance to the occupation. **If you would like to host a lecture please [contact us](#).**

In addition, we hold regular tours to witness firsthand what life is like under the occupation in the west bank. Details about these tours can be found on our website and Facebook. **We invite you to keep up to date with our activities and if you are interested in a specific tour please contact this [email address](#).**

