From the Co-Executive Directors

Friends,

Over the last few years we have warned of parallel and competing policies which have both increased Arab participation in Israeli society, but also created obstacles to positive Jewish-Arab relations. This year we have witnessed an unprecedented challenge to the status of Israel’s Arab citizens from the political arena. The passing of the Nation State Law was a watershed moment, this Basic Law lays the groundwork for future discriminatory legislation, policy and attitudes, and has opened a rift in future Jewish-Arab relations. In the build-up to the 2019 elections we have already seen unprecedented delegitimization of both Arab political parties and Arab society as a whole. And yet, despite the divisive national political rhetoric, there is another narrative of hope and partnership developing, and we have been at the forefront of a groundswell of strategic activities, changing the nature of Jewish-Arab relations for the better.

On the local political level we were heartened by the results of the local elections in October, which led to the formation of Jewish-Arab political coalitions in all of Israel’s mixed cities. Over the past few months we have met with elected officials in all of Israel’s seven mixed cities, and are well positioned to leverage the next five years towards transitioning mixed cities to become shared cities. At the same time, our Shared Learning Initiative has been warmly received by the Ministry of Education and has been the recipient of a USAID grant of $1M, enabling the expansion of the program to 40 schools. This model represents the most serious effort to date in overcoming the separate school systems in Israel.

Our Safe Communities Initiative has grown remarkably, and will expand by the end of the year to seven communities across Israel. The program has made a major impact on perceptions and policies among senior leaders in Arab society and state institutions. This year has also marked a turning point in the attitudes of Israel’s universities and colleges towards their growing Arab student populations. Only a few years ago we experienced a lack of willingness among leaders in higher education to address issues of diversity and inclusion on their campuses. This has changed, and the programs in our Campus as a Shared Space initiative are in high demand. We are now working closely with a dozen institutions and consulting on numerous new programs. This is an illustration of how a combination of persistence, professionalism, and pragmatism can achieve real results.

This year the Abraham Initiatives will be celebrate 30 years of operation. This vantage point enables us to identify the changes we have facilitated in Israeli society, and builds an appreciation that we are running a marathon, not a sprint. This is also an opportunity to recognize the inspirational leadership which has built the Abraham Initiatives into the organization it is today. Ours is an international partnership, in which Jews, Arabs and non-Israelis combine their expertise and resources to strategically advance shared society in Israel. At the head of our organization, we have been privileged to have Howard Sohn as the co–chair of the board. In partnership with his co–chair, Orni Petruschka, the co–chair of the Israeli Amuta, Basha’er Fahoum–Jayoussi, and the rest of our lay leadership team, Howard has provided wisdom, support and leadership in an unparalleled way. This year marks the end of Howard’s tenure as co–chair, and we wish to thank him for his consistent efforts and his leadership.

We welcome Geoffrey Lewis as he takes on the mantle of co–chair, and look forward to his contribution to building on our achievements.

Shared Society in Israel is an attainable goal. Thank you for being part of our coalition of supporters, partners and allies. Together we can create an equitable and shared society between Jews and Arabs in Israel.

Amnon & Thabet
In the early days of The Abraham Fund, founder Alan Slifka with President Navon and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

30 Years of the Abraham Initiatives

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Abraham Initiatives. This milestone enables us to look back at the work we have done to promote equality and partnership between Jewish and Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel, and look forward to the future of building Jewish-Arab relations in Israel.

The Abraham Initiatives – Our Story

The Abraham Fund was founded in 1989 by two American Jews, Alan B Slifka and Prof. Eugene Weiner. Slifka was an eternal optimist who struggled to put the world to rights and Weiner was a civil rights activist in the US and a close friend of Dr. Martin Luther King.

During a visit to Israel, Slifka realized that Jews and Arabs lived mainly in separate areas with very little contact. He and Eugene began to study relations between the two communities. Their conclusion was that improving Jewish-Arab relations was vital for the future of Israeli society. They began by mapping the field, producing a survey of 350 organizations and projects. In 1992 the Abraham Fund published a foundational guide to organizations and activities in Israel that promote Jewish-Arab coexistence.

The First Decade

In the early days, the Abraham Fund was a small professional organization based in Jerusalem. The organization’s task was to identify initiatives with potential and help them with planning and funding. Thanks to hundreds of grants to organizations and projects in diverse fields, the Abraham Fund sparked a revolution. It sowed seeds which blossomed and matured into dozens of organizations dedicated to working to promote partnership and equality between Arabs and Jews, helping them to consolidate and persevere. During this period the Abraham Fund provided over $20 million towards coexistence.

The Second Decade

In October 2000, and the outbreak of the 2nd Intifada, the ground in Israel shook. During ten days of demonstrations and violent clashes, 13 Arab citizens were shot and killed by the Israel Police. These events marked a turning point for the Abraham Fund. The organization changed its name to the Abraham Fund Initiatives, and under the leadership of Dan Pattir, began to plan and implement projects based on its recognition of the need for profound social change between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority.

The first projects were a direct response to the events of October 2000:

- The Tapestry in the Galilee project aimed to rebuild the damaged connections between Jews and Arabs in the heart of Galilee. The project proved that partnerships that promote shared interests are both viable and effective.
- The Policing in a Divided Society project tackled the fragile relations between Arab society and the police.

Over this decade, the organization strengthened its presence in the field of policy advocacy, seeking to convince others by actively modelling its ideas on the ground.

An example of this approach was a project called Ya Salaam: Language as a Cultural Bridge. The project sought to prove that the longstanding failure of Arabic teaching for Jews was not inevitable. The Fund was convinced that Arabic could be taught properly. We implemented the project in 200 schools over the decade, and for the first time Arab teachers began to work in Jewish classrooms. The Ministry of Education adopted the project in 2016.

At the Herzliya Conference in 2007 we presented a study showing that the Israeli economy loses around 30-40 billion shekels a year due to its failure to integrate Arab citizens. This was a historic turning point. Ehud Olmert, Prime Minister at the time, announced the establishment of an authority dedicated to the economic development of Arab society and to narrowing the gaps between the two populations.

The Third Decade

During our third decade we catalyzed social and policy change across key areas in majority-minority relations in Israeli society. From the media to college campuses, representation in public service to formulating a consensual model for volunteering by young people in Arab communities.

In 2011, our founder Alan Slifka z”l passed away. Greatly missed, he is commemorated in the Abraham Initiatives’ headquarters, now operating in the mixed city of Lod.

This year the organization’s name was changed to Abraham Initiatives, reflecting the evolution of focus from a Fund to a think–practice tank providing scalable solutions.

The Abraham Initiatives – Our Future

What lies ahead? What will we do over the next 30 years and where will we be when they end?

In a reality of constant uncertainty, we will adhere to our basic values of equality and partnership between Arabs and Jews. We will continue to create, think, invent, and promote new ideas for shared life. We will continue to shape cities in Israel as joint and egalitarian spaces.

We will make Arabic a legitimate, spoken language and an integral part of Israel’s linguistic and cultural reality.

We will promote equal, accessible, and fair services for Arab citizens in all fields, and we will continue to oppose discriminatory laws and practices.

We will address the deep causes of neglect and violence and advocate for fair and efficient policing – because Arabs in Israel are entitled to live in security.

We will shape the academic institutions as hothouses of tolerance, promote proper political representation of the majority, and work to ensure fair media coverage.

We will prove that coexistence based on equality is the moral choice and the best option for everyone.

We will continue together: Dedicated staff members from every corner of Israel; our board of directors; and our partners in civil society, philanthropy, government ministries, academia, the media, and the Knesset. Thanks to these partnerships, we will realize our dream. We will prosper here together in justice, equality, and peace.
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Education for a Shared Society

With few exceptions, Jewish and Arab children generally study in separate school systems, rarely having the opportunity to interact or properly learn one another’s languages and cultures. The Abraham Initiatives operates several programs to address this core obstacle to building shared society.

**Jewish-Arab School Encounters** provides 5th and 6th grade Jewish and Arab children from neighboring schools the opportunity to interact in a positive setting, often for the very first time. The program pairs schools and runs joint activities throughout the year, providing cultural enrichment around each group’s traditions.

Responding to the deterioration of spoken Hebrew proficiency in the Arab community, the **Ivrit B’Salam - Spoken Hebrew** Initiative provides students with positive exposure to Jewish culture and improved opportunities for learning Hebrew. Without proficiency in Hebrew, Israel’s Arab citizens lack a shared language with the majority of Israel’s Jewish citizens and have limited opportunities to integrate effectively into Israeli society, access core government services, higher education or secure gainful employment. Ivrit B’Salam uses an innovative curriculum taught by a Jewish, native Hebrew-speaking teacher in the Arab school system to build linguistic and cultural bridges.

In this 5th year of operating the initiative, we began the process of transitioning towards government adoption of the program. This follows the positive findings of a broad evaluation carried out by the Ministry of Education and the completion of the 3rd-6th grades syllabi, developed in partnership with The Center for Educational Technology, which we are now testing in 30 classrooms. We will continue to operate the program with the goal of full adoption by the Ministry in the 2019-2020 school year.

Over the past decade, the **Ya Salam - Spoken Arabic** Initiative has integrated Arab teachers into Jewish schools. Following the success of the scaling and evaluation of the program, the Ministry of Education mandated the adoption of the Ya Salam model across the Jewish elementary school system in Israel beginning with the 2017-18 school year. We monitored the early stages of the Ministry’s adoption, and are currently working with the Ministry to create a new textbook as well as run teacher trainings, as the Ya Salam curriculum goes through the process of being scaled nation-wide.

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“I feel like I am changing the world. Like I am really making a difference. I really believe that education is the way to bring peace in the Middle East. Not politics; education.”

Ital Levi, Jewish teacher from Afula who teaches Hebrew in Umm El Fahum.

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95% of school principals report that the Ivrit B’Salam program has improved participants’ spoken Hebrew.

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Jewish & Arab educators teaching English in a Shared Learning class.
The Abraham Initiatives    |   Annual Report  2018

Founded on the combination of high quality pedagogy with education for social values, Shared Learning has the potential to generate deep and meaningful educational impact. For these reasons the Ministry of Education partners with the Abraham Initiatives on this program.”

Dana Friedman, Head of the Headquarters for Civic and Shared Society Education at the Ministry of Education.

The Shared Learning pilot enabled us to explore a variety of teaching models and to perfect the implementation of a program we are hopeful will be adopted in the future by the government. English language study was chosen as a focus of the initiative, providing Jewish and Arab students the opportunity to study a subject that places them on neutral ground. The Ministry of Education has enthusiastically partnered with us on this initiative.

The Jewish and Arab teachers at the front of Shared Learning classrooms must model the ability to work and learn together. 40 teachers participated in a 5 day training in Beersheba, providing them with pedagogical training and tools needed to address identity issues that can arise in their classrooms.

The initiative was awarded a $1 million grant from USAID - enabling major program expansion. We worked with our partner, the esteemed Center for Educational Technology, as they built the syllabus for our English curriculum. We believe that as the program expands, it’s power to provide a platform for establishing positive shared experiences will grow.

20 schools
40 teachers
660 students

The Moises Itzkowich Foundation

Arab and Jewish students studying together.
In the past decade, Israeli society has witnessed a negative shift in levels of tolerance and democracy. This trend is most prominent among Jewish youth, whose attitudes have been measured to be more hardline than those held by older generations. A recent study run by The Israel Democracy Institute found that only 48% of Jewish young adults believe Arab citizens should have equal rights, compared to 76% of Jewish adults.

In response, we run two initiatives geared towards participants in their mid to late teens. The first is a course offered in 5 Pre-Army Leadership Academies, providing education about Arab society and its challenges to youth who characteristically move into leadership roles during their military service and beyond.

The 2nd program – “Living in One Land” – is a program specifically designed to increase awareness of Arab society among Jewish high-school students. After the initial pilot at Blich High School, one of Israel’s most renowned institutions for secondary education, we expanded to 4 schools with a total of 622 participants. In conjunction to 5 lectures covering Arab communities in Israel, Arab youth in Israel, and how Jews and Arabs can live together, we have added an “ask-anything Q&A”, and a tour to an Arab town. This is a 1st-of-its-kind program in Israel which aims to enrich the study of civics in High Schools and increase Jewish teens’ exposure and knowledge of Arab society.

Challenging Stereotypes among Youth

Angham (the program facilitator) came into the room looking into our eyes and talking directly with no distance. Some people in the room had negative perceptions of Arabs and were defensive, but once they saw that she just wanted to explain how she feels, and hear how they feel, it was great.”

Shira, graduate of the Telem Mechina

125 Pre-Military Academy participants
625 High-school participants
Total: 750
Israel’s higher education sphere is often the first site of meaningful Arab-Jewish interaction for Israeli citizens. As Arab student participation in higher education increases significantly (from 10,000 undergraduates in 2010 to 47,000 in 2017) the need to cultivate diverse and welcoming campuses is critical.

This past year, we expanded our program to 11 institutions. Trainings include: 5 Arabic language courses giving administrative staff tools to better communicate with Arab students; 15 Cultural Sensitivity courses building the capacity of administrative staff to better understand the cultural context of Arab students on campus, and 20 tours to Arab towns enabling staff to experience the communities from which their students come.

According to participants surveyed, 86% state they acquired knowledge which was important to their professional role.

This year we hosted a first-of-its-kind conference in partnership with the Van Leer Institute of Jerusalem addressing major issues facing higher education institutions in Israel. The conference was attended by over 100 senior academics, administrators and researchers. Participants reported that it was a watershed moment, bringing discussion of the most challenging issues to the table in a positive and enriching way.

The tour of Umm El Fahem was fascinating. I was exposed to the culture and customs of the Arab population – many things I did not know before the tour. During Iftar, I was surprised to find the whole town quiet, much like when Jews fast during Yom Kippur, but the Arabs do it for a whole month. This tour helps me better understand the needs of my Arab students.”

Rinat Assulin. Faculty of Medicine, Hebrew University.

Campus as a Shared Space

Faculty members trained

Study tours to Arab towns

say they gained knowledge which is important for their work on campus.

500

20

86%
Safe Communities

The Safe Communities Initiative promotes equitable, effective policing and life-saving emergency services in Arab communities. With increasing awareness of the crisis of violence in Arab towns, the Abraham Initiatives has become a key intermediary and source of expertise on how to deal with these critical issues.

Safe Communities held 3 regional workshops in order to create a platform for Arab leaders and government service providers to meet face-to-face and discuss needs, strategies and solutions to the crisis. Mayors from numerous towns participated, the Head of Firefighting Services in Israel attended, and civil society leaders spoke. Channels of dialogue were created to better understand needs and potential solutions on the ground.

Based on the success of our pilot in three towns, this year we are operating our program in 6 Arab communities. We have started mapping the territory in Arara in the Negev, in the mixed cities of Lod and Acco, and in Majd al Krum in the Galilee. 2018 was a local election year, during which Safe Communities launched a successful campaign to counter violence during this very heated and volatile time in Arab communities. Videos created for the Elections Without Violence Campaign reached over 250,000 people and were screened on television. A charter condemning election violence was written and signed by almost all Arab candidates, shaping the discourse and messaging around the heated election period.

Additionally, The Abraham Initiatives presented at a first-of-its-kind conference held by the Justice Ministry and the Police on violence in Arab society. The Chief of Police, The Director of the Ministry of Justice, and the Attorney General all participated.

In 2018, the Safe Communities initiative secured additional funding allowing the program to expand in scope and degree of impact on Arab society, as well as shape policymaking and public discourse surrounding personal security in Arab communities.

The presentation made by the Abraham Initiatives at the Impact Forum of the Ministry of Justice left a lasting impression, clarifying that there is a major gap between how law enforcement agencies see themselves, and how they are perceived by Arab society.”

Israel’s State Prosecutor
Shai Nitzan
I think all Israeli citizens should study Arabic in school. The fact that I and my children don’t speak it is not good. This was a good opportunity to start. Our teacher not only taught us Arabic but took time to speak about life in her village. She shared intimate cultural moments from her life and helped us understand the Arab experience in Israel.”

Nimrod Busso, Editor at Calcalist newspaper. Participant in our Media course.

Minority Mainstreaming in the Media

Media as a Shared Space brings Arab voices into the Israeli public discourse by normalizing the presence of Arab citizens, Arabic language, and Arab culture in the Israeli media.

Our Arabic Language and Arab Society course uses Arabic language as an entry point to build relationships with different Hebrew-speaking newsrooms. We held courses at YNET and the Calcalist. And, in 2018, an important new course opened up at Ta’agid- Israel’s Public Broadcasting Corporation.

As a part of the course, we led numerous tours for opinion leaders in Israel’s mainstream media. These tours and briefings directly led to over 110 media items.

Additionally, The Abraham Initiatives’ Executive Directors and staff were interviewed in Hebrew, Arabic and English media, providing content-based information for a diverse range of topics relating to Jewish–Arab relations in Israel.

The impact of the media initiative on the mainstream media has now extended to a change in policy at YNET, one of Israel’s most widely read publications. After having taken a course with The Abraham Initiatives, the editor of YNET decided to add an Arabic component to the news section. As a pilot project, articles in the online publication that are of interest to Arab society will include summaries in Arabic.

Over 150 journalists and editors impacted by our program.
On October 30, local elections were held in Israel. The Abraham Initiatives participated in a variety of ways, including serving as a leading member of Mekomiot 2018 - a coalition created in order to support the election of more women to local governments. Our role was to ensure that all campaign content was equally accessible to Arab audiences.

Leading up to the election we held “Women and Elections in Nazareth” - a series of lectures mentoring Arab women on how to move from the private to the public sphere of influence.

72 women ran in the local elections this year in Israel, with a number having previously participated in our Leadership Development courses for youth, Arab women, and a joint leadership program for Jewish & Arab women. 26 Arab women were chosen for public office this year - a marked rise compared to 10 years ago, when only 6 candidates were elected. Osnat Osman, Maha Abu Samra and Sunduss Abu Salih are examples of 3 women who participated in our training courses and went on to run and/or be elected to political leadership.

For the past 4 years, The Abraham Initiatives has been running leadership courses for emerging leaders in Arab society, focusing on women and young adults. There are 250 members of our Youth & Women’s Leadership Alumni Forum who continued to meet this year, strengthening their connections to each other and committing to promote social change within our society.
This year, the Israeli government passed the Nation State Law – an anti-democratic bill which negatively affects the Arab minority by demoting the official status of the Arabic language and prioritizing the development of Jewish settlement - while excluding any reference to the existence of Arab citizens and their right to equality. The Abraham Initiatives immediately took a stance against the legislation, which, as a Basic Law bearing constitutional status, paves the way for further discrimination of Israel’s Arab minority.

We raised awareness about the bill by speaking at rallies, briefing international diplomats on the implications of the Law, and participating in forums. At a conference with President Rivlin in attendance, Thabet publicly asked the President to take action to stop the law. This moment was captured and reported by all major media outlets in both Hebrew and Arabic, and several American news outlets.

In partnership with other civil society NGOs, we organized “The Biggest Arabic Lesson in the World” - a festive happening drawing thousands of Israelis from across the country. The protest at HaBima Square modeled how joyfully Arabic and Hebrew, not to mention Jews and Arabs, can exist together in one space.

The Abraham Initiatives organized a broad coalition of NGO directors, academics, MKs and activists to strategize against the law. In order to raise awareness and galvanize support against the bill, a video campaign was launched in collaboration with Standing Together (a new Jewish-Arab collaboration). We will continue to work with all our partners to bring this issue to the attention of the public and to fight for the equal rights of all citizens of the State.

"We can’t stand by as the government passes laws that hurt the Arabic language and hurt democracy.”

Thousands of Israelis from all over the country joined “The Biggest Arabic Lesson in the World” to protest the Nation State Law.
2018 Major Donors and Supporters

While space only allows us to list our 2018 major supporters, we deeply appreciate each and every one of our donors, whose gifts “large or small” make our work possible.

Shared Society Visionaries
- Alan B. Slifka Foundation
- The Izkowich Foundation
- Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation
- Sam Spiegel Foundation
- Borgenicht Foundation
- Stefan T. Edlis and H. Gael Neeson
- Claude Ghez, MD
- Fohs Foundation
- Klarman Family Foundation
- Orni & Chen Petruschka
- USAID
- European Union
- Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), US State Dept.
- Zivik – IFA – German Federal Foreign Ministry

Bridge Builders
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- Riane Gruss
- David Tabak
- The Lois and Richard England Family Foundation
- Caroline and Brian Lurie
- David and Inez Myers Foundation
- Barbara Zucker
- Usaca Trust
- The Bridging Trust
- New North London Synagogue
- Finchley Reform Synagogue

Students from a pre-army military academy at the soccer stadium on a visit to the Arab town of Sachnin.
Financials

Overall Budget 2018
$3,080,000

Revenue by Source: 2018
- Foundations and Federations 54%
- Individual Donors 37%
- Government Allocations 9%

Expenses by Initiative: 2018
- Education 31%
- Campus 12%
- Leadership 7%
- Advocacy 28%
- Safe Communities 16%
- Media 6%

Jewish & Arab students learn to make olive oil together.
Our Team

Founder & First Chair Person
Alan B. Slifka

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Basha’er Fahoum-Jagoussi, Co-Chair Israeli Amuta

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For more information and to support the Abraham Initiatives’ work, please contact one of our offices below. Thank you for helping transform the landscape of Jewish–Arab relations, and creating a shared society of inclusion and equality among Israel’s Jewish and Arab citizens.

Donate at www.abrahaminitiatives.org.il

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Teachers writing in Hebrew & Arabic at Shared Learning training in Bersheva

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