

**THE
GENEVA
INITIATIVE**

English Edition

Building Our Future

The complete guide to
reconciliation between
Palestinians and Israelis

The conflict is the
enemy of both sides

Why Reconciliation?

Small steps, by individuals, can
have as much influence as
governmental decisions

The tragedy of Coronavirus can also
be an opportunity for reconciliation

Why Reconciliation?

Corona has changed the world. In ways that nobody expected, it stopped the ordinary lives of billions of people around the globe. As severe and heartbreaking as Corona and its outcomes are, it also gives us time to self-reflect and reconsider our actions. **It might allow us to think somewhat differently about the reality of violence and conflict that Palestinians and Israelis have been living in for decades.**

It could lead us to take more responsibility. It should make us create a better future. **Maybe the tragedy and chaos that the disease caused can also create hope for peace and reconciliation between us.**

Reconciliation is a process in which two sides in a conflict change their knowledge, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs about each other. This process can occur after a peace treaty is signed, during the process of negotiations between the sides, or before the "decision makers" even begin to talk with one another. **There is a major advantage to beginning the reconciliation process early on,** because the process reduces and eliminates the culture of conflict that is in place between the conflicting parties. It creates a culture of peace.

Advancing reconciliation can be done voluntarily by individuals, groups, communities, NGOs, businesses or private institutions who want to create a bottom-up change by initiating direct dialogue, shared projects, cross-national activities, joint businesses, and more. It can be initiated by the governments and carried out in a top-down manner by actively working on changing school curricula, building museums, holding formal public statements, implementing institutional reforms, and more.

Individual actions can create significant changes. They can change the way societies think and act, they can change the atmosphere, strengthen empathy, bring the sides closer to each other and allow them to believe that a better future is possible. They can change

the desperate discourse that both Israelis and Palestinians are embedded in. They can create optimism and hope, and real change on the ground.

Changing the reality of the conflict also necessitates not excluding anyone because of race, religion and gender. Women didn't play a significant role in previous efforts to advance peace in our region. They were, in fact, almost totally excluded from the negotiations and decision-making rooms. This must change. **The presence of women in the process is absolutely essential**, not only because they make up 50% of the population and are just as affected by the conflict as men, but because they have a unique contribution to peace processes. Moreover, **as has been proven time and again** throughout the world, women played a central role and often led processes of reconciliation. We must join this trend.

The necessary changes in the mindset of societies in conflict do not happen immediately. It is a long and difficult process that touches the roots of the conflict. It is hard for groups in conflict to think differently about an enemy who has deeply hurt them and is perceived to be a continuous threat to them.

But the sides have to acknowledge that reconciliation does not mean that they abandon their narratives and beliefs. Instead, it means that they are willing to appreciate that their rival has its own narratives and beliefs, **and that in order to achieve a better future between them, they can cooperate despite their differences, build bridges, and make peace.**

In order to create a future in which the sides don't hate each other, and instead cooperate and build a better relationship - the work has to begin now. **Any individual, any action, big or small, can start making it happen.**



Narratives

Knowing more about the other side
doesn't weaken you.

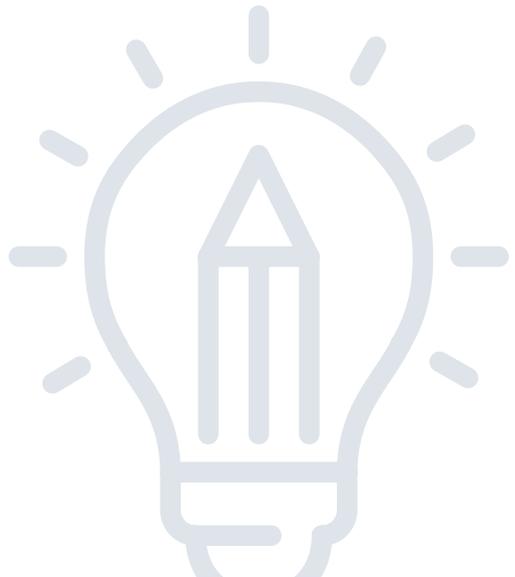
Not everything that is "good" for
them is "bad" for you

Narratives

Opposing sides in a conflict have a completely different perception of what "reality" is. They remember different facts, emphasize different episodes, and tend to ignore events that are crucial to the other side. Even when discussing the same event, they frame it differently and use different terms to describe it (Nakba/Independence).

Each side believes that it is the victim, that it wants peace, and that the other side is violent and irrational. Furthermore, each side is absolutely sure that it is objectively right and that the rival knows this. For them, this is not "a story" or a "narrative"; this is "reality," "the truth."

Israelis and Palestinians should acknowledge that their "truth" is just one version of understanding what reality and history are. This does not mean you stop believing that your narrative is the right one. It does not mean that you stop preferring your group over the other. It means that:



- 1 You understand that there are a variety of ways to perceive the conflict. **There are a variety of narratives on your side, and a variety of narratives on the other side.**
- 2 **You are able to listen to other narratives,** to consider them, and to understand that others truly believe that their story is the right one, even if you disagree with them.
- 3 **There are narratives that have been silenced and should be exposed.** This is also important in the context of gender relations, since the dominant narratives which are presented have traditionally been composed mostly by men.
- 4 Your preferred narrative does not have to completely dismiss or harm others. **This is not necessarily a "zero sum game" in which anything that is "good" for you is "bad" for the other, and vice versa.**
- 5 You should reconsider and rethink your jargon, the terms you use and your framing of events. **While being true to your narrative, you might also be able to frame it in a way that is more acceptable to others and does not offend them.**
- 6 **Positive feelings towards the other, empathy and compassion are legitimate,** even without accepting their version of "the truth."
- 7 **Knowing more about the other does not weaken you;** the contrary is probably true - it leads to a better understanding of him/her.



Media

Consciousness creates reality:

Initiate a social-media campaign among your groups

Communicate with individuals from the other side

Make sure that media outlets don't neglect the discussion about the topic

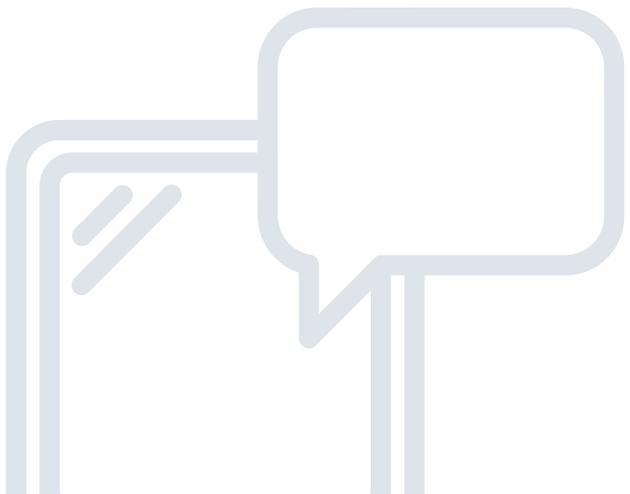
Media

Media has a crucial influence on how societies think about and perceive "reality." Most of what Israelis and Palestinians think of their "enemy" is constructed based on what the media portrays.

Over the past two decades, the role of media has become more important and relevant: the ability to spread news is much easier in the age of social media, and it is becoming harder to check which news is true and which is "fake news," as well as the agenda of those spreading it.

In the third decade of the 21st century, every individual with a camera, a keyboard or a smartphone; anyone who has WhatsApp, Instagram, Tiktok, Twitter or Facebook - has media influence. We can report about events, and also create them.

Therefore, change in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be enacted by individuals and by media outlets in a variety of ways, including:



- 1 Spreading positive news of cooperation, coexistence and care between Palestinians and Israelis, and not only "bad news". **Even the smallest positive event reported can contribute to creating a culture of peace.**
- 2 Checking facts and terminology, **examining with a critical eye and not taking for granted everything that is broadcast/sent to us**, both from our society and from the other.
- 3 **Emphasizing individual stories** of the Palestinians and Israelis, **and not only the national stories of two conflicting sides.**
- 4 **Getting acquainted with different narratives** from our side and from the other side, and not focusing solely on the official political-national narratives.
- 5 **Making sure that the relations between the sides receive attention**, that are in the focus of discussions in the media, **and are not neglected.**
- 6 **Having ongoing communication** with members of the "other side."
- 7 **Creating alternative ways to understand reality.**
- 8 Initiating campaigns to **change the relations between the sides.**



Meeting the "other"

Meetings reduce stereotypes

The longer - the better

Continue talking after the workshop has ended

Meeting the "other"

The majority of Jewish-Israelis have never talked with a Palestinian from the West Bank or Gaza. Those who did have personal encounters mostly experienced them as employers or when serving in the military. Palestinians who meet Israelis see them as occupiers - soldiers, settlers or employers.

Palestinians and Israelis mostly have stereotypes of one another. We think we know the other very well and have strong emotions and concrete perceptions about them, but have never actually talked to them.

In order to change relations with each other, or even just to know who the other is, it is essential to do a very basic and simple thing: meet, talk, listen and get to know each other; to see who your "enemy" is and to try to understand if she/he is truly an enemy.

When meetings are organized, they should follow some basic rules:



- 1 **In the meeting everyone is of equal status**, even though the conflict is asymmetric.
- 2 **Everyone should be encouraged to voice their ideas, feelings, thoughts and needs.**
- 3 **Behavioral codes must be enforced** so there are no insults or offensive language used.
- 4 **It would be fruitful if the sides discuss** both the conflict that separates them, but also **what they might share** and what could bring them closer to one another.
- 5 The longer the encounter - the better. **It takes time for opposing sides to start talking and to "break the ice."**
- 6 If willing, the sides should think about how to **continue their dialogue after the meeting ends** and share their experience with their friends who did not "meet the other."

The Coronavirus time period has taught us that meetings can take place even when people cannot leave their homes. Face-to-face meetings are considerably preferable, but meetings can take place even when there are huge obstacles that prevent us from doing so.



Public declarations and apologies

Both sides have things to apologize for

Both sides should take responsibility

Public declarations and apologies

Apologizing is hard. It is hard for individuals, and even harder for groups and nations. It is so difficult precisely because it means so much for the side you are apologizing to. Therefore, if and when done, it can dramatically restore relationships and change attitudes.

It can be done without completely changing or opposing your national ethos, and without necessarily harming your self-esteem. It can sometimes even help the apologizing/declaring society in its process of healing from the conflict.

Four main components that can allow Israelis and Palestinians to apologize to each other in a way that can create better relations:



1

Both sides should apologize to one another. Both sides have things to apologize for. Both sides can take responsibility for wrongs they created.

2

The declaration should be specific and go into the details of what each side is apologizing for. **Saying "I'm sorry" is not enough by itself**, and going into the specifics promises that the sides learn and talk about their misdeeds.

3

The declaration should be frank, honest and genuine. If you don't mean it – it is not worth it, it will not be accepted, and will probably have a countereffect.

4

The apologies should explain what reforms and changes will be made. Even if the apology is about actions that happened in the past and cannot be undone, there are steps which can be taken today (building memorials, changing street names, stopping incitement, changing laws, institutional reforms, etc.).



Joint projects

Economic collaboration and joint projects can create mutual trust and change the lives of the participants

Both sides should be equally represented, with similar salaries

Joint projects

There are those who claim that economic collaboration or joint projects have a countereffect: They present a façade of normalcy which in practice preserves the conflict and "normalizes the occupation." But working together towards a shared goal and having joint projects can also create mutual trust and interests between rivals, change the day-to-day lives of the individuals participating in them, and provide an atmosphere of peace and coexistence.

Such collaborations and projects can be classified as:

1. Projects that aim at changing something related to the relations between the sides (a joint tourism website or venture for visiting Israel and Palestine, cleaning shared spaces together, etc.).
2. Projects that have no connection to the conflict or to the relations between the sides (a joint startup, a global business with two branches in Ramallah and Tel-Aviv, etc.).

In order to make use of the advantages that such joint projects and collaborations have, and make a change through them, they should follow some basic guidelines:

- 1 Both sides should be equally represented.
- 2 People from both sides should earn the same wages, have the same kind of responsibilities and be in the same positions. In cases in which this is not possible, rotating mechanisms should be enforced.
- 3 The relations between the sides should be discussed and dealt with. Even if the business/project is not directly connected to the conflict, "the elephant in the room" should not be ignored.
- 4 Workshops and seminars about both cultures and societies should be introduced to the workers, or be part of the work structures.
- 5 The definitions of aims and expected results should be clear. The core idea of having joint projects is that sides working together want to achieve something besides "just" meeting.





The education system

Changes in the education system can
change whole generations

Palestinians and Israelis can find
common values, like the value of life,
which will serve as a source of inspiration

Changes in the education system

Formal education requires every child to go to school for at least 9 years. Informal education shapes the lives of youngsters throughout their childhood until they mature. Therefore, education systems have incredible power in forming the way future generations perceive the conflict.

There are two main approaches to making a change in the education systems:



Teaching about the conflict

1

Write joint Israeli-Palestinian textbooks that both Education Ministries approve, and can be taught both in Palestinian schools and in Israeli schools.

2

Tell our version of the story, but also **provide a glimpse into the other side's story:**

- We believe they left their homes, they believe they were forced out of them.
- We claim that this land belonged to our ancestors for decades, they claim historical rights over it.

3

Even without looking at the other side's story - **restructure what we emphasize about our side** (war heroes or peace heroes?) and provide more knowledge about the other's culture, heritage and society (including learning their language).

The values and culture we educate for

Even without directly touching the conflict itself, schoolchildren can embrace a culture that is more peace-oriented:

4

Palestinians and Israelis can identify a set of common values that could serve as a source of inspiration and a practical guide for all of us. **The value of life, for example, is embedded in both societies and religions.** Emphasizing it, even without talking about the conflict, can change pupils' approach.

5

Creating a hierarchy between values. **Do we focus on the willingness to sacrifice lives for the motherland or tolerance and empathy?** These values do not necessarily contradict one another, but the question is what we emphasize.



Inner changes in each society

The other is not necessarily
the enemy

The conflict is the enemy
of both sides

Inner changes in each society

Reconciliation is a process that two sides undergo together. But even though reciprocity is a must, each society can also work on its own. There are changes that can happen in each society while also working together:



1

Talk about the conflict

Although the conflict influences our daily lives, Palestinians and Israelis are "tired of talking about it." We have to make it the center of attention in daily discourse, even if we will be considered a "downer."

2

Outline plans of how to end the conflict and envision a better future

Israelis and Palestinian are despairing and hopeless. The discourse has to change, inside each society, from how to manage the conflict to how to solve it.

3

Frame "the conflict" as the enemy (and not the other side)

Instead of blaming the other side for its part in the conflict, try to see how you can cooperate with them in order to overcome the common enemy. **Ending the conflict is something both sides want.**

4

Make changes in your society, even if the other side also "benefits" from them

Stopping incitement, making institutional reforms, condemning violence, promoting human rights, paying attention to your selection of words and terminology, and many other actions are important and needed for the wellbeing of your side even if they are "good" for the other side.



Justice

Restoring relations, creating a better future and mutual acceptance - are all ways to achieve justice

Justice

"Justice" is a tricky term. Palestinians and Israelis have different definitions and understandings regarding what it is and how it can be achieved.

Since we have contradictory narratives, it might seem that the sides can never agree on what justice means. This is a big obstacle since justice is one, if not the most, important component of changing the hearts and minds of the two peoples. When we feel justice is not done, the situation is unacceptable to us because it interferes with our very basic values, instincts and emotions.

While having different perceptions, and even if not totally agreeing, there are a few things the sides can agree upon and jointly work for, like acknowledging that:



1

Justice does not necessarily mean looking only at the past or seeking for a revenge mechanism. **It can also mean restoring relations, improving present conditions and creating a better future.**

2

Even without agreeing about everything, **there are many elements that both sides can agree upon as just:** providing universal human rights, having access to basic human needs (running water, food), ensuring personal and national security, having freedom of movement, enabling individual and collective self-determination, and more.

3

Both sides can acknowledge some of their past wrongs, take responsibility for them, and implement changes accordingly (apologize, commemorate, reform institutions, etc.).

4

Joint committees of Palestinians and Israelis could work together in order to agree upon **a shared understanding of justice.**

Peoples, nations and religions have been experiencing violent conflicts for thousands of years. Some of them believed that their conflict is the hardest, the one that will never end and cannot be reconciled. Doing justice with ourselves could mean acknowledging that conflicts can end.

In the changing reality following the Corona pandemic, cooperating in order to stay healthy and protecting our lives by overcoming national conflicts, could be the Israeli-Palestinian implementation of doing justice for both sides.

What can be done?

This booklet presents some basic concepts of reconciliation. It is distributed In Arabic, Hebrew and English by the Geneva Initiative with the hope that members from both societies acknowledge that the process of overcoming barriers between them can start by individuals who can:

- Meet the "other" in order to see who s/he really is
- Initiate a media-campaign in their WhatsApp groups
- Acknowledge and get acquainted with different narratives
- Change the way the conflict is taught to their children
- Create a joint Palestinian-Israeli project
- Begin working with their ingroup in order to reform its attitudes
- Enhance the willingness of their society to accept responsibility
- Understand that creating justice can assure a better future
- Carefully choose your words and question any terminology

The writing of this booklet is part of an ongoing Israeli-Palestinian process designed to bring an end to the conflict. It began long before the outbreak of the Coronavirus, but we hope that the perceptual and behavioral changes that have developed as a result of the pandemic will provide an opportunity for both societies to bring about a change in their relationship, and to initiate processes that will lead to reconciliation and peace.

