

US Multi-Denominational Group Building Grassroots Support for Two-State Middle East Solution

The 'Yes We Can: Middle East Peace' group hosts performance events to bring diverse cultures together. The goal is to build a grassroots campaign for Middle East Peace modeled on the success of Barack Obama's presidential campaign.

Jeff Swicord | Washington 11 December 2009



Photo: VOA Image

Members of "Yes We Can: Middle East Peace" dance together at a historic synagogue in downtown Washington DC

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It was an evening of music and theater at a historic synagogue in downtown Washington D.C. But the thoughts and prayers of Christians, Muslims, and Jews gathered were about Middle East peace and the desire for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The event was sponsored by "Yes We Can: Middle East Peace," a newly formed partnership of religious and secular Americans in the Washington D.C. area.

The sounds of Arabs, Christians, and Jews celebrating the formation of Yes We Can: Middle East Peace, a new interfaith coalition in Washington D.C. They want to support President Barack Obama's initiatives for peace in the Holy Land through a two-state solution. Palestinian-American Mae Abdul Rahman is the co-chair of the evening's events.

"I think what we would like to do is to start getting people engaged, to discuss the issues of relevance and to come together based on a common objective which is to advance a secured and just peace between Palestinians and Israelis," she said.

Representatives from Washington's Arab Jewish and Christian communities attended. The

purpose of the evening was to highlight the human cost of continuing the conflict through music and theater.

Ramon Tasat, a Sephardic Jew, played Hebrew songs with a Spanish flair and actors performed monologues from Israeli and Palestinian perspectives.

Andra Baylus, an American Jew who coordinated the events, says the point is to share our common humanity.

"We need to realize we are not different from one another; just because you have a different religion or you're born in a different part of the world, we all experience the pain of a lost loved one," she explained. "We all experience joy. And so we tried to capture that all in one in this particular grouping of performers."

The highlight of the evening was the personal stories of Robi Damelin, an Israeli from Tel Aviv, and Mazen Faraj, a Palestinian from a refugee camp near Bethlehem. Both lost family members in the conflict. Mazen's father was killed by an Israeli soldier while walking home from the grocery store. Mazen told the audience violent resistance will only lead to self-destruction.

"Our case is a just case," he said. "It is not about killing, it is not about blood. It is not about that we like to kill anyone around the world. We are just looking for our rights and our freedom."

Robi Damelin's son was killed by a Palestinian sniper while he was serving in the army. She says feelings of anger and hate will only lead to more misery and a continuation of the conflict.

"I understood very soon that this man didn't kill my son because he was my son, he killed him because he was a symbol, you know, of an occupying army. That is a very difficult thing to say, but that is the truth. And I realized that anger just closes people down," she said.

Yes We Can: Middle East Peace is planning other events in the Washington D.C. area. It is also organizing a grassroots campaign on university campuses around the U.S. to raise awareness.