



31 July 2014 - Amidst fighting and bombings, there are individuals and communities that seek reconciliation and coexistence rather than retribution.

The 30 Israeli Jewish and 30 Palestinian families that live in Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salaam, which translates to Oasis of Peace, have decided not to let the latest hostilities turn them against each other. “These times of heightened violence actually really bring the village together,” said Bob Mark, a Jewish Israeli who taught in the village’s primary school for 23 years. “You’ll find the village demonstrating together,” he added. “While the residents have differing views on the solution to the country’s woes they all agree that the killing must stop.”

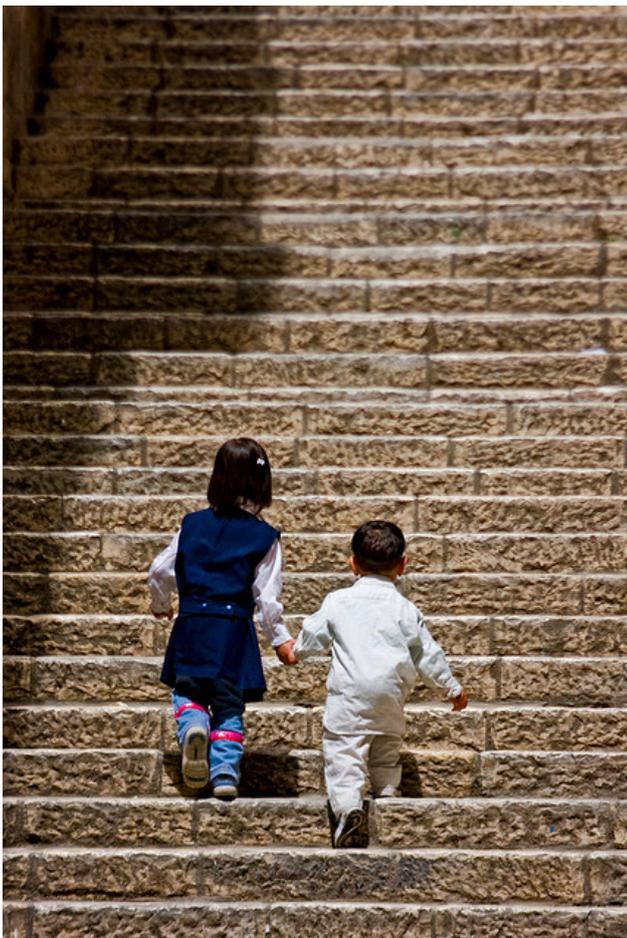
Coexistence has become part of daily life in this cooperative village that was formed in the late 1970s. Decisions are made collectively, the children study in both Arabic and Hebrew and all prospective residents are required to attend a special training session on conflict resolution.

While the residents have differing views on the solution to the country’s woes, they agree that the killings we are witnessing today must come to an end. More than 1,360 Palestinians and 59 Israelis have been killed since the latest round of hostilities began on 8 July. In an attempt to save their lives, more than 200,000 displaced people in Gaza have taken refuge in facilities run by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East ([UNRWA](#)). These

shelters, however, have also come under attack, with yesterday's shelling of a [UN school in Jabaliya refugee camp](#) claiming at least 16 lives.

UN's Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon has strongly [urged](#) all sides to avoid further escalations. He has noted that all sides must meet all obligations under international humanitarian law, both towards civilians ahead of impending attacks, as well as maintaining proportionality in any kind of military response.

Claiming public space



Neve Shalom - Wahat al-Salam is not the only community that is countering hatred in a polarized country. The organization Hand in Hand, for instance, runs bilingual public schools in Jerusalem, Galilee and Wadi Ara, as well as kindergartens in Haifa and Jaffa. Their members have taken to the streets in Jerusalem to mark their call for peace, marching from the local

school to the city centre. Their marches are a way for Jews and Palestinians to “claim the public space together”, says Shalom Dichter, Hand in Hand’s Executive Director. “The fact that hundreds of people were marching... made it clear both to the ... many people who saw it, as well as to ourselves, that we are not alone in that we oppose the war, we oppose the violence and we are practicing walking together in the public sphere.”

The situation is more volatile now than it has been for years. Communities are being tested by the ongoing onslaught between Israeli forces and Hamas, and the current troubles are eroding even the basic tenets of coexistence. But both Dichter at Hand in Hand and most residents of Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salaam seem comfortable with their limited sphere of influence. They know they cannot avoid the hatred that permeates much of Israeli society, but they can seek to counter it. In an interview with [IRIN](#), an inhabitant of Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salaam concludes: “I can’t say I’m optimistic or pessimistic, but I’m determined. I’m 100 percent sure that there is no other way. I know we can’t change the entire world... but we can be an example to our people that there is a more human way to live.”

□ UNRIC related links:

- [The Human Tragedy in Gaza](#)
- [Urgent Need for Humanitarian Aid in Gaza](#)
- [Israel's Deaf Ear - The Expanding Occupation of Palestine](#)