We are pleased to submit the following evidence in the name of the Parents Circle – Families Forum.

1. Executive Summary
   - The Parents Circle Families Forum (PCFF) is an organization of more than 600 bereaved Palestinian and Israeli families who have lost an immediate family member in the conflict. The long term vision of the organization is to create a framework for a reconciliation process to be an integral part of any future political peace negotiations. Without reconciliation, we believe there can only be a ceasefire, and not a lasting peace.
   - The PCFF works to solve the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis through dialogue and mutual understanding. To achieve this goal we run a wide range of programmes that include: youth and adult education, people to people programmes, women’s programmes, social media programmes, exhibitions and documentaries.
   - PCFF travels internationally to promote reconciliation with a very clear message: "Do not be pro one side or the other but pro solution, otherwise you run the danger of importing our conflict into your country".
   - In the context of the considerable sums spent by international donors with the aim of promoting peace between Israelis and Palestinians, we believe that grass roots reconciliation projects like ours are a critically important investment. We urge the UK government to give priority accordingly to grassroots reconciliation efforts that educate each side about the other and bring Israelis and Palestinians to the understanding that non-violence is the only solution to this never ending conflict.

2. About the Parents Circle-Families Forum

   The Parents Circle-Families Forum is an organization of more than 600 bereaved Palestinian and Israeli families who have lost an immediate family member in the conflict. The PCFF works to solve the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis through dialogue and mutual understanding. Given that the lack of trust and empathy between the sides allows for the cycle of violence to continue, the Forum presents a different and much-needed perspective on the reasons for the violence. To achieve this goal we work to imbue both sides with a sense of tolerance and reconciliation rather than hatred and revenge, sharing with others our personal and painful stories. Each day, through our activities and outreach, the Families Forum reaffirms the sanctity of life and the need to safeguard human dignity and freedom.
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To lay the groundwork for a lasting peace, PCFF provides, first and foremost, the opportunity for Israelis and Palestinians to meet. In the context of conflict, the two peoples remain alienated from one another, a separation which is fortified by feelings of fear, hatred, mistrust and dehumanization of the other. Rather than allow bereavement to serve as yet another reason to hate, PCFF’s activities aim to use the personal stories of bereaved Israelis and Palestinians to prevent further bereavement on both sides, to demand a peaceful resolution to the conflict from policymakers and to educate the public towards reconciliation.

The PCFF’s work has been recognized by highly respected international figures, including President Obama, former Prime Minister and Quartet Envoy Tony Blair, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, US President Bill Clinton, US President Jimmy Carter, Daniel Barenboim and many others.

There is a British Friends of the PCFF which is a registered charity in the UK. Its patrons include Lord Rowan Williams, Lord Jonathan Sacks, Juliet Stevenson, Dr Usama Hasan, Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg, Dr Amineh Hoti, Karen Armstrong, Huw Irranca-Davies MP, Lord Janner of Braunstone QC and Rabbi Lionel Blue.

3. The importance of bringing Israelis and Palestinian together

It is our deep conviction, borne out of our personal experiences, and confirmed by the impact of our activities, that promoting mutual understanding of the other within Israeli and Palestinian societies at the grassroots level is central to resolving the conflict. The most powerful way to do this, and the most challenging, is to bring Israelis and Palestinians face to face in a spirit of open dialogue, and not confrontation. Prior to the Second Intifada contact between the two societies was far greater. That desperate period of conflict greatly deepened the emotional and physical wedge between the two populations.

Today we are struggling against the challenging political situation and the physical barriers that separate us which shut down the space for dialogue, reduce understanding, and reinforce hardline positions on both sides.

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Our organization is constantly searching for new and innovative ways to bridge the divides. Following are examples of our activities. We are proud of what we have achieved, but we are acutely aware that there is so much more to be done, and many more people we need to reach.
4. Current programs include:

4a. Youth Education

The personal stories of our members hold special significance for the younger generation. Our high school dialogue meetings address young Israeli and Palestinian students. Since the Second Intifada there is a whole generation who have never met the “other side” and the dialogue meetings may be their first encounter. After hearing the personal narratives and the joint message of an Israeli and a Palestinian representative from the PCFF in their classroom, there is a definite change in attitude and a willingness to explore the possibility of a dialogue as an alternative to violence and an understanding of the needs of the other. We know that these encounters work by the interesting and often very poignant feedback forms students fill in at the end of the meeting. We manage to reach an average of 15,000 students each year. We have a follow up meeting with the students which includes the screening of “Two Sided Story” a documentary produced by the Parents Circle – Families Forum, which illustrates the narrative of both sides. This documentary is based on an adult workshop run by the PCFF.

4b. Summer Camp – Youth Programme

It is the children caught in the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict who have paid the highest price of all: they have suffered the trauma of losing an immediate family member. Each year the PCFF runs a summer camp for bereaved children and their friends. The children are aged 14 to 18. Some of the facilitators today have been to the summer camp themselves and so there is an ongoing commitment to peace after they participate. Today with Facebook the participants are able to keep in touch during the year and, dependent on budget, we arrange meetings. The programme includes social games, dialogue, workshops, physical activities, Arabic and Hebrew language lessons and joint creative projects and expressions of their learning. These activities aim at building trust among the youth. Some activities are competitive, where mixed bi-national groups experience working together as teams. Palestinian and Israeli youth alike come away from their experience in the youth program with increased knowledge of the other, with a sense of connection to one another that was built regardless of religious, cultural, national or ethnic ties. The sense of shared humanity that existed for many before, was cemented by this experience.

4c. Adult Education

Programmatic and People to People Approach:

The past several years of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been characterized by an absence and stalling of any political or diplomatic dialogue, therefor the current peace talks make the work on the ground and the people to people approach more important than ever. The ongoing conflict continues to create barriers – both emotional and physical – between both societies. The PCFF’s work is based on the premise that reconciliation is a multi-level process necessary to complement and drive any future peace agreement.

The underlying basis of the people to people programme is that change results from the interaction of belligerent groups when there is opportunity for increased mutual understanding and appreciation. It also works on the premise that following the initial interaction, partnerships and
collaborations addressing common concerns create a real long-term commitment, on the way to building true peace between people and communities.

“History Through the Human Eye” project:

Modules for social change agents, made up of unilateral and bilateral workshops and dialogue activities over time, between Israelis and Palestinians to recognize, learn about and acknowledge the personal and national narrative of the other.

The Parents Circle has run 16 workshops which included Palestinian and Israeli doctors, artists, educationalists, NGOs, social activists, just to mention a few. These workshops have created a ripple effect and with each workshop we run we are having more and more applicants. In the present climate this is something of a miracle and demonstrates that the Palestinians and Israelis in our group each have standing in their communities. The documentary “Two Sided Story” is based on one of the workshops under this project with participants from every walk of life and shade of opinion in Israel and Palestine. We are screening this documentary throughout the West Bank and Israel as well as internationally. It is an exceptional tool for understanding the narrative of the other and for breaking down entrenched barriers.

4d. Social Media

The past several years of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been characterized by an absence and stalling of any political or diplomatic dialogue. Both sides view the other with distrust and skepticism and not as partners for making peace.

Today, on the front line in the public opinion battle are social media platforms like Facebook, which is very influential among Israelis and Palestinians. A third of all Palestinians and around 45 percent of Israelis are active on Facebook, but even on Facebook Israelis and Palestinians are mostly exposed to their own communities and to voices of criticism and hatred on both sides. They do not hear enough alternative voices and especially the unique voice of the PCFF.

The PCFF launched the Crack in the Wall (CITW) (http://www.facebook.com/crackinthewall) in order to foster interaction between Palestinians and Israelis and to facilitate more opportunities for changing attitudes, breaking down stereotypes and humanizing the conflicted societies in order to break the cycle of violence. The uniqueness of this network is that all its entries are published in Hebrew and Arabic, allowing users to express themselves in their own language. Research has shown that technologies of communication like social media platforms have an enabling effect. They have acted as a catalyst to facilitate and accelerate social change already happening on the ground. Since the Crack in the Wall was launched in April 2012 it has provided a platform for more than 20,000 people, the majority of them Israelis and Palestinians. It has brought to the forefront the fact that there are Israelis and Palestinians who want to be engaged and who are determined to work together to change the status quo. In 2013 the Crack in the Wall project won the prestigious United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)/BMW award.

We are also proud of our website www.theparentscircle.com which publicises our activities in English, Hebrew and Arabic.
4e. Women’s Group

Women on both sides of the conflict need to be empowered to realize their own strengths and unique ability to conduct a dialogue and to acknowledge the role of women in the path to reconciliation. UN resolution 1325 affirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping and humanitarian response. With all of this in mind, the PCFF has created a powerful group of bereaved women who are fast becoming important players in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

Over 2012/2013 - some 60 Palestinian and Israeli women from the group worked on trust building, and capacity building. They learned how to give power to their personal narratives and to be stronger agents for change. They were exposed to the national narrative from both sides and participated in experiential tours to significant venues which illustrated the narrative of each side. They were exposed to the role of women in conflict resolution all over the world in a lecture series and planned a successful public event held in Tel-Aviv, attended by over 1,500 Israelis and 200 Palestinians from the West Bank, an extraordinary achievement in the current circumstances. The women created a Photography Exhibition, “The Presence of the Void”, along with “Texture of Life”, an exhibition of Palestinian and Israeli books which each woman created of her life. There was also “Jam Session”, in which Palestinian and Israeli women made more than 750 bottles of jams and pickles to be sold at the event. A recipe book in English with the story of each woman will soon be ready to sell in order to raise funds to further the activities.

The women’s group is planning a co-op of embroidery from six West bank villages as a means of empowerment and for the women to create income.

4f. Exhibitions

The Parents Circle-Families Forum has created a number of exhibitions. “Offering Reconciliation” was an exhibition of 135 ceramic plates created by Palestinian and Israeli artists. This exhibition was shown in Israel and then at the United Nations, the world Bank, and several other major venues and cities. In the “Cartoons in Conflict” project, more than 50 famous international cartoonists donated cartoons for an exhibition which has been displayed all over Europe and the United States. An exhibition create by the women’s group - “Fabric of War”, was shown at the Royal Festival Hall and will soon be displayed in Chicago. These projects generate media coverage and expose our message to people who would not normally know about the possibility of reconciliation.

4g. International activities

The Parents Circle-Families Forum send delegates all over the world to promote a message of reconciliation, including regular visits to the UK hosted by the UK Friends of PCFF. On recent trips to Britain we have spoken in parliament, been interviewed on three BBC programs and have had articles in the Guardian, Times and other UK newspapers. We have spoken on numerous university campuses and recently also spoke at the Regents Park Mosque and in several synagogues. We feel it is highly significant that universities, mosques, synagogues and churches are willing to host us as Palestinians and Israelis speaking in the same voice. Our message to international audiences is clear: “Do not be pro one side or the other but pro-solution, otherwise you import our conflict into your
country”. This message is particularly important in countries like Britain which have significant Muslim and Jewish communities, with considerable risk of tension.

4h. Documentaries

We have three documentaries which have been shown internationally and have won prestigious prizes from Amnesty International and other Human Rights groups. “Two Sided Story” looks at a people to people reconciliation project and the impact on its participants. “Within the Eye of the Storm” follows two men, one Israeli and one Palestinian, both of whom fought for their national cause, and both of whom lost a daughter in the conflict, in their search to understand one another. “One Day After Peace” follows Robi Damelin, an Israeli born in South Africa whose son was shot and killed whilst on military service in the West Bank, in her quest to learn lessons from South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Committee.