

## Report on Screening and Dialogue Event of CMRM and SISO SA

This report gathers evidence and participants' feedback from a first of a kind event, a screening and interreligious dialogue, which was initiated by the [SISO \[Save Israel Stop the Occupation\] South Africa](#) platform and the [Claremont Main Road Mosque](#), and hosted by the latter. The objective of this report is to raise opportunities and challenges for a future dialogue between Jews and Muslims in South Africa on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, based on the assumption that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a main factor for hostility and mistrust between the communities:

*"...the broad base of Jewish and Muslim Capetonians are sadly and dangerously polarised and outside of the workplace where "politics" is seldom discussed, there are few platforms to share perspectives."* [R, participant from SISO SA]

*"Feelings run high all around the World, and the Cape Town Muslim and Jewish communities remain extremely polarized."* [B, participant from SISO SA]

Hence, promoting a dialogue on this contentious issue, might promote the relations between the communities, as well as tolerance and understanding towards the prevalent narratives held by groups in both communities. It is also important to mention that religious communities in SA which engage in interfaith-dialogue, often avoid the Middle-East issue deliberately. Therefore, this event was a first of its kind in challenging the perception of a religious conflict, of "us versus them" often perpetuated by formal representations of the Diaspora communities, claiming to represent alleged sides of the conflict.

### Introduction of Concept: Screening and Dialogue

The event took place on Sunday, December 10th, between 20:00-22:30, and included an 86 mins screening of the documentary [Disturbing the Peace](#) [DTP], telling stories of transformation of Palestinians and Israelis who have establish a pro-peace bi-national movement called [Combatants For Peace](#) [CfP]; After the screening, a dialogue based on the film was facilitated by Mrs Jaamia Galant, the Mosque's organiser, inside the mosque, where CMRM congregants, SISO SA members and guests sat in a circle.

*"...it was a powerful experience for me to sit in a circle, suspend judgement and tune into the other."* [R, participant from SISO SA]



credit: CMRM

Many of the SISO SA guests reported they felt very welcome in the mosque by Mrs Galant and Imam Rashied, and one Israeli participant reported feeling difficulties based on fear to enter the mosque in the dialogue session, which were successfully overcome.

It is important to mention that prior to this event, on October 24th, at the Cape Town Jewish Museum, a screening of DTP and an internal community dialogue took place. This was an important pilot which proved to be successful in promoting respectful dialogue amongst members of the Jewish community from different ideological backgrounds, secular, Progressive and Orthodox. The leadership of the CMRM did not feel necessary to have a similar internal screening of DTP, claiming that the Muslim community in SA is relatively homogeneous on its stance on Israel-Palestine, and therefore we decided to have a joint event hosted at the mosque.

### **Feedback from Participants**

#### **1. Challenging prevalent perceptions of the conflict**

Engaging in a dialogue made some of the participants engage with brave conversations, confronting perceptions which seem hostile, and raising questions on the whole objective of that gathering.

*“How do we address the fears of Israelis without delegitimising them ?... I acknowledge that it is important for people to relate their own experience of Palestinian hardships but how does the same sterile blame game move the conversation along?” [S, Jewish participant]*

*“What do we as an interfaith group in Cape Town want to achieve by talking to each other?” [B, participant from SISO SA]*

Some comments seemed to block the acceptance of Jewish participants:

*“anyone suggesting parity between the holocaust and Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories immediately loses the attention of an Israeli/Jewish audience.”*  
[A, Israeli participant]

Due to the lack of time, there wasn't enough time to raise feelings or confront such parities in the circle. After the dialogue, though, an Israeli participants came to a Muslim woman who raised the comment comparing Israel to Nazi Germany, and shared her feelings about her comment.

## **2. Raising new perspectives and questions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

The movie and the dialogue raised thorough thoughts among the participants about the usual ways in which we relate to the conflict.

*“The idea of a one-state magic solution to the Palestinian deadlock seems back in vogue, and not just within the welcoming confines of the Claremont mosque. Why would anyone believe that in a world littered with failed attempts to fuse two antagonistic national societies into a single entity - it will be Israelis and Palestinians who will invent the exception to the rule... The gathering at the mosque proved just how important such ventures are. It illustrated the knowledge gap when it comes to fundamental points of a complex dispute, let alone subtle aspects.”*  
[A, Israeli participant]

*“The movie sparked challenging questions, some of which were raised in the discussion forum after the screening. These included amongst other things, the sanctity of human life in the context of a struggle for liberation; personal transformation towards peace and justice even against your own community; are there really two sides to the conflict; is recognizing the other an endorsement of a two state solution.*

*Although divergent views were expressed, the dialogue was respectful and augurs well for many more such dialogues between different faith communities.”*  
[CMRM report on the event]

## **3. Expansion of the concept of dialogue and engagement to the wider community**

While this was just a beginning, and even though leaders from both religious communities attended this event, spreading the word of engagement in dialogue can change perceptions among wider groups from the two religious communities.

*“I would suggest that a piece us written on this and sent to Jewish Chronicle and Jewish Report, perhaps with some kind of reference to SISO being the organisation that is starting these conversations where others are not willing to. I*



*would also suggest that the ZF be copied so they can see that constructive dialogue is possible.” [E, member of SISO SA]*

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SISO SA invites more interfaith communities to engage in dialogue on how Diaspora communities can play an active role in bringing about a peaceful change to the Israeli Palestinian conflict, and raise the pro-peace voice of the Diasporas of this conflict through challenging the narratives of sides to the conflict, through interreligious dialogue, screening of relevant films and hosting Israeli and Palestinian peace activists to strengthen the bonds between The Israeli, Palestinian and South African peace camps.



credit: CMRM