



# Center for Religious *Tolerance*

Religion as a Force for Peace

November 2010

## In Memoriam: Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari

This issue of the CRT Newsletter is dedicated to the memory of one of our dearest friends and closest colleagues, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari. In June, CRT joined peacemakers and religious leaders around the world who mourned his passing. He was 61 years old.

Sheikh Bukhari, or Aziz as he was known to his friends, was head of the Naqshbandi Holy Land Sufi Order and the Uzbek Holy Land Community. He was one of the founders of Jerusalem Peacemakers and the Abrahamic Reunion and the originator of the now-annual "Jerusalem Hug." In 2006, with tensions rising between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, he formed a partnership with the Abu Dis Society to provide training, youth education, daycare and support for small business development in the West Bank. During Operation Cast Lead, in 2009, he initiated a delegation of Arab youth and religious leaders to show solidarity with the students and teachers in Sderot and to share the pain of his own family's experience in Gaza. He traveled throughout Europe as a sufi teacher, and across the globe as a peacemaker. His generosity, unflappable calm, and combination of ancient and modern wisdom made a deep impact on everyone who met him.

Along with his wife Hala and their daughter Danya, Sheikh Bukhari welcomed visitors to his home on the Via Dolorosa in the Old City of Jerusalem. Many CRT peacemakers had the unforgettable experience of joining Aziz for spiritual discourse or political discussion on his rooftop overlooking the Dome of the Rock or in his personal study, with walls covered with ancient Ukbeki artifacts. He hosted several Abrahamic Reunion events at his home, which sometimes caused tensions with neighbors in the Muslim quarter.

The Bukhari family home also served as the Uzbek cultural center for the estimated 4,000 Palestinians of Uzbek heritage in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. It includes a library of ancient, hand-written Islamic manuscripts – which Aziz was passionate about preserving. Bukhari was a direct descendant of the Sunni scholar Imam Muhammed Isamil al-Bukhari of Bukhara, the ninth-century author of the Hadith al-Bukhari (a collected oral tradition that contains guidance about Islamic religious law and practice). His family migrated from Bukhara to Jerusalem in 1616.

Sheikh Bukhari was known for his spiritual wisdom as well as his progressive thinking. He once took several CRT peacemakers to visit his own spiritual teacher, who lives in Turkish Cyprus. The Cyprus spiritual community is very traditional, with strict separation of men and women. Aziz honored and respected his teacher and his customs, but back in Jerusalem, he taught men and women as equals. He once commented about his daughter Danya, "She is the future. She will be a great sheikha some day."



*With Danya*

## CRT Youth Programs

**Teens Talk it Out** is a new CRT program for Sarasota High School (SHS) students. Since September, groups of twelve girls and thirteen boys have been participating weekly in "study circles" focusing on social tolerance and nonviolence. The students are Guatemalan, Mexican, Honduran, Panamanian, African American, Asian, and Caucasian. According to the girls, the issues they worry most about are relationships with their families, lack of respect, racism, rumors, bullying, greed, stereotypes, and sex trafficking. The boys worry most about school violence, accountability, "snitching", verbal abuse, relationships with their parents, how to handle anger, racial profiling and the war in Afghanistan. The program, funded by a grant from the Rotary Club of Sarasota Bay Foundation, is led by Dr. Deri Ronis. See <http://www.c-r-t.org/project-young.php>

CRT is also expanding youth activities in other ways. Our first high school intern spent a month in Israel and blogged about his experience: <http://www.c-r-t.org/action-blogs.php>. CRT has been invited by the SHS History Club to talk with students about different religions, and an interfaith youth study circle including Muslim, Christian and Jewish youth is being developed with a grant from the Harry Kramer Charitable Trust.



## Sarasota Community Takes a Stand for Tolerance

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, almost 800 people gathered in the First Presbyterian Church in Sarasota to participate in an interfaith religious service and to take a stand for tolerance and understanding. The event was organized by an ad hoc committee of religious groups and organizations in response to a national wave of anti-Islamicism, including a threatened Koran-burning in Gainesville (which was ultimately called off). The service opened with the Muslim call to prayer, the blowing of the shofar by a Jewish man and a young girl, and a Christian invocation, and included prayers and readings from the sacred scriptures of the three faiths. The overflow crowd – many of whom had never before participated in an interfaith event – showed that religious intolerance has no place in the Sarasota/Bradenton community. “It was beautiful, it brought together people of all faiths. We have more in common than we do differences,” said Gloria Schnier, 75, who is Jewish. Imam Tarik Al Bouri noted that a Muslim is not a Muslim if he does not recognize Judaism and Christianity. Wendy Kelly, a Christian from Sarasota, said: “As I sat there and I saw Muslims Christians, Jews all sitting in a row, I felt connected to them all.” She plans on visiting a mosque in the near future. Follow up events are being planned.



WIN Co-chairs Arlene Pearlman, Sarah Zaouzal and Jacci Tutt (front row) at 9/11 Interfaith Service for Peace and Understanding

## News from the Peacemakers

In June, CRT participated in an invitational meeting on **Women, Religion and Peace Building** sponsored by the United States Institute on Peace (USIP) and Georgetown University. Women peacemakers from across the globe spent two days identifying ways to use faith and religion to bring peace to troubled regions of the world. An action plan was also developed.



Women peacemakers from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, South America and the US

**Women Reborn** has been selected to participate in an international project teaching filmmaking to women involved in social empowerment. Next spring, four women will receive training from a team of professional filmmakers, and will make a film of the program as their class project.

Women Reborn has also started a second project site in the nearby village of Ar'ara. Using funds from the original grant, a vocational training program has been started for a group of 15 women. According to **Ibtisam Mahameed**, the women will be “goodwill ambassadors” to the townspeople of Ar'ara, hopefully making it possible for the program to grow in future years.



Ibtisam Mahameed and Ghassan Manasra (center) co-host Ramadan Iftar banquet table.

**Eliyahu McLean, Ghassan Manasra, Ibtisam Mahameed and Abouna Abu Hatoum** led a group of over 200 Jewish and Arab educators, religious and community leaders in an interfaith Ramadan Iftar (breaking of the fast) in Nazareth on August 29th. Despite the tensions and sporadic outbreaks of violence that occurred over the summer, participants spoke eloquently about the need for co-existence. Both Israeli and Arab press covered the event.

On September 26th, CRT joined One Peace Jerusalem in a global prayer for peace. **Eliyahu McLean**, co-founder of Jerusalem Peacemakers and the Abrahamic Reunion, organized Christian, Muslim and Jewish religious leaders to pray together as the sun rose in the heart of the Old City in Jerusalem.

**Elana Rozenman** led 100 Palestinian and Israeli women on a walk and silent meditation for peace along the Goldman Promenade in Jerusalem on October 19th. Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Druze women offered prayers for peace. CRT joined Trust-Emun and the US Embassy in Israel in sponsoring the event.

The **Center for Religious Tolerance** and CRT's director **Andrea Blanch**, have both been listed in the US Peace Registry, an online list honoring individuals and organizations for their antiwar/peace related activities. See [www.uspeace memorial.org/registry.htm](http://www.uspeace memorial.org/registry.htm)