

Encounter Point

Synopsis

Encounter Point is an 85-minute feature documentary film that follows a former Israeli settler, a Palestinian ex-prisoner, a bereaved Israeli mother and a wounded Palestinian bereaved brother who risk their lives and public standing to promote a nonviolent end to the conflict. Their journeys lead them to the unlikeliest places to confront hatred within their communities.

The film explores what drives them and thousands of other like-minded civilians to overcome anger and grief to work for grassroots solutions. It is a film about the everyday leaders in our midst.

For 2 years, the Just Vision crew followed the stories of ordinary people who feel driven to work for an end to bloodshed and occupation in favor of peace. We traveled from Tel Mond to Tulkarem, from Hebron to Haifa documenting the courageous, painful and moving stories of regular people who refuse to sit back as the conflict escalates. These civic leaders navigate suicide bombings and checkpoints to confront militancy on both sides, the wounded and apathetic masses.

Encounter Point's Israeli/Palestinian/North American/Brazilian production team includes: director & producer Ronit Avni (formerly of WITNESS), co-director Julia Bacha (co-writer/editor of the award-winning documentary, Control Room), producers Nahanni Rous and Joline Makhoul, the first Palestinian female pilot. *Encounter Point* was edited in Jerusalem and Park Slope, Brooklyn, and features original music by Kareem Roustom, who combines classical Arabic melodies and instruments with traditional Jewish Klezmer to form a harmonious fusion that mirrors the subject matter.

Encounter Point's World Premiere was at the 2006 Tribeca Film Festival. The Canadian premiere was at Hot Docs, and the West Coast premiere was at the San Francisco International Film Festival, where it won the Audience Award for Best Documentary. *Encounter Point* has

subsequently won the 2006 Audience Award for Best Documentary at the Rencontres Film Festival in Montreal, the Best Musical Score Award at the Bend Film Festival and the 2006 Spirit of Freedom Award at the Bahamas Film Festival. It has screened in Dubai, Jerusalem, Jenin, Gaza, Ramallah, Amman, Sderot and more than 200 cities worldwide. It appeared on CBC in Canada as well as on Al Arabiya, one of the largest Arabic satellite stations in the world as well as on TV in Brazil, Poland, Korea, Australia and beyond.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Over the last decade, in the face of devastating violence and pain, thousands of ordinary people have been stepping forward to end the bloodshed, preserve human rights and promote reconciliation among Israelis and Palestinians. Yet even though Palestinians and Israelis who support peace outnumber the militants, their voices are continually drowned out by sensational, explosive headlines. Keenly aware of this gap in media coverage, I assembled a crew of Palestinians, North Americans and Israelis to document a few of these forgotten heroes.

After 475 preliminary interviews, 2 years of research and 16 months of production, our multi-national, multi-lingual team selected a handful of subjects from both sides, built unprecedented relations of trust with them, and gained deep access to their lives and work.

Encounter Point tells the story of several Palestinians and Israelis who have sacrificed something deeply precious to them as a result of the conflict. These characters have lost liberty, community, public standing, safety and homes. Some even lost children. Yet all have confronted their anger and grief in order to press for a dignified end to the conflict. As Ali Abu Awwad, one of the main protagonists of the film states, "Sometimes people ask me, 'how can you do this after all you've been through?' But I tell them, 'I don't have to love Israelis to make peace with them, and I'm not asked to forgive the soldier who killed my brother, I will never forgive him.'"

Our subjects' stories are by no means romantic; they face widespread opposition, and at times trip on their own feet. Yet they persevere. We follow them from Telmond to Tulkarem; from a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv to the funeral of a 12-year-old Palestinian girl in Bethlehem, to the first conversation between a former Israeli settler and a former Palestinian prisoner. The film's subjects are at the vanguard of a movement to push Palestinian and Israeli societies to reach a tipping point, forging a new consensus for nonviolence and peace. Perhaps years from now, their actions will be recognized as a catalyst for constructive change in the region.

Shot in Arabic and Hebrew by a team that wholly mirrors the subject matter, *Encounter Point* is a film about hope, about true courage and, implicitly, about silence – the silence of journalists and politicians who pay little attention to vital Palestinian and Israeli grassroots peace efforts. As Robi Damelin, a bereaved Israeli mother states, "There is no pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian, there is pro-solution." *Encounter Point* moves beyond sensational images and challenges all of us to look for the civic leaders within our midst.

Ronit Avni (2006)

PROTAGONISTS

ALI ABU AWWAD

Ali went to Saudi Arabia in 2000-2001 for medical treatment after an Israeli settler shot him in the leg. While there, he learned that his brother Yusef had been killed by an Israeli soldier. Ali had spent years in Israeli prisons for actions like demonstrating against the occupation, throwing stones, and membership in a political party. When Yusef was killed, Ali joined the Bereaved Families Forum to work with Palestinians and Israelis who advocate nonviolence and reconciliation. Ali braves hatred of the "other" on both sides, and the stigma against those who work with the "enemy" as he spreads his message of nonviolent resistance throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel, speaking with Palestinian militants and those threatened by Israeli settlers. Ali says that he will never forgive the soldier who killed his brother, but that he doesn't have to love Israelis to make peace with them. [Read Just Vision's in-](#)

[depth interview with Ali.](#)

ROBI DAMELIN

In 2002 a Palestinian sniper killed a group of Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint. Robi's son David was one of them. Robi is haunted by the loss of her son, and the knowledge that he was posted to defend an Israeli settlement in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to which he was politically opposed. After David was killed, Robi joined the Bereaved Families Forum. She speaks in support of Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation throughout Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and internationally. Robi says that all of her work is aimed at furthering understanding between the Israeli and Palestinian people. Robi sees echoes of her childhood in South Africa in the Israeli occupation. [Read Just Vision's in-depth interview with Robi.](#)

SHLOMO ZAGMAN

For most of his life Shlomo lived in Allon Shevut, an Israeli settlement near Bethlehem. As a youth, he actively supported a political party that advocated deporting Palestinians to neighboring Arab countries, until a religious Jewish mentor convinced him that Israel's continued occupation and settlement of Palestinian territory endangers its future. Shlomo and his wife left the settlement and moved to a city inside Israel, and Shlomo became a founding member of the Movement for Realistic Religious Zionism, a group working to encourage religious Israelis to support withdrawal from settlements. His public expression of his opposition to the occupation angered many people in his hometown. Shlomo embarks on a journey through the West Bank and Israel, questioning his own and his society's assumptions about the conflict, and moving beyond traditional Right- and Left-wing positions. [Read Just Vision's in-depth interview with Shlomo.](#)

TZVIKA SHAHAK

In 1996, Tzvika's daughter Bat-Chen was killed by a Palestinian suicide bomber outside a Tel Aviv mall. She was fifteen years old when Tzvika identified her body at the morgue. During the period of mourning, Tzvika and his wife Ayelet discovered that their daughter's diaries were full of poems about peace. They published Bat-Chen's poetry in Hebrew and Arabic, and became founding members of the Bereaved Families Forum, working with hundreds of Israeli and Palestinian families to end violence and occupation. Tzvika is a decorated war

veteran and believes a strong military is important for Israel, but that genuine security will come from making peace with the Palestinians. [Read Just Vision's in-depth interview with Tzvika.](#)

GEORGE SA'ADEH

One day George, his wife Najwa and their two daughters were driving home from the supermarket in Bethlehem. Israeli soldiers opened fire on their car, killing twelve-year-old Christine. George spent three days unconscious in intensive care with nine bullet wounds, while his wife buried Christine without him. Less than a year later, George joined hundreds of other Palestinian and Israeli families in the Bereaved Families Forum working together for reconciliation, and against violence and occupation. George says that as a Christian, he forgives the soldiers who killed his daughter, but that peace can only come when Israel ends the occupation of Palestinian territory. [Read Just Vision's in-depth interview with George.](#)

RUTIE ATSMON

When the phone rings in Rutie's unobtrusive ground floor office in the heart of Tel Aviv, it is most likely news about military curfews in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, or army-issued travel permits for her Palestinian partners—information that determines whether their workshops can go on. Rutie is the director of Windows, an organization that publishes a children's magazine in Arabic and Hebrew, and brings together Israeli and Palestinian youth. Rutie works tirelessly, refusing to be deterred by military checkpoints or fears in both societies, or the precarious balancing act of working with Palestinians confined to the other side of the Separation Barrier. [Read Just Vision's in-depth interview with Rutie.](#)

AZIZ TANJI

Aziz lives in the Palestinian city of Tulkarem, where he grew up in the local refugee camp. A social worker, Aziz is dedicated to improving the lives of Palestinian children. Believing that Palestinian and Israeli children benefit from meeting together and learning about each other's lives, Aziz became the co-founder of the Windows youth organization's center in Tulkarem. Though the Israeli army hasn't granted him a permit to enter Israel for years, Aziz communicates with the Israeli staff daily and hosts them when they come to Tulkarem. He and his Israeli colleagues struggle to overcome the endless obstacles posed by military occupation and conflict in order to work together.