



**Breaking The Silence**  
The Combatants Story

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**Annual Report**  
**2007**

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## **Introduction**

*Breaking the Silence* was created as a result of our re-introduction, as combat soldiers who served a long period of time in the occupied territories, into civil society. Upon returning to society, we discovered how great a gap exists between the experiences of a soldier serving in the territories and the picture painted for the “outside world”, in Israeli civil society. Now, after some three and a half years of extensive activity, our organization focuses on activities aspiring to narrow the gap between the awareness of many Israelis as to the situation in the territories and reality.

Over the years, the organization has developed more efficient ways of collecting testimonies, while also effectively developing the entire organization. Today, after interviewing more than 500 witnesses and publishing a substantial number of reports based on these testimonies, we are an important and reliable source of information for organizations dealing with Human Rights in Israel. The abundance of testimonies continues to come our way and is at an increase.

*Breaking the Silence* exists in order to call on Israeli society to face the moral and social problems that arise as a result of the military activity within the civil population in the Occupied Territories. The testimonies collected are the basis for extensive educational activity aimed at forcing Israeli society to deal with the every-day reality in the Occupied Territories. By these means, we strive to bring about an honest acknowledgement in Israeli society of the repercussions of the forty-year-long occupation and the moral cost of the continuing daily violation of Human Rights of the Palestinians living under this occupation.

At the same time, we draw public attention also to the high moral, social and psychological effects of doing the “job” there on the soldiers, acting on behalf of the country and its citizens. The whole of Israeli society has undergone a deep social change as a result of the conflict with the population of the territories. The effects of the continual friction with civilians heaved Israeli

society into an increasing state of a loss of moral judgment and distortion of the humanity of the Israeli collective.

*Breaking the Silence* stands out as a warning sign for all of society and compels it to ask itself genuine and difficult moral questions. Our work is made possible thanks to the weariless activity of dozens of devoted volunteers as well as donations on the part of public and private organizations financially supporting our activity.

## **General**

In the past year we interviewed approximately 90 combatants who agreed to testify about their service in the territories. The abundance of material collected compelled us to get organized appropriately and much of our activity was devoted to that over the past year. At the end of 2006 we added a position fully devoted to this task to our paid staff. This addition proved useful in that alongside the substantial developments in the educational activity we were still able to continue interviewing and processing information throughout 2007.

The focus of our educational activity this year, which was very well received, was 145 Hebron with guided tours in a total attendance of over 3000, in addition to some 50 gatherings and frontal lectures with a total attendance of over 1500. These numbers represent an increase in activity with more than double the amount of attendants than we had the previous year.

Our activity in Hebron intensified over the past year and became a focal point of our organization. A coalition of Human Rights organizations concerning the city of Hebron formed during 2007, and *Breaking the Silence* is a central part of this coalition. This action was taken as a result of the unbearable violation of Human Rights in Hebron. Consequentially, we thought it appropriate to concentrate much of our efforts to activities aimed at raising the public awareness to the situation in Hebron, in cooperation with voluntary organization active in the city. In addition to the educational work done in 2006, over the past year much effort was put into parliamentary and public-media related work.

We are very pleased to report that during the year 2007 we were able to engage additional partners who share our goals and cooperate in our increasing activity. The contribution of new organizations enables us to expand the existing activities and respond to new developments immediately.

## **1. Soldiers Speak Out**

The core of activity in *Breaking the Silence* is the collection and documentation of testimonies given by combatants who served in the Territories about the activity, commands and routine they witnessed during their service. The raison d'être of the existence of the organization and its most basic objective is to make public the voice of these combatants and tell the true tale of a generation of soldiers, "graduates" of the second Intifada which began in October 2000. The goal of the collection of the testimonies is to publish them, bring them to the awareness of society and sow the seeds for public discussion of the educational and moral issues that arise from them

During 2007 we interviewed some 90 combatants. The costs entailed in editing and producing this kind of material only enabled us to publish a small number of these testimonies. During the past year, 66 interviews were edited and researched and many of them already appear on our website. Some of the testimonies made their way to the electronic press, and were exposed to the public and received public attention. We are holding hundreds of testimonies which were not yet published because they were not yet processed and verified in the manner required when working with such sensitive materials. Many of these testimonies will never reach the public eye because we have no way of verifying them.

The editing and publication of the testimonies did not occur at the pace we originally hoped for, due to the great efforts and resources that the educational project required. We have therefore decided to produce one booklet of testimonies during April 2008. This booklet is now in the final stages of preparation and will be published at the beginning of 2008 as part of a more extensive campaign marking the 40 year anniversary of the Jewish settlement in Hebron. An additional booklet, which was supposed to be published in 2007 and contains testimonies of female soldiers, will also be published during 2008. It is important to note that the documentary film "No place for a Woman" produced by Tamar Yarum was partially based on these

testimonies. The film was widely publicized and also won a number of professional awards.

### **The Internet Site**

Our site was upgraded during 2007. We currently have an average of over 350 entries per day. This number represents a substantial increase in the number of visitors at the site in comparison to the previous year. The steady increase of entries is proof of the status the organization now holds as a reliable and accessible source of information for the public. In addition, we recently re-activated our mailing lists which include over 6000 subscribers.

## **2. Meetings with the Public – Lectures and Tours**

In order to achieve the goals of our organization: leading a public debate concerning the moral, social and educational problems which are surfaced by the combatant's testimonies, *Breaking the Silence* vigorously continues its direct, lasting and ongoing dialogue with the public. Many different methods are used for this purpose, including guided tours to Hebron, frontal lectures and movie showings, and participation in conferences and public discussions.

We made a conscious decision to put much effort and devote many resources to these activities after discovering the efficacy of this form of activity which is our means of creating the public response which is necessary for the debate we wish to promote. The direct exposure to the facts and reality of Hebron, including meetings with Palestinian families there in addition to a preliminary lecture and meetings with the ex-combatants who tell their personal story and experiences as soldiers in the occupied territories first-hand, created the basic awareness required for the educational process we are promoting.

We would like to note the important professional work of Dr. Nurit Pelet-Alchanan who continually supervises the project as an assessor and inspects the entire process, including the lecturers, guides, content and responses from participants, in order to promote and better train those involved in the project and improve our achievements in our work. We truly appreciate Dr. Peled-Elchanan's work and would like to express our sincere thanks for her dedicated and important assistance.



A meeting between Israeli high school students and Hani Abu Heichal in his home in Tel Rumeida. 08.05.07

We are very pleased with our accomplishments in these activities during 2007. Over the past year we held some 45 frontal lectures with a total attendance of over 1600. Most of these meetings were with adolescents in

different educational frameworks. We are now well established among educational youth organizations in Israel and our representatives are regularly invited to conferences and seminars intended for high-school students who are expecting their army service. Some of these lectures are given as part of academic courses in education, social studies and politics.

As an inherent part of the project, we have developed and expanded substantially, as much as three times, the number of guided tours in Hebron. During 2007 some 145 tours took place, attended by more than 3000 Israelis and other guests. Among our attendants we would like to note the



A guided tour to Hebron for a delegation of Rabbis from the U.S.  
15.07.07

participation of hundreds of youth facing army service, Knesset members, newspaper editorial boards, ambassadors, diplomats, foreign parliament members and many others. We wish to thank the activists from “Children of Abraham” for the time, effort, assistance and motivation to organize some of these tours with us. As part of the gatherings and tours we have distributed some 10000 booklets of testimonies which we are certain found their way to additional audiences.

### *Gatherings and Lectures Abroad*

During 2006 we held extensive activities abroad. The exhibition was shown in Europe and we held dozens of lectures and meeting with Jewish communities, especially in Sweden, Holland, England, the United States and Switzerland. In light of our aspiration to focus on local activities during 2007, we decided not to expand our activity abroad, except for a show of the exhibition in the US planned for the end of the year. Our cooperation with local organizations led to changes in our plans as a result of which the exhibition will be shown in February-March 2008 in Philadelphia and Boston.

In addition, we participated in the “Limmud” conference (a gathering of representatives of Jewish communities and organizations) in South Africa, during which a representative of our organization delivered five lectures with an attendance of over 400. In addition we gave a lecture on the University of Capetown campus with an attendance of over 200.

### **3. Hebron**

Of all the cities in the West Bank, Hebron represents the essence of the Israeli Occupation. The presence of a Jewish settlement in the heart of a Palestinian city exposes the true nature of the occupation and its moral and human corruption. The Palestinians in Hebron suffer from an ongoing violation of their human rights such as severe restrictions on movement, violence on the part of the settlers as well as security forces and more.

*Breaking the Silence* is now intensively involved in Hebron in two aspects of our activity. First, there is our educational activity as a part of which hundreds of youth facing army service visited the city. The objective of this activity is to expose the participants to the difficult reality of the occupation in the city and drive them to act as a response to the moral problems that arise from this reality. In addition to this, we focus on activity aspiring to make a change. For this means, we held dozens of guided tours for members of the media and leaders of public opinion in Israel and around the world, ambassadors and foreign diplomats, and members of the Knesset. In cooperation with other Human Rights organizations such as “B’Tselem”, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, “Children of Abraham” and others, we took different measures in order to raise the awareness in Israel and the world to the Hebron reality. Among these activities we would like to note:

#### **Photography**

At the beginning of the year we began a joint project with “B’Tselem” and “Children of Abraham” and distributed 30 cameras among Palestinian residents in Hebron in order to enable the documentation of different violations of human rights by the Settlers and security forces. Part of this documentation was shown in the local press and led to vast public reactions. The ongoing management of the project was entrusted in the hands of “B’Tselem” and continues vigorously to this day.

### Legal

Over the past year we actively assisted the Association for Civil Rights in Israel in exposing events and activities violating the rights of the Palestinian inhabitants of Hebron. We also aided the Peace Now Settlement Follow-up Staff in exposing and dealing with illegal settling activity which often takes place in Hebron.

### Knesset

In cooperation with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel and "B'Tselem" we provided relevant information to Knesset members which led to some discussions in the different Knesset committees, and we also guided a number of MKs in a tour intended to acquaint them with relevant facts about the reality in Hebron.



M.K. member Amira Dotan from Kadima at a visit in the Abu Eisha family, Hebron. 17.01.07

### The Media

As part of the guided tours in Hebron we gave a tour to the staffs of Ynet and Ha'Aretz as well as senior journalists from Israel and around the world. We hoped to widen the exposure of the difficult problems in Hebron, and the press coverage of the occurrences in the city was widespread and was significantly publicized, which affected the reality in the city.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to express our deepest gratitude to the dozens of dedicated volunteers without whom we could not have reached the many achievements we did over the past year.

We would especially like to thank Brad Brooks-Rubin for his part in producing and organizing the exhibition. To Tirza Flur, Rachel Afek, Tal Haran, Maya Negev, Ofer Neuman and many others for the dedication and willingness to do all the hard work of transcribing, editing and translating the testimonies. To Gavri Guy and Gilad Sofer for their assistance in the graphic design of our publications. To Ariel Shatil and Eli Sharon for all their help.

We would especially like to note our active cooperation with the Israeli and Palestinian members of "Children of Abraham". You actively assist our activities in Hebron and we are very grateful for that.

A special thanks goes to the members who attend the different activities and distribute our materials at lectures and conferences. To our members who are students who invest many hours between their studies at the university in order to promote our activities. To the soldiers, male and female, who agreed to tell their personal story and thus contribute to exposing the true reality of the territories.

*Breaking the Silence* is privileged with the support of many funds and organizations, among them: The Moriah Fund, The New Israel Fund, The British Embassy in Israel, ICCO, SIVMO, Die Schwelle and dozens of private and anonymous donors. We thank you all for your assistance, and we will still be dependant on you in the future. We see you as our faithful and proud partners.

Miki Kratzman, Chairman.

## **Board**

**Miki Kratzman** – Chairman – head of Photography at Bezalel, photographer and journalist in “Ha’Aretz”

**Niv Chaklili** – photographer and journalist

**Avi Mugrabi** – film director and journalist

**Dr. Nurit Peled-Elchanan** – Tel Aviv University School of Education and David Yelin

**Assaf Sharon** – Department of Philosophy, Stanford University

## **Activists**

Arnon Degani

Noam Chayut

Ziv Arnon

Omer Tzangut

Ilan Phatchi

Yona Boimfeld

Itamar Schwartz

Itamar Shapira

Shai Ben-Amitai

Yanai Yisraeli

Oded Naaman

Oren Klisman

## **Staff**

Dotan Greenwald, Michael Manekin, Ram Rahat, Yehuda Shaul, Avichay Sharon

All our activists are former combatants, some of whom were officers, and take part in our activities as researchers and lecturers. In addition, some 40 volunteers assist us in editing sound and video, transcribing the testimonies, graphic design and translating the materials into English.