

Ms. Lilach Ben-Arie, Israel

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I was born and grew up in Kibbutz Ein HaShlosa which is located right next to the Gaza Strip (3 km East) in the Negev desert of Israel. A Kibbutz is a communal agricultural community, and 300 of us work together to live sustainably with nature. I am 26 years old and I am studying special education. I did one year of volunteering in the civil society and 2 years of compulsory military service. As part of my military service I supported refugee youth from Eritrea and Sudan in accessing basic services while they were in detention. Later I worked for 2 years with teenagers as a social guide. Currently, I study in a college which encourages Arab and Jewish people to relate and study together to ensure that everyone has common classes.

During the last 12 years, I along with my family have had constant rocket attacks. We have all had to live in fear because every few days we are forced to hide in bomb shelters because terrorists have constantly been firing missiles at our little agricultural community of 300 people.

Peace-making dream:

I often dream of a country, Israel, where we can all sunbathe along the coast of the Gaza Strip - Jews and Israeli Arabs and Palestinians without problems of conflict. My dream is that we can eliminate all barriers to the Gaza Strip and West Bank without fear of terrorism blowing people up all over my country as has been witnessed in cafes, malls, restaurants, and buses.

I think that education will greatly help and enlighten people. We all need to be more tolerant of one another. I think if both sides really get to know what the other side thinks and respect their rights; peace would truly blossom in Israel and Palestine, and all around the world.