



## If you want peace, Start education from birth

**Mor Dekel, Chairman of OMEP Israel**

September 21 is the "International Day of Peace". There is a large talk about peace at a political and international level. Now, after two years of COVID-19 and the social chaos accompanying it, we ought to rethink the concept of peace.

The COVID-19 crisis we experienced is the "flood" of our days. This flood swamped on top of the health crisis, social, environmental, educational, and economic crises. These crises require a different strategic thinking; we have to build plans based on a holistic view. Today, adapting life along the COVID, we must treat the complex crises with a long-term view and think of peace: Peace between nations, between countries, between sectors, and between people. So, how do you get there?

António Guterres, the former general secretary of the United Nations, declared that education is a tool for realizing peace. He said in 2015 that humanity's well-being and future depend on solidarity and joint work, as they exist in a family, a global family. He said that solidarity is essential for people, for the planet, and for peace. In his words, "Strengthening democracies by guaranteeing the right to education is a basic tool that will make it possible to remedy personal and social suffering".

At the World Assembly of OMEP, the World Organization for Early Childhood (Panama, 2019), it was stated that "From a global point of view, many children, too many, live in poverty, hunger, inequality, or in an environment of armed conflicts; Children of immigrants, displaced persons, separated from their families or imprisoned; Children affected by climate change, pollution, environmental degradation and increased frequency of natural disasters; Children that are beaten due to racism, xenophobia, gender discrimination, or exploited for sexual needs or slavery". Peace is not only the absence of war but also eradicating poverty, racism, discrimination, and exclusion.

Recently, the whole world has been witnessing the war in Ukraine. The people of Ukraine are experiencing an unprecedented social and human crisis, and the primary victims are children and women. Solid global mechanisms are required to ensure a humanitarian response, which includes respect for rights and their establishment. A similar reality prevails in other countries. Some of the conflicts do not receive worldwide resonance, but in all of them, there is an expression of harm to the people (adults and children). This reality requires dialogue and understanding between countries and within the countries and achieving a commitment to ending violence, ending armed conflicts, and ending the arms trade.

### What is happening with us, here, in Israel?

During the last three years, we have been through the COVID-19 crisis, five election systems (and the sixth will be in November), an economic crisis, and a deep social crisis between communities and sectors. All of these are characterized by the symptoms of wars mentioned above: personal and social insecurity, conflicts between groups in Israeli society, suspicion, and harm. Some argue that the social division in the country stems from the conduct of the elected



Officials and the media, which set a model that educates hatred, aversion, and reluctance towards those who are not like you in their views, beliefs, or social affiliation.

### **So, where does the change starts? From the base! From early childhood!**

Israel invests in early childhood less than any other western country. Although the education budget exceeds the security budget, the average public expenditure in Israel on settings for babies and toddlers up to the age of three is about 75% lower than the average in the OECD countries. It is a quarter of the investment per child in Great Britain, 5% in Germany, and 2% in France.

Our children experience the results of the ongoing neglect of preschool education and the childcare system daily. They are forced to stay in settings whose conditions are far from satisfactory. Most of the settings are characterized by a large number of children, many children under the responsibility of one caregiver, and staff suffering from poor training and poor employment conditions, inadequate salaries, and the lack of appropriate training. These cause a growing shortage of staff members, a feeling of frustration among the working staff, and as a result, sometimes cases of severe abuse and violence against the toddlers.

OMEP Israel has served for years as the voice of babies and toddlers, whose voices are not heard. We repeatedly call for recognition of the fact that children are not born at the age of three and that the state should take responsibility for its citizens from birth. At the beginning of the school year, steps were taken in this direction, and the Ministry of Education began accepting the responsibility of babies from birth. Still, the responsibility is mainly on licensing, supervision, and too little on education.

It is well known that early childhood is the most critical age for a child's emotional, social, and cognitive development. There is no doubt that the current situation harms the development of babies and toddlers. This is an injury, whose results will manifest in future difficulties for integration in education and society. The state comptroller addressed the issue in a report in 2015 "What can be prevented at the beginning, or corrected relatively easily at a young age, becomes an impossible task later on".

Hence, the only conclusion is if you want social and political change. Invest in education from birth! Start with building a "culture of peace" is education for respect and tolerance from birth.

OMEP, since its establishment 75 years ago, has worked to build a more human world for children. Justice and peace are synonymous with the enjoyment of human rights from birth. The first president of OMEP, Alva Myrdal, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1982 and stated, "The longing for peace lies in the hearts of all human beings".

**Invest in the future generation of our society and thus create a just, peaceful, and inclusive society. Kids live in the present, but they are the future of our world.**

The New Hebrew year is almost here. In the name of the OMEP Israel management and members, I wish you all a happy new year! A year of happiness and peace for all the world's citizens from birth.