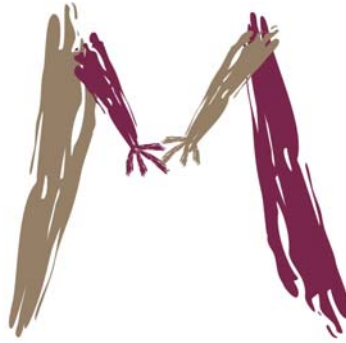


# Annual General Report



G R O U P E D I A L O G U E  
M O N T R É A L  
D I A L O G U E G R O U P

## Annual General Report To the Members

**Distributed at the Montreal Dialogue Group's Annual  
General Meeting, June 20, 2007**

# **MONTREAL DIALOGUE GROUP 2006-2007 ANNUAL REPORT**

## **Message from the Executive**

Managing the day-to-day activities of the Montreal Dialogue Group over the past few years has been challenging and rewarding. From its modest inception over 4 years ago, the MDG has evolved into a vibrant community of over 300 individuals committed to finding peaceful and humane venues for resolving conflict as well as serving as a model for others.

Of course, the road has not and will not be easy. To reconcile our differences and accept the narratives of the “other” we have to challenge our own beliefs and confront members within our own community. We were pleased to discover that ‘our community’ is not necessarily based on our place of birth, religion or culture – but our values. As our confidence and comfort level with our fellow members grow, our relationships mature and solidify. We have met a great many wonderful people through this organization and have learned so much from each and every interaction.

The MDG is heading into a new era, with new leadership, a new mission and a renewed focus. Over the past year, we clarified the MDG's mission, updated the bylaws, gained a better sense of issues within the Arab community, developed strong programs, initiated active Issues and Art groups and generated a great deal of positive publicity with the Middle East Comedy Night, Peace Concert as well as other engagements. Thanks to our tireless board, volunteers and members, we are confident that the MDG has the foundation needed to further advance the relationship between the Arab, Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities in Montreal and eventually abroad. It is an exciting time for the group as we hand over the reins with the greatest of confidence.

As we prepare to take a ‘back seat’, we look forward to continuing to be part of the MDG and to nurturing and developing our friendships.

Ronit, Jihad and Lesley

## **Overview**

We are proud to say that this has been a very successful year. As a relatively young organization, we have worked hard this year to consolidate and streamline the structure and the running of the organization, to meet the needs of our members, and to stay focused on our goals. We have had a number of challenges to deal with, including the war in the Middle East last summer, but working through these issues has helped us mature and gain experience so that we are now even better equipped to move ahead. In the coming year we hope to reach out to and participate with other communities in Montreal and to be more visible in the public domain.

The MDG has a vibrant community of people with approximately 30 to 50 attending our dialogue sessions and around 50 paid members.

## Governance

We will be reducing the number of board members from nine to seven. We would like to thank the six board members who will be rotating off the board, including our current co-presidents Ronit Yarosky and Jihad Bahlis. Ronit is a co-founder of the MDG and has worked non-stop since its inception. Her excellent leadership, wisdom and strong belief in dialogue have been crucial to the creation and development of this unique organization. Jihad Bahlis took on the role of acting co-president a year ago, as well as being treasurer, and with knowledge, vision and outstanding ability to problem solve, he has been invaluable in dealing with the many challenges an organization of this nature is faced with. Lesley Levy will be leaving after her two years on the executive as secretary. Lesley has been invaluable to the MDG and has worked tirelessly to ensure the smooth running of the MDG. Chaim Ronn a devoted member of the board and chair of the program committee for the past year brought us a variety of programs of excellent quality. Assem El-Chahal's knowledge of the history and sensitivity towards the issues proved most helpful and valuable. And last but not least, Herta Guttman's insights and clear articulation of the issues that solidified our bridge building efforts. We are delighted to welcome three new nominees to our board: Sharon Gubbay Helfer, Rania Arabi and Sheila Resels.

Position	2006-2007 Board	2007-2008 Board
Co-President	Ronit Yarosky	TBD
Co-President	Jihad Bahlis – Acting	TBD
Treasurer	Jihad Bahlis	TBD
Secretary	Lesley Levy	TBD
Board Members	Shahbaz Ashraff Len Bennet Assem El Chahal Behrooz Farivar Herta Guttman Chaim Ronn	Shahbaz Ashraff Len Bennet Behrooz Farivar
Board Nominees		Rania Arabi Sharon Gubbay Helfer Sheila Resels <b>Vacant</b>
Past Presidents (non voting board members)		Jihad Bahlis Ronit Yarosky

## Community Consultation Project

Thanks to a grant from the Jewish Community Foundation, the MDG hired Salwa Ghaly to conduct a consultation into the Arab communities to help us further our understanding of the relationships between the Arab and Jewish communities on both personal and communitarian bases. By reaching out to the Arab community, we are actively seeking to identify factors that will encourage more Arabs to join the MDG and partake in dialogue. The resulting 50-page report provided valuable insights and recommendations for the MDG. Some key recommendations have already been implemented, such as our new mission statement (see below) and revised bylaws (<http://www.dialoguegroup.org/data/mdgdraftbylaws.pdf>), and plans are underway to incorporate others. The report gave the MDG a unique opportunity to critically assess its progress and challenges vis-à-vis dialogue in the Arab and Islamic communities of Montreal and we hope to conduct a similar consultation in the Jewish community in the future. We are grateful to Salwa for doing such an outstanding and professional job. A summary of the report is on our website at (<http://www.dialoguegroup.org/data/mdgdraftbylaws.pdf>).

## New Mission Statement

Following the recommendations of the community consultation project, the board clarified the mission and goals of the MDG. The new text is presented below:

### Mission

We are the MONTREAL DIALOGUE GROUP, bringing Canadians of Palestinian, Israeli, Arab, Muslim, Christian and Jewish identities together in dialogue. We organize transformative events that foster open and honest communication. By focusing on active listening, we strive for understanding and empathy within and between our communities.

### Context

We are brought together by our common concern over the Middle East conflict and to ensure that the ensuing mistrust and divisiveness is not replicated in Canada.

### Core Values

- Equality. We recognize that the human rights of all Middle East residents including Palestinians, Israelis, Arabs, Muslims, Christians and Jews should be protected in accordance with International Law and the United Nations Charter of Human Rights. This includes the right for self-determination, freedom of speech and equal treatment.
- Humanitarian Approach to Solving Conflicts. We oppose violence and cruelty and highly value the human dignity of all groups and individuals.

### Goals

- Promote Cultural Understanding – through knowledge and education.
- Build Trust – through open communications and friendships.
- Alleviate Fear – through transparency and working towards common goals.
- Thrive Together – through joint projects/activities.

## Activities

Our regular dialogue sessions presented opportunities to dialogue on a wide variety of topics including; stereotyping, the Naqba, Refugees, the Holocaust and Bridge Building.

In addition to our monthly sessions, we held two successful fundraising events; in November our sold-out comedy night, Fun-da-mental Differences, and very entertaining, challenged stereotyping and raised over \$3,500. In May, our Peace Concert hosted by CBC's "Global Village" Jowi Taylor, was uplifting and provided an opportunity for Arab and Jewish artists to share the same stage and raised over \$1,500.

Last August, during the war in the Middle East, we held two dialogue sessions to further our understanding of the impact of this conflict on all parties, as well as a unique vigil downtown to honour all those who had lost their lives in the conflict. The vigil brought people together under the banner of 'Let's Talk' and focused on peaceful conflict resolution for all sides as opposed to supporting one side over another. It was a very moving gesture to bring people together at such a difficult time.

In May we held our first retreat for current board members and nominees, to facilitate transition and plan for the coming year. The tranquil location and beautiful day resulted in a very productive, enjoyable and memorable experience.

Our website, [www.dialoguegroup.org](http://www.dialoguegroup.org) has been regularly updated by Jihad Bahlis and has proved an invaluable tool for disseminating information and attracting new members.

## Special Interest Groups Reports

### The Issues Group – submitted by Boris Chasin

The issues group met 8 times between the fall of 2006 and the summer of 2007. The group was comprised of 10-14 "core" members, and several others who either attended occasionally or were connected through email.

We met in peoples' homes and everyone brought refreshments to share for the social time at the end. The demographic consisted predominantly of Jewish members, most of whom seemed "left-leaning" though this was in no way a monolith. We had a few Arab participants who were greatly appreciated and the lack of Arab membership was frequently commented upon.

We had formal meetings conducted by a chairperson in a respectful and considerate manner. People felt comfortable to express themselves and a wide variety of subjects were broached including: Iran, One voice, Leadership Crisis on Both Sides of ME Conflict, MDG Mission Statement, Identity and Role of the Issues Group, Protocol Within Group, Internet Activity, Definition of the other (i.e., Arab and Jew) and Jimmy Carter's book. Many people want the group to become more pro-active and involved in bringing the communities closer together. The group initiated a letter of support to a Muslim school that had been the victim of vandalism. We decided to strike a sub-committee composed of one Jew and one Arab to vet articles of interest to the group. Though some articles were interesting, this activity was not sustained.

Early in December, the Issues group had to contend with some unsolicited emails espousing a whole gamut of viewpoints and political opinions. Following an in-group discussion, it was decided that, with the exception of emails for the purposes of "housekeeping", all electronically disseminated articles and responses to them would be halted. It was strongly felt that face-to-face encounters within the group, while by no means "easy", were far superior to email exchanges in that they promoted real dialogue. Email exchanges, by contrast, seemed to sow the seeds of discord and give rise to misunderstandings, thereby risking compromising the work, mission and objectives of the committee.

As of this writing we have one more meeting to go for the season. It is a privilege for me to work with this group of committed, compassionate and intelligent people.

### **The Art Group** – submitted by Tali Goodfriend

During the fall semester we met on a monthly basis. We started by brainstorming and generating ideas on participant's interests and main objectives for the projects – but did not do any art. Some of the topics:

- “Partnering up photography” going into different homes and participating in dinners, parties or holidays and documenting via photography.
- Group projects vs. individual projects.
- Documenting “sacred spaces” and culminating with an exhibition.
- Explored the idea of working with Art Gallery Umm El-Fahm in some capacity.

During the winter the group decided to work on outreach art projects and present the idea to educational institutions such as: high schools, elementary schools and universities. My task was to write the introductory letter and make the initial contacts. We had successful contacts with several schools and it has taken months to set up and organize with the high schools. In June 2007 we will have our first all day workshop.

### **Charitable Status**

In May 2006, approximately 11 months after submitting the application, the MDG was granted Charitable Status – an important milestone for gaining stature within the community as well as raising funds.

### **Outreach**

The MDG gave several presentations on the virtues as well as our experience with dialogue over the past year. These included: Concordia University as guest lecturers in the Department of Religion, Peace and Reconciliation Conference held March 2007, the Padua Centre and others.

### **MDG in the News**

Both the comedy night and the peace concert provided ample opportunities for the MDG to publicize our mission, vision and goals. These included articles in the Gazette and Canadian Jewish News as well interviews on various radio stations including CJAD, MIX 96, CHOM and CBC.

## Our Friends

We would like to thank **The Westmount YMCA** who has generously offered us the space and equipment for our meetings. Gary White, the Executive Director, and Tracey Kamel, the Community Outreach Coordinator, are always willing and eager to help and take care of all the details.

We also thank the Jewish Community Foundation for providing the generous grant that enabled us to undertake our Community Consultation.

We are very much indebted to our volunteers who have organized all the special events and dialogue sessions. We thank everyone who came early to set up the room for the meetings, to those who made phone calls, brought cookies and spoke at our meetings. The MDG could not exist without the involvement of so many people.

## Financial Statement (April 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2007)

### Revenue:

- Membership Fees: \$1,075
- Donations: \$ 640
- Comedy Night \$8,755
- Public Meetings: \$ 527

**Total Revenue**                      **\$10,997**

### Expenses:

- Outreach Program: \$4,014
- Wreath Laying Ceremony: \$ 400
- Comedy Night \$5,203
- Peace Concert \$ 34
- Public Meetings \$ 669
- Operating Expense \$ 631
- Web Site / Email List \$ 280
- Professional Fees \$ 570

**Total Expenses**                                      **\$11,081**

Net                                      **(\$804)**  
**Start of Year**                      **\$6,272**  
**End of Year**                        **\$5,468**

## **Contact Us**

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