

# IMLA Mission to Israel



## **A group of thirteen people consisting of IMLA members and their spouses/partners recently participated in the IMLA Mission to Israel.**

“On the first day, we were led by our guide, Avsha Rotman, on a walking tour of the ancient port city of Jaffa, with building ruins from the Pheonician period dating back 5000 years, and the most beautiful areas of modern Tel Aviv. Dr. Einat Wilf, Senior Fellow with the Jewish People Policy Institute and former foreign policy advisor to Shimon Peres, spoke to the group at the opening dinner that evening, providing an excellent overview of current geopolitical issues facing Israel and a pragmatic analysis of the complexities surrounding efforts to arrive at a principled, comprehensive approach to the two-state vs. one-state alternatives, all of which have proven to be elusive. Wilf is author of several books, including *Telling Our Story, Essays on Zionism, the Middle East and the Path to Peace*. She stressed the importance of the various definitions of Judaism in understanding the complex dynamics of Israeli society and politics.

On November 26, we were treated to a detailed and revealing discussion of the Jewish Connection to the Land of Israel by Dr. Ian Stern, a renowned archeologist, scholar and educator, followed by a walk along Rothschild’s Boulevard formerly known as the Street of the People, with a stop at Independence Hall where the new State was declared in 1948. We then enjoyed a lunch and discussion with Erica Solomon Vassar, CEO of the Israel Bar Association, visited Tel Aviv University where we met with representatives of the faculty of law, followed by a visit with Uzi Salman, Tel Aviv General Attorney, capped off by dinner that evening with Michael Snowden, Counselor for Political Affairs with the U.S. Embassy for a discussion on U.S.-Israel relations.

On November 27, we had a lively and very engaging meeting with the legal advisor and representatives of the Federation of Local Authorities who gave us an overview of their legal and professional responsibilities for civil and criminal matters involving Tel Aviv municipal government, the intricacies of their roles within each community, and the municipal challenges faced in different sectors around Israel. Following lunch at the Fish Market in the new in town Saron Mall, we met with Daniel Reisner at the Herzog, Fox & Neeman law offices for a discussion of the legal status of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Reisner is widely recognized as the Godfather of Israeli Experts on international law and war crimes, with prior service as a Head of the International Law Branch of the IDF Legal Division. This was followed by a meeting focusing on Israel’s Narrow Waistline, with a briefing on current issues from the West Bank Settlement led by the former Deputy Director of the Israel Government Press Office (Prime Minister’s office) who currently works at the Weizmann Institute of Science. We then traveled north to Galilee for a memorable dinner meeting at Dubrovin with Rasool Saade, Director of the Safe Communities Program at the Abraham Fund Initiatives and former Department Head for the Advancement of Arab Students at the Israel Student Union.

On November 28, we ascended the Golan Heights for a geopolitical update on the Syrian Civil War and its impact on Israel provided by Captain Ilan Schulman, former IDF paratrooper and intelligence officer, then contin-



ued on to Jerusalem, where we enjoyed an overlook of the city from the Mount of Olives and a visit to the City of David, the historic nucleus of the ancient capital of Jerusalem established 3000 years ago by King David, with time to explore the excavations and recent archaeological developments, a visit to the Western Wall, and a dinner that evening with Anat Hoffman, CEO of Women of the Wall.

On November 29, our group visited the Temple Mount and viewed the Dome of the Rock and al Aqsa Mosque, an area that since 1187 has been under the rule of Waqf, an Islamic religious trust. This was followed by a lunch meeting with Tomer Naor, Chief Legal Officer of the Movement for Quality of Government in Israel, a visit with Batzion Ben-David Gerstman, a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who led a discussion on Israel, Gaza and the Law of Armed Conflict. This was followed by a uniquely engaging tour of the Israel Supreme Court and informative meeting with Justice Daphne Barak-Erez, who provided helpful insights into the work of the appellate court and its unbelievable case load, and led a discussion of internal procedures, court practices and a practical look into the work of the Court. Uniquely, in addition to its appellate work, the Supreme Court sits as a court of first instance in human rights cases involving the government. There are 15 justices who usually sit in panels of three, although there are larger panels in some of the more controversial cases. On November 30, we enjoyed a breakfast meeting and presentation by Ran Bar-Yoshafat, Deputy Director of the Kehelet Policy Forum Research Institute, who discussed the Law of Return as a Just Law and provided very conservative but clear viewpoints on national issues and the multiple sides of the difficult and unbelievably complex policy issues faced by Israel. This was followed by a memorable visit and comprehensive tour of Yad Vashem, including the Historical Museum, the Children's Memorial and the Hall of Remembrance. For lunch, we were led by Arava Alon on a multicultural tasting tour of a fresh produce market, Machne Yehuda, and were guided through scores of ethnic market stalls and allowed to sample the delicious wares and diverse cultural tastes that included Kurdistan, Georgian, Iraqi and Yemeni and many more cultures. This culinary treat was followed by a meeting at the tomb of Samuel with Shaul Arieli, one of Israel's leading experts on the demarcation of the future Israeli-Palestinian board and the route of the separation barrier. Part of Arieli's military service included responsibility for preparing the official negotiations with the Palestinians, service as head of the Peace Administration of the Barak Government and a leading negotiator in the process that led to the Geneva initiative in December 2003. Following a tour of Bethlehem, our group enjoyed a delicious Shabbat dinner with the family of the former Israeli Ambassador to the United Kingdom.

On December 1, we traveled to Masada and took the cable car to the top of this historic mountain where 960 men, women and children were the last to resist the Romans during the great Jewish revolt 2000 years ago, a tragic, ancient story that has become synonymous with Israel's quest for freedom and independence in modern times. This was followed by lunch and a swim at the Dead Sea, the lowest place in the world. This was a memorable experience for the IMLA local government attorneys and their guests who participated in the IMLA Mission to Israel. Our guide, Avsha Rotman, was the key to a successful trip from start to finish, as were the staff and travel professionals with Israel Seminar."

