

# OneVoice movement comes to U of A for Middle East peace talk

SEAN STEELS  
News Staff

Daroub Yacoub, a young Palestinian woman, remembers the moment she realized she wanted to speak out for peace in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Not that she could forget coming home to find the street in front of her house lined with military tanks.

The Alumni wall in front of which she and Maya Epstein, a young Israeli woman, are speaking to a small number of students might remind Epstein of a similar installment on her own campus. There's only a small difference between the two exhibits: the wall on Epstein's campus is decorated with the names of the seven students killed in her cafeteria by a suicide bomber, not with alumni.

Maya and Daroub have been brought together to speak at North American universities about their experiences by the OneVoice Movement, a non-partisan, grassroots organization dedicated to resolving the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in the Middle East. They are aware of the unique nature of their friendship.

"This," Maya said, waving her finger back and forth between herself and Daroub, "does not happen everyday."

The battle over the land in the Gaza strip has turned the two cultures into alien neighbours. They explained that the conflict, spurred on by a small minority of violent extremists, has cut traffic between the two states down to a paperwork-laden trickle. Most people don't believe that the side opposing them would ever be willing to co-operate or keep promises that could lead to conflict resolution. At the same time, a poll conducted by OneVoice determined that 76 per cent of Israelis

and Palestinians support a peaceful, two-state solution.

Laurel Rapp, OneVoice's international education program manager, explained that through the use of its two branches, OneVoice Palestine and OneVoice Israel, the organization is coordinating state-unique efforts at the grassroots level to foster an atmosphere of trust and compassion between the silent and peaceful majorities of the two groups.

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**LAUREL RAPP**  
ONEVOICE INTERNATIONAL  
EDUCATION PROGRAM MANAGER

"What we have are two separate nationalist movements, OneVoice Palestine and OneVoice Israel, who are working for very different reasons but ultimately share the same goal of ending the conflict and establishing a two-state solution," she explained.

"We do very few joint activities for two reasons. The first is logistical. Israelis cannot go to the West Bank or Gaza, and Palestinians [...] require a lot of paperwork [...] to get travel permits to Israel," she said. "The second is we also realize that, at this point, we're

a bit of a ways from bringing Israelis and Palestinians together to love each other."

But despite stumbling blocks created by over half a century of distrust and death, OneVoice has managed to break ground in the peace-making process. They've obtained over 650 000 signatories to their cause, with an equitable divide between Palestinian and Israeli participants. In the years since the organization's 2002 debut, it has also expanded to stem the conflict on an international stage with their campus presentations in Europe and North America.

"It's so clear that this conflict isn't isolated to the West Bank," Rapp said. "Coming to North America, you'll find that this conflict replicates itself on university campuses. What we're trying to do is bring moderate voices for resolution to campuses and show that Canadian students can be part of the solution rather than the problem."

Jay Cairns, administrator of the Jewish Students Association (JSA) at the University of Alberta, fell short of directly endorsing OneVoice's cause, but agreed that there should always be a venue for positive dialogue.

"There are many students that feel various ways about [conflict resolution], but the point for us is that we need to start focusing on peaceful solutions," he said.

He explained that the JSA doesn't take a political stance on the issue. The JSA's first and foremost priority is the support it provides for university students and the security of the Jewish community on campus.

"Whether [the solution] is one-state or two-state, that gets into the political arena, and that's something that we're not prepared to do," he conceded. "As it stands, we're very happy with the situation on U of A campus. It's very tame."

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## CORRECTION

In the article titled "Students take another swipe at credit card issues" in the Thursday, 20 March issue of the Gateway, an error was made during editing that changed the meaning of a paraphrased quote attributed to SU President Michael Janz. The line, which read "... but explained that student leaders have given up on fighting the decision," should have read "... but explained that student leaders have not given up on fighting the decision." The Gateway would like to apologize to our readers and the SU for any confusion this may have caused. We would also like to point out that Michael Janz is the embodiment of hard work and will continue to fight for students as BoG rep next year. Additionally, he exhibits the following qualities: friendly demeanour, sense of humour, understanding, ability to forgive, eloquent speech, appreciation of fine wine, and curator of Chinese antiquities.

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