

CG Jerusalem Unveils Collaborative Mural

Inspired by a local school's message of peaceful coexistence, the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem brought Israeli and Palestinian students together with two American artists to turn a message of hope and peace into art. The students were from Jerusalem's Hand in Hand School, founded to teach coexistence and create a safe environment for children from varying backgrounds to learn together, apart from the region's political divide.

Artists Max Levi Frieder and Joel Bergner worked with students to create a wall mural that is not just a pretty painting, but a depiction of the troubled past and hopeful future for the Middle East. Looking from right to left, as done when reading both Arabic and Hebrew, the mural's message evolves from a painful disunity among diverse peoples to a brighter day in which differences are embraced. The artwork envisions a society where citizens from all backgrounds can join together in empowered common humanity, an ideal that the multicultural participants proved through the creation of this mural.

More than a dozen Hand in Hand students painted the mural on seven sheets of thick Plexiglass that, when fully assembled, stretched 12 meters across and 3 meters tall. Each piece of Plexiglass weighs 111 kilograms and required a team of eight contractors to transport and



Artist Max Levi Frieder explains the concept behind the mural as Consul General Michael Ratney looks on at the unveiling event, June 3. Photo by Isaac D. Pacheco

mount at Consulate General Jerusalem's Arnona Consular Compound. Consul General Michael Ratney led an unveiling ceremony attended by the artists, students, mission staff and local media. There, he reiterated the message of common humanity among diverse people.

Selecting the compound's courtyard to display the mural was significant. Each day, hundreds of people from varying ethnic, religious and political groups pass through the visitor's area to apply for U.S. visas and passports or other consular services. They now can stop to admire the mural and see the message that coexistence is possible. The mural's creation not only allowed the consulate general to facilitate a fun event for Palestinian and Israeli students, but it serves as a daily reminder to everyone of America's commitment to Middle East peace. ■