

Perspectives in Infant Mental Health

Professional Publication of the World Association for Infant Mental Health

President's letter from Prague: Tel Aviv (Israel)

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By Miri Keren, M.D., WAIMH President, Israel, ofkeren@zahav.net.il, Sam Tyano, M.D. and Ghassan Abdallah, Ph.D.

Tel Aviv, 7/10/14

Dear WAIMH members, dear Colleagues,

As many of you know, our 2016 conference was planned to take place in Tel Aviv, and organized by a joint Israeli-Palestinian Local Committee, as an active step of WAIMH to provide a template for dialogue between professionals in areas of conflict and turmoil around the world.

Two weeks after the Edinburgh conference, the political situation in Israel and Palestine has quite unexpectedly deteriorated, the long-lasting well-known existing conflict escalated, and a full-blown war broke, with all its disastrous consequences. On July 20th, a letter from the Board of Directors of WAIMH was sent to our members, explaining the rationale of the decision to hold its 15th World Congress in Tel Aviv, a city in the Middle East which is currently afflicted by the hostilities. The intent was then and is now to work together with both local Israeli and Palestinian colleagues on behalf of babies, their rights to a safe and peaceful existence, and their families. Infant mental health specialists from both sides, Israel

and Palestine, restated this commitment at the 2014 World Congress in Edinburgh. In their view, coming to Tel Aviv means supporting our Palestinian and Israeli WAIMH members who are jointly standing up for the infants' rights and essential needs in the middle of political conflict.

As we wrote then, we promised to carefully monitor the safety needs of all conference participants. Following the violent phase of the conflict, we are now in a phase of high uncertainty.

This uncertainty has already engendered feelings of uneasiness and ambivalence among many, including among those who understand the complexity of this deep-rooted conflict. Moreover, on the practical level, we may face a very unpleasant financial situation with last-minute cancellations of flight tickets, accommodation reservations, social events etc...

Therefore, with a strong concern for your sense of safety, together with our strong will to keep the idea of science as a bridge for dialogue and mutual recognition, the Board of WAIMH has unanimously decided to keep the joint Palestinian Israeli Local and Scientific committees but to move the conference from Tel Aviv to Prague.



Ghassan Abdallah and Miri Keren at the WAIMH 14th World Congress Opening Ceremony.

Photo by Simon Williams.

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Prague has been chosen because it is an easy-to-access city for our Palestinian colleagues in terms of visas, and is relatively inexpensive and affordable to our local Israeli and Arab Infant Mental Health professionals.

Last, but not least, the announced theme of the conference was originally «Supporting Babies and Families in a Rapidly Changing World». We feel that in the light of the events that led to the relocation of the conference, the theme needs to be changed into

Infant Mental Health in a rapidly changing world: Conflict, adversity, and resilience.

With the strong personal conviction that we, as mental health professionals, have a special role in times of turmoil and conflicts, as we are facing today in various areas in the world, we invite each of you to come to Prague and to share with us your clinical and research work about Infant Mental Health in various contexts of challenges and opportunities. The overwhelming pace of high-tech developments, that characterizes the 21st century, has added a new dimension to our work that needs to be addressed.

This will indeed be an unusual WAIMH conference, where the Local Committee gathers professionals from two societies in conflict, and has the challenging task of organizing the conference in a country outside of their own. We all share the strong conviction that this is the adequate answer to WAIMH ultimate aim to provide a «transitional space» for spreading scientific knowledge in the field of IMH and promoting clinical reflective skills...

With this deep conviction in our hearts, we personally invite each of you to attend this unusual 15th WAIMH conference in Prague (May 29th - June 2nd, 2016).