Israeli Music Project Koolulam Brings Jews, Christians and Muslims Together at Tower of David

By Eliana Rudee June 18, 2018

“And so they went to Yehoshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Yisrael, We come from a distant land; we propose that you make a pact with us.”
Joshua 9:6 (The Israel Bible™)

When a rabbi, sheikh and priest meet, it may seem like the start to a bad joke, but on June 14 at the Tower of David, the meeting of religious leaders from the world’s three largest monotheistic faiths was no joke.

With a mission to build interfaith dialogue, people of all religions and backgrounds came together on the last day of Ramadan to sing Bob Marley’s “One Love” together at the historic Jerusalem citadel.
Koolulam is a social musical project created to bring together people from all walks of life in the Israeli social spectrum through a joint musical creation. For each event a well-known song is chosen, which is given new musical arrangement and vocal harmonies. April’s Koolulam event in Tel Aviv went viral after thousands, including the President Reuven Rivlin, participated in Tel Aviv’s Menorah Mivtachim Arena to sing Naomi Shemer’s “Al Kol Eleh” for Israel’s 70th anniversary.

The event was held with the Tower of David Museum, Israeli music project Koolulam and Jerusalem.com and with the cooperation of the Interfaith Encounter Association, Coexistence Trip Initiative, Tiyul-Rihla, the World Jewish Congress, Bayt ar-Rahmah and over 50 other local and international organizations that work on dialogue and interfaith relations.

Before the main Koolulam event, religious leaders gathered for a colloquium on how religion can serve as a bridge to mutual understanding, compassion and peace between people of all faiths and backgrounds in Israel. Hosted by Dr. Yehuda Stolov, CEO of the Interfaith Encounter Association, the meeting was attended by Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf (Pak Yahya), the Secretary General of the world’s largest Muslim organization, Indonesia’s Nahdatul Ulama, which has more than 60 million members. According to Dr. Stolov, Sheikh Staquf promotes a “committed Islam, but an Islam of love and compassion, which is very important for Jews and Christians to meet.”

“The function of religion is to solve conflicts around the world – it should not be the justification for conflict,” Sheikh Staquf told Breaking Israel News. “This event shows the world that everyone has a strong desire for peace. It facilitates leaders to think about which elements are needed to activate and to pursue harmony with one another. Hosted in a city that everyone shares as a center is not only exciting, but touching.”

In the context of an inability for political leadership alone to deliver peace, Dr. Stolov told Breaking Israel News that interfaith encounters of everyday people, guided by religious leaders, is the best method for creating constructive friendships and opportunities to leverage tradition for the purpose of peace. He lauded the Koolulam music event as complementing the evening colloquium, illustrating how people with different voices can harmonize together and create something beautiful.
“Different voices don’t need to compete – we can come together in harmony and allow people to discover that it’s not a zero-sum game,” he explained.

Father Francis of the Community of the Beatitudes, a French Congregation in Emmaus-Nicopolis next to Latrun, told Breaking Israel News that he came to Koolulam to “bring people together, break down prejudice and form interfaith dialogue with the Jewish community in Israel.”

“We have a special love for Israel and we try to create bridges of reconciliation, healing and friendship,” he maintained, adding that his congregation adds Jewish liturgy into their musical rituals, bringing Jews and Christians together.

As with every Koolulam concert, the event produced a powerful cinematic clip that will be distributed around the world on June 28. Filmed at midnight, with the breathtaking view of the Old City, the clip will show hundreds of strangers from various religions and backgrounds gathering at the now the iconic symbol of Jerusalem and gateway to the Old City, the Tower of David. The ancient citadel has guarded the city for hundreds, and in some parts, thousands of years and brings into its walls the cultures and traditions of Jerusalem.

Eilat Lieber, Director of the Tower of David Museum, told Breaking Israel News, “The Tower of David is a unique symbol of the city, as it is the only building in Jerusalem that has never been destroyed. In it, you can identify all the different cultures that have been in Jerusalem over the last 2,700 years. It remains a fortress of spirit rather than a fortress of power.”

“The Tower of David Museum is “proud to be able to host this unifying event within the walls of the ancient citadel. The Tower of David stands at a point where old meets new and bridges between east and west and we welcome the opportunity to bring so many people throughout the world together promoting messages of peace, respect and friendship,” she said.

The participants, from different corners of the world, took part in the inspiring activity of Koolulam where they learned innovative musical arrangement of Bob Marley’s “One Love” in three languages and three voices.

“This kind of event is the very essence of Koolulam, which wants to inspire people through music regardless of race, religion or sex. This event is dedicated to a song for hope: hope for equality, empathy and friendship between different sectors. We welcome the opportunity to take part in such an event and to spread the hope that there will be a future of a shared song coming from people of different backgrounds and religions,” said Koolulam Co-Founders Or Taicher and Ben Yefet.

Taicher, Koolulam’s Artistic Director told Breaking Israel News, “this event is a type of social prayer – we want people to people to pray for each other and with each other.” He explained, “the music is not the issue, but rather it’s the tool to bring inspiration to those who come into Koolulam as strangers and go out as a group with a new creation – a song.”
“In a city where so many people fight for being here, we sang tonight about togetherness and hope,” Taicher added.

Yefet, Koolulam’s Musical Director told Breaking Israel News, “We believe in people and their ability to change the world. Our goal is to connect people no matter what background they belong to.”