

Celebrating Humanity's Contradictions Around a Shared Table

For the Ruth and Yael Dayan Prize

Community, for me, is a space where identities are acknowledged fully and equally legitimate and enriching. *Younited* is that community. We gather here—Israeli, Palestinian, and international peers from over twenty nations—each carrying their own narratives, dances, and hopes in luggages on their way to Givat Haviva, Israel. The importance of this community lies in every interaction, every conversation we hold where difference isn't avoided but engaged with.

When I first joined *Younited* nearly three years ago, I was an angry kid. Angry at injustice, angry at division, angry because I didn't know where and to whom I belonged. To be an Arab Palestinian citizen of Israel, my mother said, is “to belong and not belong at the same time”. It is that feeling to be split between two worlds—never fully one, never fully the other. The state's divisions had become my own. It felt almost extraordinary, even forbidden, that I could share a dorm room, a meal, or even my pain with an Israeli Jew.

But something shifted at *Younited*. It started with a class discussion about national identity where opinions clashed and emotions ran high. What struck me most wasn't the disagreement—it was the willingness to stay in it. I realized that understanding begins not when everyone agrees, but when we listen long enough to recognize the truth in someone else's story.

Younited transformed me from an angry kid into an empathetic leader. I began stepping into spaces I once avoided. Today, I lead student initiatives that bridge divides as part of my leadership at *Younited*, and I guide simulations in local embassies where young leaders negotiate possible ways to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict. Moreover, I founded *Yalla Peace!*, a global

youth movement bringing youth together through the imagination of a shared-society to study politics and dialogue, and implement change in the form of community-based projects. Through these experiences, I learned that peace isn't the absence of conflict; it is listening to unusual narratives while embracing your own. It begins not when we erase the past, but when we name it fully, truthfully, and together.

Just last month, on October 21, our community organized the *Spiral of Pain*, a shared space for grief. I had the privilege of mourning both the loss of life on October 7, 2023, and the devastation that followed in Gaza. We did what many other young people in global conflicts can't do: we told stories, shed tears, reflected, and sang songs about peace. We acknowledged one another's pain, we felt it too; we remembered them, we owe them remembrance.

I'm privileged to belong to Younited, privileged to be part of that group of teens who refused to sacrifice their humanity for hatred. I am privileged to grieve with my Israeli friends, to remember my Palestinian people, and to take part in humanizing an inhumane war. In Givat Haviva, fear became a thing of the past, alienation made obsolete. Enemies turned human, turned friends.

I didn't always know I was Palestinian. But now I do. And I know that being Palestinian doesn't mean I'm against someone else's existence. It means I'm for dignity, memory, and a future where stories don't have to compete but can coexist. Existing, for me, means to keep asking questions—hard, honest ones. It is why I now aspire to contribute to the resolution of the Israel–Palestine conflict through dialogue and celebration of variance, and why I still flinch when I see someone flatten my identity into a political label.

As global polarization intensifies, I've come to see Younited as a living example of what peace can look like: diverse, imperfect, but sustained by empathetic leaders. Peace, I've learned, is not a declaration, it's a practice. One that requires celebrating humanity's contradictions around a shared table. It is the small, everyday acts of openness, of choosing to listen when it's uncomfortable, to ask rather than assume. Peace is to greet my Israeli friends every morning, saying "*boker tov*"; they reply with: "*sabah en-nour*" (Arabic for good morning; literally "morning of light").

My experience at Younited has not only shaped my understanding of peace, it has shown me that I have a role in building it. I am no longer the angry kid who thought peace required identity to be diluted. I am the leader who knows that peace built on strong, unapologetic identities is the most sustainable kind. My membership in Younited is hence a **promise** of what the world could be.

Madian Marana, 2025