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YALA-YOUNG LEADERS

The recent upheavals in the Arab world, led by the new generation and spread through social media, have shown that the young people of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are powerful agents for positive change. From the *Yasmin* and *Tahrir* revolutions, through the struggles for liberty in Syria, Libya and Yemen, to the struggle for social justice in Israel, the youth of the region has shown its willingness and ability to mobilize for greater freedom, equality and solidarity, opening a historic window of opportunity. Nearly 65 percent of the population in the MENA region is under the age of 30; about 30 percent of the population is between the ages of 15 and 24.

The YaLa-Young Leaders Movement, founded by the Peres Center for Peace and YaLa Palestine, was launched in May 2011 as a Facebook-based movement (www.facebook.com/yalaYL) promoting dialogue and engagement as means to securing a safe, productive, and peaceful region. In just one year since its birth, YaLa has grown to over 100,000 members and has become the broadest and fastest-growing regional change movement today. 80% of YaLa's members come from the MENA region (in particular from Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Algeria, Israel, Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen), with the remaining members coming from the wider international community. Through regular dialogue and concrete initiatives, YaLa members are working together to create and enact a new vision for a region of freedom, equality, prosperity and peace.

LOOKING BACK: THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF YALA

Launched on May 24th, 2011, YaLa-Young Leaders quickly grew to tens of thousands of members within the first months of operation. Among the first initiatives of YaLa was a photography contest themed “My City, My Life” in which Palestinian & Israeli members were encouraged to submit photos expressing their relationships with their urban or rural surroundings. The contest was intended to give community members a visual peek into the day-to-day lives of one another. The subject chosen for the competition, “My City, My Life”, brought to the fore photographs varying from the overtly political, to more universal images that required captions to identify the locations in which they were taken. Reactions to the competition and to the photographs overwhelmingly demonstrated the value of making visual acquaintances with the reality of “the other” – community members had the opportunity to see differences and similarities between Palestinians and Israelis and within each of the societies. From the dozens of photos submitted to the contest, the two that received the most votes on the YaLa Facebook page, photos by Yuval Hidas and Mohammad AlHaj, won the contest. The two were also nominated as cross-conflict Friendship Champions by Stanford University and Facebook-endorsed “Friends Without Borders”.

Another early initiative of YaLa was cooperation with Microsoft R&D Israel to involve Palestinian youth in their annual summer camp for excellent computer science and electrical engineering students. This was the first year that the camp was opened to applications from both Israeli and Palestinian students. Through YaLa a number of Palestinian students applied for the program and



among those accepted were Mohammad Alqadi, Thaer Abdallah, Lutfy Ghazaleh and Mohammed Barakat. The Tech Camp took place September 18-22, 2011 at the Microsoft R&D Center in Herzliya, Israel during which time the students furthered their knowledge of the C# programming language, developed projects and competed in a final contest.

YaLa has also partnered with Spain's **Barcelona Football Club**, Barça, signing a Memorandum of Understanding based on the shared belief that sports in general, and football in particular, can be a common language among the peoples of the world and thus important tools for the development of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence. Putting this agreement into action, Barça periodically invites YaLa members to be guests of the club. Thus far two delegations comprised of a total of 12 YaLa members (Mohamed Rafik Bentaalla, Ahmed Essam, Naama Shpak, Or Soffer, Daoud Aranaout, Abdalrhim Hamdan, Thaer Abdallah, Mohammad Alhaj, Tzlil Shahrabani, Ahmad Majadly, Tariq Khanfer, Guy Peres and Hiba Genç) have visited Barcelona. The first delegation visited Barcelona in October 2011 during the city's Peace Week and the second delegation in January 2012. During the visits, YaLa delegates had the opportunity to build meaningful friendships and to experience Barça, meeting with coach Pep Guardiola and players and attending matches and training sessions.



YaLa members with F.C. Barcelona's Pep Guardiola and Lionel Messi at the second YaLa delegation to Barcelona.

Another focus of YaLa's early activities was the establishment of a Steering Committee to lead YaLa initiatives. The Steering Committee is made up of youth representatives from Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, the Persian Gulf (Kuwait) and the Maghreb (Morocco). Steering Committee members are responsible for outlining proposals for YaLa projects and have drafted, and are promoting, the Agenda for the Future of the Middle East, which was presented at the First Online Peace Conference (see next section). The Steering Committee, which convenes regularly online, is currently composed of 11 members and will be continually expanded to further include outstanding YaLa members from other Middle Eastern countries.



THE FIRST ONLINE PEACE & ECONOMIC COOPERATION CONFERENCE



On the 23rd and 24th of January 2012, YaLa held the First-Ever Online Regional Peace and Economic Cooperation Conference for the Middle East. Throughout the two days, a total of 40,000 young people participated – likely the most “attended” peace conference in history. From Pakistan to Palestine, from Saudi Arabia to Israel, from Tunisia to Kuwait – tens of thousands of youth from across the region took part in fruitful and friendly dialogue, read and gave feedback on the [YaLa Agenda for the Future](#) (see next section) and the YaLa Project Book of concrete initiatives, including accelerators for start-ups, online music studios and gaming development portals, and the flagship project, the YaLa Online Leadership Academy. Participants were also

addressed via video by dignitaries and leading figures from a variety of fields, namely U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Israeli President Shimon Peres, 2011 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Leymah Gbowee, UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova, former U.S. Middle East Advisor Amb. Dennis Ross, André Azoulay of Morocco, Facebook Vice President David Fischer, Italian Foreign Ministry Development Cooperation Director Elisabetta Belloni, Microsoft Vice President Dan'l Lewin, Barcelona Head Coach Pep Guardiola, musicians Andrea Bocelli and Achinoam “Noa” Nini, NBA Commissioner David Stern, renowned actress Sharon Stone, former U.S. President Bill Clinton and H.R.H. Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan.

YALA ADVOCACY AND POLICY INITIATIVES

Agenda for the Future of the Middle East

In the context of the First Online Conference, the members of YaLa formulated an Agenda for the Future of the Middle East in order to outline its core values and to make its voice heard vis-à-vis the governments of the region and the world. The Agenda is divided into a Declaration of Principles and a detailed call to action regarding democracy, human rights, economic development, regional peace, including a two-state solution, putting an end to occupation, violence, terror, rejection and hatred and adhering to peaceful cooperation based on self-determination, equality, mutual respect, cooperation and security for all. The Agenda has been conveyed to world leaders including Israeli President Shimon Peres, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, U.S. President Barack Obama, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, H.M. King Mohammed VI of Morocco, European Union High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who are being called upon to recognize and endorse the Agenda and actively support its implementation.



Relations with the International Community

Throughout its first year, YaLa has worked to forge ties with governments and organizations throughout the international community. In particular, YaLa received letters of support from international dignitaries, among which His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI and Quartet Representative Tony Blair and established partnerships with governmental bodies such as the Foreign Ministry of Italy-Development Cooperation Division and the Foreign Ministry of Norway.

Furthermore, YaLa representatives conducted a visit in September 2011 to the U.S. State Department and White House in Washington DC in order to introduce YaLa to key players in the U.S. Administration. Since the visit strong ties have been established with the U.S. State Department under the leadership of Secretary Hillary Clinton. The visit also served as the launching point for YaLa's ties with the United Nations and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). These ties have resulted thus far in a Memorandum of Understanding with UNESCO as well as in the invitation of two YaLa representatives to speak at the upcoming "United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine", to be held in late May 2012.



Palestinian and Israeli YaLa Delegates Mahdee Jaber Abu-Zehriya and Nimrod BenZe'ev at CGIU 2012.

In March 2012, YaLa was also invited to the **Clinton Global Initiative University Summit (CGIU)** in Washington DC to present the YaLa Online Academy (see next section). Participation in CGIU 2012 enabled the YaLa Academy to become a registered commitment at CGIU and to be presented to a wide variety of organizations and initiatives the world over. The March 2012 visit was also utilized to further connections with USAID and the U.S. State Department's Global Youth Issues.

International Media and the Voices of YaLa

Branching out into new mediums and formats, YaLa has been working to get the fresh voices of Middle Eastern and North African youth heard. In April 2012, [the first YaLa Column was launched in Israel's Jerusalem Post](#). The column will be published monthly, opening a window for Post readers to the voices of young leaders from all over the MENA region. Further publications, such as the online magazine "Megafon", will also be publishing YaLa member contributions. In the upcoming year, we will aim to broaden the scope of publications and newspapers featuring YaLa contributions to include the Arab world and international media.

Furthermore, YaLa has been the subject of over 200 articles in the international media, including pieces in the [New York Times](#), the [Washington Post](#), [Der Spiegel](#), [CBS News](#), [the AP Wire](#) and much more.



Bringing YaLa Members to the Fore

In order to expose leading figures in diplomacy to YaLa members and initiatives in Palestine and Israel, YaLa conducted several meetings throughout the year. Among these, a meeting was held in February 2012 with the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, Dan Shapiro. The meeting was attended by Embassy staff and Palestinian and Israeli YaLa members. A second meeting was held in April with U.S. Acting Under-Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Ambassador Kathleen Stephens wherein YaLa participated along with other organizations in a presentation of joint Palestinian-Israeli initiatives.



Israeli and Palestinian YaLa members at a meeting with U.S. Ambassador to Israel, Dan Shapiro, in Jaffa, February 2012.

As part of YaLa's ties with the U.S. State Department, and specifically with the Office of Global Youth Issues directed by Special Advisor to the Secretary Ronan Farrow, Israeli YaLa members will be taking part in the first U.S. Youth Council in the MENA region, which is being established by the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv. As the number of Youth Councils throughout the region grows, the aim is to have YaLa representatives in each council and for YaLa to serve as a meeting point between the councils as part of YaLa's efforts to facilitate cooperation, sharing of information and partnerships.

Linking Protest Movements and Creating a MENA Change Coalition

Since YaLa's founding one year ago, it has been serving as a hub for people struggling for change in the region, whether social, political or economic. YaLa has served as a platform for young leaders throughout the region, to express themselves freely, form connections, share information about current events and generate genuine partnerships, such as opening up mainstream media platforms to new, boundary-crossing voices from the MENA region. All this has been done in the spirit of greater freedoms, human & civil rights and equality as well as promoting education, economic prosperity, social justice, and a free-thinking, pro-active identity for young Middle Easterners and North Africans.

In the coming year YaLa will increasingly be shaped as a platform wherein the region's various protest movements and activists struggling for values similar to those of YaLa can meet, converse, share ideas, and strengthen regional solidarity, while touching upon difficult issues and tackling with them out of mutual agreement, as well as learning from one another how to deal with difficulties that might arise. As YaLa seeks to preserve the initial spirit of the Arab Spring and to propel change in the region, YaLa believes that this could be an extremely powerful tool for changing the regional conversation and promoting truly revolutionary attitudes.

YaLa calls upon protest activists throughout the region to make use of YaLa as a platform to promote their struggles and ideals.



THE YALA-YOUNG LEADERS ONLINE ACADEMY



With YaLa members from throughout the Middle East and North Africa having cited at the First Online Conference their desire and need for a program which enables collaborative access to the top-quality education and leadership training, YaLa has begun developing its flagship project: the YaLa-Young Leaders Online Academy (YLOA). Progress thus far can be summarized as follows.

Curriculum and Content

At the Conference, five fields of study were identified as the most needed and important for prosperity and peace in the region. Since then, and with the help of YaLa member and partner feedback, these fields have been crystallized as follows:

- Good Governance
- New & Social Media
- Negotiation & Mediation
- Business & Technology
- Culture & the Arts

Additionally, a new field has been added - **Mediterranean Studies** - with the view that the interconnected historical, cultural, religious, and judicial heritage of the Mediterranean basin, as well as the huge social and economic potential which lay along its coasts, must be reinforced to help the Mediterranean basin regain its stability and role as a beacon of world civilization. Mediterranean Studies will touch upon regional cultural heritage as well as inter-cultural exchange, Euro-Mediterranean relations and cooperation, joint socio-economic ventures and projects with emphasis on tourism management, technology and peaceful co-existence. This department will also promote study tours within the Mediterranean basin, as well as political and economic debate and exchanges.

Understanding the inevitable and important overlap between the fields, YaLa has adapted an interdisciplinary approach and aims to offer a flexible program where YaLa students will be able to build a curriculum from various departments. In addition, given the leadership orientation of the Academy, students will be required to incorporate in their curriculum cross-sectorial courses in the subjects of leadership, management and communication.

Partnerships with Universities and IT Companies

YaLa has been forming a vast network of top universities and institutes that have expressed an interest in principle to partner with YaLa and provide courses as part of the YaLa Academy. Amongst these are Princeton, Stanford, Harvard, U-MASS Boston, U-PENN, George Washington, and Sabanci, as well as the Mediterranean Universities Union (Unimed).

The Mediterranean Studies curriculum and projects are being developed in strategic partnership with the **Institute for Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin (ICD)**, one of Europe's largest independent cultural exchange organizations, as well as with the **Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI)**, which was created as one of the six priority areas of the Union for the Mediterranean and as part of



a vast network of universities in the Euro-Med region. ICD will be a full partner of YLOA, cooperating on Diplomacy and Mediterranean Studies courses, degrees, seminars, projects and peace conferences. EMUNI will offer courses to YLOA primarily in the areas of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, the development of sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean, and peaceful coexistence.

In addition, believing in the crucial link between accessible high-quality education and employment possibilities in the region, YaLa is partnering with several private sector IT companies in order to offer skill-oriented training tailored for the modern market. YaLa is thus continuing its close partnership with Facebook, which will work with YaLa in the ongoing development of the Academy, as well as offer courses as part of the New & Social Media Department. In addition, **Microsoft Corp.**, as well as **Hewlett Packard** through their **HP Life** program, will offer training courses to YaLa Academy Students.

Technological Platform

YaLa is currently in intensive talks with Coursera, the most innovative and comprehensive online education platform today founded by Stanford Professors Daphne Koller and Andrew Ng, and will confirm an agreement with Coursera once University partnerships are finalized. Coursera combines mastery-based learning principles with video lectures, interactive content ensuring student engagement and effective learning as well as progress-monitoring and feedback for students. Thus YaLa will join the effort of making world-class higher education accessible throughout the world through distance learning technology, within the exceptional context of YaLa's goals of pursuing peace and prosperity in the Middle East and North Africa region. In addition, YaLa is continuing its partnership with the "Shaker" avatar Technology Company. Following the huge success of the YaLa virtual square at the YaLa Conference in January, Shaker is now developing the YaLa Online Academy Campus, which will provide an interactive hub for YaLa's Academic community.

YaLa Academy Leadership

In order to help steer the Academy's development stages, an **International Advisory Committee** is currently being assembled under the Chairmanship of Prof. Lawrence Summers (Harvard President Emeritus and former U.S. Secretary of Treasury). Thus far members include:

- *Prof. Eric Kandel*, 2000 Nobel Prize Laureate in Physiology and Medicine and professor of biochemistry and biophysics at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons;
- *Prof. Nicholas Negroponte*, co-founder and former director of the MIT Media Lab;
- *Dr. Maria Klawe*, Board Director of Microsoft Corp. and President of Harvey Mudd College
- *Prof. Christopher S. Eisgruber*, Provost of Princeton;
- *Prof. Henry Rosovsky*, former professor of Economics, former Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and former Acting President of Harvard;
- *David Fischer*, Vice President of Advertising and Global Operations at Facebook;
- *André Azoulay*, senior advisor to King Mohammed VI of Morocco;
- *Arnon Woolfson*, Founder, Howling Wolf Productions & Management
- *Bernard Henri Levy*, influential intellectual, philosopher and journalist.

Furthermore, Sharon Stone, Amb. Dennis Ross and Kamel Hussein have taken upon themselves the position of Department Chairs of the Culture & Arts, the Good Governance and the Negotiation and Mediation Departments respectively.



YALA TECHNOLOGY PROJECTS

Another key component of the Project Book adopted during the Conference, the YaLa Online Accelerator project has begun to take form. This new and pioneering approach of giving YaLa members the opportunity to work together on an online integrated platform, regardless of borders and physical constraints, and turn their innovative ideas into real companies has been shared with many leading worldwide business companies and organizations and has garnered much interest.



In particular, cooperation has already been established with Microsoft, which through its R&D Center for the Middle East and Africa will connect between its newly established accelerator incubator and YaLa, giving YaLa members the opportunity to participate in testing and evaluating products from Microsoft accelerator's startups in very early stages and offer ideas for developments. YaLa members will also be able to participate in select online training offered to Microsoft's startups by world-class lecturers in a variety of subjects, including creating a business plan, building an accurate presentation, how to pitch, effectively approaching investors and more.

YALA PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

YaLa is grateful to its partners and supporters, among which the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Development Cooperation Division, the Government of Norway, EAI, Facebook, Microsoft, HP, Shaker, UNESCO, F.C. Barcelona, the NBA, Sissman Gallery, CA, Groupe de Recherche Arts & Cultures, IDC Herzliya-Asper Institute for New Media Diplomacy, Social-Economic Academy, Municipal Yud Beith School, Srutonim, the Israeli Student Association, as well as to the universities that have expressed interest in YaLa: Princeton, Stanford, Harvard, MIT, U-MASS Boston, U-PENN, George Washington, Sabanci, and the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI) as well as the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin and the Mediterranean Universities Union (Unimed).



LOOKING AHEAD: YALA IN 2012-13

The coming year will see significant developments in both the advocacy/policy and project areas of YaLa. Work on the development of the YaLa Accelerator and other initiatives from the Project Book will continue. In particular, a YaLa Academy pilot program will be launched in two stages, with courses opening in September 2012 and the full pilot beginning in January 2013, including courses from each of the six Departments. The Pilot period will allow for analysis and affirmation of technological, academic and administrative implementation methods, and will serve to finalize the curriculum structure, as well as the roll-out timeline of the YaLa Academy. The application process for the full pilot planned to begin in September 2012, will see the selection of approximately 300 YaLa members for the full pilot. Please fill in the following [survey](#) and help us continue to move in the right direction with the YaLa Academy, your feedback is important us!

In the policy area, YaLa intends to organize a regional meeting between YaLa members wherein the YaLa Agenda for the Future will be further developed across the entire range of fields, from issues of Peace and Security - including a two-state solution for the Palestinian-Israeli situation, based on the 1967 lines and mutually agreed land swaps - through Freedoms & Civil and Human Rights and issues of Social, Economic and Gender Security & Equality.

YaLa continues to hold, as stated by the last article of our Declaration of Principles, that **we see ourselves, the people of the Middle East and not any commodity, as the region's single most-valuable resource**. As the YaLa community continues to grow and the dialogue on our platform continues to expand, evolve and break down barriers, we realize the great power and responsibility that we have as forward-thinking, united and committed young leaders, and continue to believe in and create a new Middle East and North Africa region. **YaLa, let's go!**

"Armed with conviction and aided by technology, you pushed forward the political, economic, and social change that is now pulsing across the region. And your voices will continue to be invaluable in the process of brokering regional peace... I admire your resolve to engage in these difficult discussions. I look forward to hearing your ideas, your perspectives, and your vision for the future."

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton

"It is your participation that makes possible the YaLa online movement for change, for partnership, for social justice, peace and prosperity across the Middle East. It is through your participation, dialogue and search for common ground that gives hope to so many of us all around the world."

David Fischer, Vice President of Facebook

"The YaLa Young Leaders movement plays an inspiring role in promoting dialogue and mutual understanding in the Middle East. I see this as a model for movements in other regions. We need new forms of civic engagement today. We need approaches to citizenship for the century ahead."

Amb. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO



YALA-YOUNG LEADERS IS FOUNDED BY

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