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## Giving birth to peace

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Michele Klein , THE JERUSALEM POST

Ten Israeli midwives and 10 Palestinian midwives have been holding meetings this year to further their professional development. They have discussed the skills and practices of home birth and hospital midwives, learned about water birth, and also gotten to know each other. These meetings are part of a women's health project initiated by the Circle of Health International (COHI). Sera Bonds, also a midwife and a public health scholar, founded this NGO in 2004 to promote the capacity of women's health care professionals in crisis areas. The NGO has worked also in Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Louisiana (after the hurricanes), and Tibet, and will be expanding to Pakistan in 2009.

In 2006, COHI began to work in our region. Mindy Levy of Moshav Beit Lechem Haglilit, a home birth midwife and childbirth educator with a special interest in the effect of trauma on women's maternity experiences, enlisted the group of Israeli midwives while Salam Kanaan, director of midwifery at Red Crescent Hospital in east Jerusalem, who recruited the Palestinian participants.

Bonds facilitated the most recent weekend workshop, which focused on protocols of labor and delivery in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The participants prepared presentations for the meeting, worked in pairs (each comprised of one Israeli and one Palestinian), shared meals, and discussed how to continue their collaboration after they returned home. One outcome of these meetings has been Israeli Leslie Wolff and Palestinian Aisha Sashi's "kangaroo care" project; in October they are scheduled to travel together to an international midwifery conference in Sweden. Another collaboration is helping Palestinian midwives prepare for their licensing exams.

"Of all the women's health projects we've done around the world, I'm most proud of this one," says Bonds. "We managed to avoid politics in the beginning, as we felt it was more important to get to know each other as midwives, as women, as wives, and as mothers. The two days were full of laughter, learning, and open hearts as these women boldly demonstrated through their participation their commitment to partnership, peace and professional development. It was an honor to bear witness to the trust and humility expressed during the meeting."

Bonds believes that such meetings empower the participants and points out that the women need courage to attend the sessions and develop the relationships they form there. She also believes that

these new professional bridges can eventually lead to non-violence.

"By working towards non-violent birth," said another participant, "we are working to create a non-violent world."

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