

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The current issue of the *Bulletin* is being published after a considerable delay. We apologize to our readers and undertake to do our best to ensure that subsequent issues are published on a regular basis.

Last year, the three-year term of Professor Sasson Somekh as Director of the Israeli Academic Center in Cairo came to an end. We are greatly indebted to him for his deep devotion and skilful contribution to the Center and its activities.

Our region has come upon hard times as this issue goes to press, with dialogue and negotiation obstructed by bullets and bombs. As passions run high, the Israeli Academic Center in Cairo struggles to maintain its warm corner for collegial study and cultural exchange. The Center has been in existence for over eighteen years now. Its very foundation was an inseparable element of the peace-making process between Egypt and Israel. It has reflected the perception, shared by both Egypt and Israel, that peace should not be between governments alone: efforts must be made to extend it to popular and non-governmental levels.

The Center is an apolitical institution with a purely academic role. It is meant to assist Egyptian and Israeli scholars seeking to study each other's cultures and societies and to widen the scope of mutual acquaintance by hosting lectures, workshops and other scientific and cultural events. Lecturers from all of Israel's major academic institutions are invited to present the fruits of their intellectual activities to Egyptian audiences. The solid nucleus of Egyptian participants in these events is a group of Hebrew-speaking students, scholars and journalists, partly a product of the admirable proliferation of Hebrew studies in Egyptian academic institutions. But the interest taken in the Center's activities stretches far beyond this devoted group. We frequently host new people who want to know what the Israeli Academic Center is all about. Every day we see new beginnings in an ongoing dialogue. This is our modest contribution, through academic channels, to a better understanding between the two societies.

The articles published in the current issue of the *Bulletin* are mostly revised versions of recent lectures delivered at the Center. They have no particular theme in common; rather, they reflect the diversity of topics presented to our audiences in the framework of our academic events.

Those of our readers who have a mastery of Arabic will enjoy the article contributed by our friend and colleague, Mr. Nabawi Serag, who was formerly in charge of Jewish sites at the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities and has often honored the *Bulletin* with his scholarly articles. His current piece introduces a study of Hebrew inscriptions on tombstones at the Jewish cemetery located in the Bassatine neighborhood in old Cairo. Mr. Serag recently retired after several decades at his post, in which he manifested his empathy for the Jewish heritage. We extend to him our deepest gratitude and hope he will continue enlightening us with his forthcoming studies.

Two years ago we were grief-stricken by the loss of our friend and colleague Inbal Perelson, Assistant Director of the Center in 1996–1997. Inbal died along with two other activists, one Jewish and one Palestinian, in a tragic accident while on an excursion undertaken in the context of a Jewish–Arab seminar in the cause of peace. She was a brilliant researcher whose fields of interest ranged from Israeli children's literature to the musical creativity of Jewish composers and singers in the Arab countries, particularly Egypt. Beyond that, she was a genuine humanist who demonstrated her solidarity with suffering and oppressed people, irrespective of their national, ethnic or religious affiliation. A eulogy by Amr Zakarya, Assistant Director of the Academic Center and one of Inbal's closest friends, appears in the Arabic section of the *Bulletin*.

But life must go on. There is no better way to cherish Inbal's memory and legacy than by reiterating our commitment to intensify and improve the activities of the Israeli Academic Center in Cairo, including the orderly publication of its *Bulletin*.

Yossi Amitay