

## Meet Mohamed Abed Elrahman, Participant in the Galilee Dreamers Delegation to South Africa

*Mohamed, a 17-year-old Muslim Israeli from B'ina, travelled together with a mixed group of Jewish and Arab teenagers and teachers on Oranim International School's delegation to South Africa this spring. Mohamed describes how Galilee Dreamers developed lasting connections between the Jewish and Arab participants and gave him hope for a more peaceful future in Israel.*



This April, Mohamed travelled to South Africa together with a group of students and teachers from his school, the Al-Bian High School in Dir Al-Asad, and the Asif High School in Misgav. Four students and one teacher from each school participated. Dr. Roberta Bell-Kligler, Director of Oranim International School, led the delegation.

In South Africa, the group participated in a transformative program including encounters with local high school students (Jewish and non-Jewish), home hospitality, and touring in three cities – Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Port Elizabeth. Galilee Dreamers (formerly known as Sparks of Change) has been sending delegations to North America since 2016, but

this was the first time travelling to South Africa. Mohamed describes the trip as “the best experience in my life.”

### About Mohamed

Mohamed (nicknamed Hamoodi) is an eleventh grader studying Physics and Chemistry, who loves math, drawing, and the sport Street Workout. He says: “Family and friends – those are the two most important words for me.” He describes himself: “I like to communicate with people who are different and especially those who don’t belong to the same society as I do.”

Prior to the delegation, Mohamed explained his dream that motivated him to participate in Galilee Dreamers:

I dream big, and I dream about living in constant peace far away from hate, racism, and judging, and that dream won’t be accomplished without teaching the new generations how to become better people than ever. And that dream starts with each one of us. To achieve the goal, we have to work hard, and work should be done by educating ourselves before anything else. “Be the change you want to see in the world” (Mahatma Gandhi). If everyone began thinking like this, life would be so much easier.

### Building Connections between Jewish and Arab Teenagers

In an interview with the Oranim International School newsletter, Mohamed describes the transformative impact of the Galilee Dreamers delegation on his life. On the delegation, he discovered that what was most important was not the touring in South Africa (which he had looked forward to before the program), but the connections made between the participants and with the South Africans their age.

Although the two participating Israeli high schools are less than half an hour away from each other in the Galilee, students from the two schools had little to no interaction with one another before the delegation. Mohamed explains that in the community he comes from, there is very little social interaction with Jews in the neighboring communities. At most, they buy and sell from each other in the local stores. He had never invited Jews to his home, or visited Jews in their homes, or been inside a Jewish school before the Galilee Dreamers delegation. He admits to having stereotypes about Jews prior to the delegation, coming from the community he lives in.

Now, all that has changed. Mohamed became close friends with the Jews in his delegation, and since returning home he has already visited one of them in his home in the Jewish community of Ya'ad. He met the other participant's Jewish friends, and saw, that in the end of the day, they all wanted peace.

Mohamed also visited the Jewish high school in Misgav to see his friends there and host a group of visiting Jewish high school students from South Africa, some of whom he had already met on the Galilee Dreamers delegation to South Africa. He notes that the very fact that he visited the Jewish school is not at all to be taken for granted.

### **Hope for Change**

Mohamed's trip to South Africa gave him hope for change in Israel. He saw how much South African society has been able to change, even though there is still a long way to go.

Mohamed's vision for Israel is that someday Jews and Arabs will live in harmony together. He acknowledges that this will be a long process, and that we are working for peace for the sake of his future children's generation. He sees his generation of young people as key in making this change.

"I see hope in this delegation and these people," says Mohamed. He explains that the Galilee Dreamers delegation is an important step forward, because on the delegation Jews and Arabs learn to rely on one another, and everyone has an equal voice.

Mohamed and his friends on the delegation are excited to begin working to realize their vision of peace. They are thinking about making a summer camp for Jewish and Arab teenagers from their two communities, to get to know one another. Mohamed and his friends from Galilee Dreamers are truly striving to "Be the change you want to see in the world."