

## PEACE AWARD RECIPIENT SYRACUSE AREA MIDDLE EAST DIALOG SAMED: SMALL AND STEADFAST



**T**he Syracuse Area Middle East Dialog group (SAMED) emerged in September 1981 out of a desire to bring together American Jews, Arabs and others interested in fostering a peaceful accommodation particularly between Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews in the Middle East. Convinced of the value of dialog to increase our understanding and effectiveness, the first SAMED members designed a small inter-communal group to begin a very long, still uncompleted, journey.

At the outset, certain limits were placed on membership. Each member had to agree to "accept the legitimacy of both the State of Israel and self-determination for Palestinians, including the option of a sovereign West Bank-Gaza Strip state." In 1981, support for a two-state solution was not the "mainstream" view within either Jewish or Palestinian communities. In addition, we restricted the number of members so we could speak directly face-to-face and insure that the three communities were equally represented: Palestinians, Jews, and other concerned Americans. The initial six-member group soon grew to fifteen and then reached today's twenty-one limit.

Circumstances in the United States and in the Middle East have changed over the years, and so has our membership. Some members left because they were uncomfortable with particular group actions or inactions, some because of the press of other commitments, and others have died or moved away. We also broadened membership to include Arab-Americans who are not Palestinians.

Since 1981, we have met continuously, usually once a month. We inform ourselves about policies of the U.S. government relating to the Middle East and about developments in that region. Out of discussions on those issues and our diverse perspectives, we formulate brief, and sometimes lengthy, statements that we share widely. In those statements, we do not tell the peoples in the Middle East how to live together; rather we focus our efforts on American and U.S. government conduct in fostering peace in that region. Sharing our views in writing or in face-to-face meetings with U.S. government officials has become one of our major activities.

In July 1982, we called for immediate cessation of shooting and killing by all sides in Lebanon and for action to solve the underlying Israeli-Palestinian conflict.