

## **First Intercultural Innovation Award winner mentored by UNWTO**



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First Intercultural Innovation Award winner starts supports phase with the collaboration of the World Tourism Organization

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Aziz Abu Sarah, director of MEJDI Tours was welcomed in Madrid by the World Tourism Organization's Secretary General Taleb Rifai. Abu Sarah is a Palestinian living between the United States and the Middle East who was recently appointed an "Emerging Explorer" by National Geographic, which is an honor the organization gives to young people making a difference early in their careers. MEJDI Tours was founded by Rabbi Marc Gopin,

professor at George Mason University. Gopin, who is an orthodox rabbi, is a leading scholar on the role of religions in conflict resolution and peace building.

During the meeting, Rifai expressed UNWTO's commitment to assist MEJDI Tours in their growth and expansion to other regions. Following the discussions, MEJDI Tours was invited to attend subsequent meetings and events of the organization to promote their activities. Other initiatives within the support of UNWTO to MEJI Tours include the work of the UNWTO Volunteers, technical assistance and communications. In addition, Abu Sarah visited met with several other organizations in the tourism sector and partners working in the Middle East.

MEJDI Tours is a joint Jewish-Arab tour organization that runs group tours to Israel, Palestine, Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt. Their flagship project, the 'Dual Narrative' tour, offers tours to Israel and Palestine led by Israeli and Palestinian peace builders. It is an innovative approach for learning about the Middle East that highlights the different narratives of Israelis and Palestinians from a variety of cultural, political, and religious backgrounds.

The collaboration with the UNWTO was framed in the conviction that tourism has a major role in promoting intercultural understanding and peace.

"The tourism sector offers a new natural path to build bridges and bring cultures together on the road for understanding and peace and should thus be put higher on the international and national peace building agendas" said Rifai.

"Through this award to MEJDI Tours, the UNAOC and the BMW Group will intensify their global commitment to further social cohesion and coexistence among communities," said Daniel Cerván, coordinator of the Intercultural Innovation Award.

The Intercultural Innovation Award, a partnership between the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the BMW Group, aims to select and support the most innovated initiatives that encourage intercultural dialogue and cooperation around the world.

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