

UPF Israel: Israeli-Palestinian Youth Revive Soccer for Peace in San Marino

Hod Ben Zvi
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City of San Marino, Republic of San Marino - Jewish and Palestinian children traveled together from Israel to San Marino to take part in a Soccer for Peace tournament from August 23-29, 2026, reviving the tradition after a six-year hiatus.

The 22-person delegation comprised equal numbers of Jewish and Arab participants: nine Jewish children and nine Muslim children aged 12 - 13, along with two adult mentors from each community. The leadership team supporting the youth included football coaches Yazdi and Wasim, civics teacher Zakaria Mahameed, "Kicking Out Violence in Sports" project manager Roece, and UPF-Israel Chair Hod Ben Zvi.



Prior to departure, a joint orientation meeting took place at Givat Haviva, bringing together Jewish and Arab parents and youth to establish trust, address logistics, and distribute UPF sports kit.

Traveling from Tel Aviv to Rome and continuing by bus to San Marino, the delegation spent an intensive and meaningful week together. The structured itinerary combined sports, dialogue and cultural discovery:

Daily training and tournament: Daily two-hour football sessions at the San Marino Football Federation central pitch culminated in a friendly match against the San Marino Academy U14 team. On the pitch, the 18 youths played together wearing the same jersey, demonstrating how sports can build bridges.

Evening dialogue and bonding: Evening sessions focused on personal reflection and mutual understanding, allowing the children's natural warmth to surface away from the heavy atmosphere of regional conflict.



Excursions and recreation: The group enjoyed guided tours of historic San Marino, a day trip to Rimini, swimming and bowling.

The initiative received generous sponsorship from the San Marino Football Federation, the Ministry of Industry and Sport, and the Ministry of Tourism, as well as from UPF-San Marino, led by President Giorgio Gasperoni and Chief Organizer David Gasperoni.



On the final day, the delegation was honored with an official audience with the Captains Regent (heads of state of San Marino) at the Parliament Building. During the exchange of warm greetings and official reports, Mr. Hod Ben Zvi, chair of UPF-Israel, expressed deep gratitude on behalf of the delegation, highlighting a central teaching of UPF co-founder Dr. Hak Ja Han: "To achieve lasting peace, we must replace the logic of power with the logic of love."

The Captains Regent responded with great enthusiasm and encouraging words. The meeting concluded with inspiring reflections by Member of Parliament Hon. Gerardo Giovagnoli, who played a key role in securing government approval and sponsorship.

San Marino's national broadcaster, RTV, covered the delegation extensively. In television interviews,

UPF representatives emphasized that true peace relies on human relationships. As noted in the RTV coverage: "Unless agreements are based on genuine human relationships between people, they cannot last... We have to shake the box in a positive way so that their hearts can unite."



Following the delegation's safe return, follow-up gatherings are being organized for participants and their families to continue building on these newly formed bonds locally.

Background and History

The Soccer for Peace initiative was originally conceived as a joint venture between three UPF chapters: Italy, Israel and San Marino. Its core concept is bringing Jewish and Arab children together for a week of friendly football matches, recreation, and shared adventures in Italy and San Marino. The program creates a unique space for youth to build genuine friendships between themselves and with local children in the host nation.

The inaugural project took place in Turin in 2015, followed by annual editions in the Republic of San Marino from 2016 through 2019. The initiative was subsequently paused due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the regional war. Finally, after dedicated efforts by partners across all regions, the project was revived this year. Today, San Marino has become renowned in Israel precisely for this pioneering initiative.

