



Jerusalem International YMCA  
 ימקא הבינלאומית ירושלים  
 جمعية الشبان المسيحية الدولية - القدس



## YMCA JERUSALEM YOUTH CHORUS JAPAN TOUR 2014

This August, the YMCA Jerusalem Youth Chorus, a choir and dialogue program for Israeli and Palestinian high school students at the Jerusalem International YMCA, took its first international concert tour, to Japan.

For many of the singers it was their first time abroad, and for all the first time in Japan. But each one rose to the challenge and overcame personal, cultural, and linguistic barriers in order to learn from and appreciate their Japanese hosts and their worldview. This process of finding oneself a foreigner allowed our singers to better understand both other perspectives and also the feeling of being an “other.” It has allowed them to return to Jerusalem more capable of empathy for those outside their initial circle of concern. And experiencing the hospitality of their Japanese hosts reinforced the power of welcoming those who are different. This is only one of many valuable lessons we learned in Japan that relates directly to our work together in Jerusalem.



The tour was an immense growth experience for the choir, on a personal level, an interpersonal level, a communal level, and on a professional level. Many new friendships were formed, old friendships solidified, choir identity strengthened through shared experience, and professionalism tested in high-profile concerts. The YMCA Jerusalem Youth Chorus has emerged on a whole new level, its members ready to support one another through full-length concerts, 24-hour travel days, and the challenges of a new culture.



During the tour, the YMCA Jerusalem Youth Chorus was able to spread its message of peace, love, understanding, and hope throughout Japan through extensive and high-profile media coverage. The chorus was featured nationally on NHK, Japan’s largest news network, and was in countless newspapers, including on the front page of this Tokyo daily. Our audiences left inspired by our work together and more interested in supporting it going forward.



As we have been officially invited to return in the coming years, this tour is but the seed of a long-term relationship that will surely prove fruitful as we grow with it. In the meantime, we have returned safely to Jerusalem and our home at the Jerusalem International YMCA, and will draw on this experience to give us strength and courage in the challenging days ahead. *Arigato Gozaimasu.*