Founding member of Jewish-Arab village Neve Shalom dies in car accident

Dr. Ahmad Hijazi, 45, and his 11-year-old son Adam, died in a car accident while vacationing on the African island of Zanzibar.

By Jack Khoury | Aug.21, 2012 | 6:20 PM | 1

A picture of Ahmad Hijazi and his son Adam, posted on Neve Shalom’s Facebook page.

Dr. Ahmad Hijazi, 45, one of the founders of the binational cooperative village of Neve Shalom, was killed in a car accident on Monday, along with his 11-year-old son Adam, while vacationing on the African island of Zanzibar.

Hijazi’s wife Maram was injured in the accident and was admitted to a local hospital.

Neve Shalom, which means “oasis of peace,” is a cooperative community founded by Israeli Jews and Arabs and located midway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

Hijazi and his family went to Zanzibar about a week ago and had planned to return to Israel at the end of this week.

A well-known lecturer and educator, Hijazi had been living in Neve Shalom for about 30 years and was the director of the community’s School for Peace. Word of the horrific accident was sent by Maram to her family in the town of Taibeh in the Jezreel Valley and to her husband’s family in Tamra in western Galilee.
Halil Hijazi, a close friend and relative, said that most of the details surrounding the accident are unknown. “We understood that the accident involved a head-on collision between their vehicle and another one, but no more than that,” he said. The family and residents of both towns were grief-stricken upon hearing the news, he added.

“We never imagined that such a grave incident could happen during the holiday season – in the blink of an eye, the holiday atmosphere was replaced by sorrow and sadness,” Hijazi said.

The couple had two children – Adam, who was killed in Zanzibar, and Issam, 16, who opted not to go to on the family vacation and is staying with his mother’s family in Taibeh.

Family members have approached the Foreign Ministry for assistance in bringing the bodies and the injured woman back to Israel.

Ibrahim Hijazi, another family member, said that he expects the caskets to reach Israel by Wednesday, adding that the funerals will be held in Neve Shalom. “While it’s true they are from Tamra, their lives were centered in Neve Shalom and that’s where they’ll be laid to rest. I pray that God will help us through this catastrophe; as we always say, it is fate and God’s will,” he said.

Death notices were pasted up throughout Neve Shalom and the community’s Facebook page celebrated the many achievements of Ahmad and Maram. “It is too early for us to absorb the depth of this terrible loss and tragedy,” the community wrote on Facebook.