

UPF Jerusalem, Israel's webinar on the Abraham Accords with world leaders

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Jerusalem, Israel -- The first of a series of UPF webinars on the Abraham Accords presented a distinguished panel of world leaders.

The Rt. Honorable Stephen Harper, prime minister of Canada (2006-2015); H.E. Ehud Barak, prime minister of Israel (1999-2001); H.E. Mirek Topolánek, prime minister of the Czech Republic (2006-2009); and Hon. Newt Gingrich, speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives (1995-1999) each gave a presentation and answered questions from the online audience.



The recent U.S.-brokered agreement between Israel, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, later joined by Sudan and Morocco, signifies a historic moment of hope in the Middle East. The webinar engaged views from the Middle East, Europe and North America and included a virtual audience of former heads of state and government, current and former parliamentarians, UPF associates, and thought leaders from around the world.

The webinar took place on January 14, 2021, under the title "The Abraham Accords – A Step toward Peace in the Middle East."

The International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP), a constituent association of UPF, organized the webinar with the collaboration of UPF International, UPF of North America, and UPF of Europe and the

Middle East.

The meeting began with an overview of UPF's vision for peace in the Middle East, presented by Dr. Nurit Hirschfeld, president of UPF-Israel. Dr. Thomas Walsh, the chairman of UPF International, then offered the opening remarks.

Guy Taylor, the chief of the International Security Team at The Washington Times, spoke about the wider background and context of the Abraham Accords. He later responded to questions from the audience about the agreements reached between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan.



Mr. Taylor described the Abraham Accords "the most significant developments relating to Arab-Israeli relations since the 1993 Oslo Accord." He raised a number of key questions, such as the following:

Why did the Arab states agree without a U.S. recognition of Palestine?

Why is Saudi Arabia not on board yet?

Will the incoming U.S. administration's stated intention of rapprochement with Iran dissuade Saudi Arabia from coming on board?



Hon. Yehiel "Hilik" Bar, deputy speaker of the Israeli Knesset (2013-2019), moderated the discussion. Each of the principal speakers provided brief opening remarks.

Former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper began with words of encouragement: "The Abraham Accords are a tremendously hopeful achievement for the world during what has otherwise been a very difficult time."

Israel's former Prime Minister Ehud Barak said he does not share the same political perspective as the current Israeli leadership. Nevertheless, in what he called "an irony of history," he said that, against the wishes of some of the (Israeli) originators, the Accords will lead to breaking the ice with the Palestinians as well.

He provided an example of how the Accords will change the attitudes of Israelis toward Palestinians:

Young Israelis asked for selfies with tourists from Dubai in the center of Tel Aviv -- only to discover that the "Emiratis" were actually young Arabs from a nearby city in Israel.

A European point of view was presented by the former prime minister of the Czech Republic, Mirek Topolánek, who stated, "The agreements of normalization of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco and the promise of similar [agreements] with Sudan are completely groundbreaking, historically significant and lasting."

Former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Newt Gingrich said: "What's important about the Abraham Accords is that they say, 'We historically are closer together. We are tribal brothers. We have much more reason to find a way to live together than to find a way to kill each other.'" Mr. Gingrich said the Accords represent "a real effort to embed the pursuit of peace into a process that involved a great historic lineage."

After a lively round of questions from the audience, which elicited valuable insights, the speakers offered their concluding remarks.

Speaker Gingrich said: "The key is for everybody to move forward. ... The opportunity has now been created for people to ... reach out to each other, create relationships, and I think that the more Israelis can interact with Sudanese or Moroccans or people from the various Gulf states, the better off [they will be] ... and that will send a signal to the other countries."



H.E. Mirek Topolánek offered a recommendation to the incoming Biden administration: that, while retaining every right to criticize their predecessors, they "continue this process, because it is very important, not only for the U.S. but for the whole world."

He also expressed a wish that former politicians can use their influence "because we are not in power, but we are influential. ... When we connect and have a common voice, we can help with the continuation of this process."

H.E. Ehud Barak said that "the Emirates and the other partners to the Abraham Accords will have both leverage against Israel and something to lose if they don't [succeed] ... but somehow it makes Israel more exposed to pressure from the Arab world to solve the Palestine issues and [gives them] something to lose if it doesn't happen."

Prime Minister Stephen Harper attributed the successful conclusion of the Accords to three factors: the United States' controversial moving of its embassy to Jerusalem, thereby squarely supporting Israel's existence; its unambiguous stance against Iran, thereby uniting Israel and Gulf interests; and its rejection of the notion that the Palestinians have a veto over peace between Israel and other Arab nations.

Looking forward to possible changes introduced by the incoming Biden administration, he said: "If the U.S. decides to go in the direction [of reaching out to Iran], I think, if anything, this will further solidify the alliance that's taking place between Israel and the Gulf Arabs."

Dr. Michael Jenkins, the president of UPF International, offered the closing remarks.

Future webinars in this series will include representatives from the other participating countries in the Abraham Accords, with the hope of providing constructive dialogue toward securing lasting peace in the region.