

Thomas G. Walsh
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"Challenges and Prospects for Peace in the Holy Land: A Conversation during the Time of Covid 19"

To view the May 29th webinar, click the following:

Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-q41ZabcMA
Podcast: soundcloud.com/upfpeacetalks/peacetalks7

May 29, 2020, UPF-International held a web conference titled "Challenges and Prospects for Peace in the Holy Land: A Conversation during the Time of Covid 19." The conference had over 300 participants from 52 countries.

Dr. Thomas Walsh (*Chairman, UPF International*) gave the opening remarks and introduced the panelists. During this time of the coronavirus governments have their hands full addressing the immediate challenges of the crisis. The political and economic impact is equally enormous and widely felt.

For this webinar, our attention turns to the Middle East. We invited panelists to discuss the political, social and economic context of the issues facing the Middle East and offer their recommendations for constructive steps toward dialogue, peace and development that might be taken, either by governments or non-state actors such as civil society, the private sector, and faith-based organizations.

Panelists:



Dr. Eldad Pardo (*Lecturer and research fellow, Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Head of Research, IMPACT-SE Institute for Monitoring Peace in School Education*) spoke first. He connected the current situation in the Middle East to two major events in 1979: the Iranian Revolution and the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel. These events represent the two approaches that have defined events in the region in the decades since: the radical destructive approach and the diplomatic constructive approach. He emphasized the need for peace education in the Middle East. After 9/11, there has been a concerted effort in many Arab countries, such as Jordan, to expunge radicalism from mainstream education. There has been a slow but effective progress in undoing decades of “hate-based” education and establishing more constructive perspectives.



Mr. Daniel Sherman (*Strategic Consultant and Lecturer of Middle East Affairs and Politics, Israel*) gave his remarks. He made a distinction between two ideas of peace: peace as an absence of war, and peace as the presence of liberty, justice and respect for international norms. In recent years, the former idea has prevailed. Mr. Sherman spoke optimistically of the potential role of the Arab-Israeli minority in building peace between Israel and Palestine. There have been major miscalculations in American Middle East policy throughout modern history, and future miscalculations resulting from poor communication and the lack of de-escalation protocols could be disastrous. There are many options available to the current government of Israel which could make a future two-state solution more stable, and Mr. Sherman called for those options to be taken seriously. He warned against miscalculation in US relations with Iran.



Hon. Gözde Dizdar (*Founder/Managing Director of Governance and Development [GD Global], Turkey*) spoke next. The “twin disasters” of the COVID-19 pandemic and the collapse of oil prices have rocked the region. Iran has been the regional epicenter of the pandemic, and the Middle East has reported over 220,000 cases. Worldwide lockdowns have dropped oil demand so dramatically that the price of oil has fallen below 0

dollars per barrel. These events have transformed and complicated ongoing regional crises, exacerbating displacement. Though these challenges are daunting, the crisis brings opportunities for positive change. Investment can be shifted from weapons and security towards health and technology. Hon. Dizdar concluded that the opportunity still exists for a greater, more prosperous future.



Imam Faisal Abdul Rauf (*Co-Founder and Chair, Cordova Initiative; Founder, American Society for Muslim Advancement*) followed with his thoughts. He connected the lockdown to the Muslim tradition of contemplative retreat during Ramadan. He further connected recent events to the passage in Isaiah, (swords into ploughshares). The general direction of modern history has been from war to

peace. He was less enthusiastic about a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine than about growing interdependence between the two peoples leading to economic and social union. He called for visionary leadership on both sides to move towards this solution. The pandemic crisis has created stresses for governments, contributing both to the weakening of the nation states and to a shift in the balance of power between governments and their people.



Rt. Revd. Riah El-Assal (*Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, 1998 to 2007*) quoted Albert Einstein who said, “Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law, of order- in short, of government.” Regarding the current situation, the Bishop feels the cause of peace hasn’t been affected by the coronavirus. On the contrary, people view the coronavirus as one other problem that faces the human race. He said

the Palestinians are entitled to a state of their own with East

Jerusalem as the capital and West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. He suggests the world city of Jerusalem be governed by a municipal council represented by the three faith traditions, Jewish, Christian and Muslim so it can be viewed as the capital of peace.

Due to technical difficulties the Bishop's message had to be recorded and inserted. He was not available for the question and answer session.

Q&A followed: On the question of whether COVID-19 constitutes a common enemy sufficient to bring Israel and Palestine together, Dr. Pardo challenged the notion that a “common enemy” is needed. Peace does not require an enemy. Mr. Sherman likewise challenged the idea of looking for enemies, seeing “mobilizing-against” as a key way that leaders manipulate their peoples against their own interests. Hon. Dizdar called for more communication and education about regional problems. Imam Rauf finished the discussion by reiterating that humans are images of God walking on earth, and calling for a celebration of religious and cultural diversity in recognition of that idea.

Comments may be sent to PeaceTalks@upf.org

Upcoming Events

MAY 30: [Decoding Parenting: Seven Weeks of the Family as a School of Love](#)

JUN 1: [UN Global Day of Parents](#)

JUN 30: [UN International Day of Parliamentarism](#)

JUL 18: [Nelson Mandela International Day](#)

AUG 19: [UN International Day of Peace](#)

AUG 19: [UN World Humanitarian Day](#)



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