

IAPP Jerusalem, Israel Knesset roundtable on the role of Israeli Arab community

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Jerusalem, Israel—On July 10, 2018 some 20 experts and parliamentarians gathered at the Knesset for a roundtable discussion on the topic of the central role of the Israeli Arab community in promoting regional peace and stability through economic avenues.

The host was Member of the Knesset (MK) Esawi Frej of the Meretz Party, who was joined by fellow Knesset members Akram Hasson from the ruling coalition and Zouhair Bahaloul from the Zionist Union.

After the welcoming remarks given by Mrs. Adi Sasaki, the forum's secretary general, Mr. Hod Ben Zvi, the president of UPF's Israeli chapter, gave a short orientation asking the participants to focus on the positive role that the Israeli Arab community can play in bridging the gaps in the Middle East region. Dr. Nurit Hirschfeld, secretary general of UPF-Israel, who chaired the session, gave the four presenters an opportunity to express their views on the topic. A very lively discussion followed, with diverse and sometimes even critical opinions.

The experts included Mr. Dan Kataribas, director of the Foreign Trade and International Relations Division of the Manufacturers' Association; Dr. Erez Sverdlov, who is a senior advisor for strategic planning and former head of the Center for Systems Analysis at the Planning Division in the Israeli Defense Force as well as being the head of the think tank for long-term planning of the energy sector in Israel. Also present were Mr. Tarek Debini, an expert in corporate and real estate taxation; Ambassador Zvi Mazel, former Israeli ambassador to Egypt, Romania and Sweden and former deputy director general for Africa in the Foreign Ministry; Dr. Arie Gronic, a specialist on international relations; Dr. Eldad Pardo, a scholar and renowned expert on Iran; Prof. Eliezer Glaubach, a political scientist and the president of the Jerusalem Peace & Security Forum.

The participants pointed out the important role of the Arab citizens of Israel as a bridge for peace with the Palestinian people and with the entire Middle East region. The potential of achieving a flourishing economy through regional cooperation on various projects such as solar energy, hi-tech hubs, and the like were noted.



Some emphasized that a precondition to the positive involvement of Arab Israelis in the region requires empowering their own economic development. One must consider that over the years, Arab Israelis have come closer to the Israelis in terms of culture and somewhat more distant from the traditional Arab culture prevailing in the region. However, their deep mutual roots and common language still give them an edge in serving as a bridge among the peoples. As can be learned from the Arab Spring movements, the wish of many people is to live in a democracy, and thus democratic countries like Israel can eventually serve as a positive catalyst.

MK Bhaloul expressed a very deep concern that haphazardly made laws that infringe on human rights, particularly in the Arab community, might create a regrettable setback in efforts for peace. MK Hasson gave a comprehensive report of positive economical steps that he has initiated to foster greater cooperation among Israelis and Palestinians

Prof. Glaubach brought up the idea of establishing committees composed of people with similar professional backgrounds from both communities who could be commissioned to work in parallel toward a better future for the entire region. In his closing remarks, Mr. Hod Ben Zvi called for lifting the spirit in the Arab Israeli community by focusing on a common regional vision.

The event was greatly supported by dynamic young leaders from the Israeli chapter of Youth and Students for Peace.