

IAPP Washington, D.C., USA Holds Second Discussion on Abraham Accords

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Washington, D.C., United States -- The 2020 agreements between Israel and several Arab nations were the focus of an international webinar.

The International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP), a constituent association of UPF, convened the online conference to include the perspectives of all major stakeholders in the Abraham Accords.

The discussion on February 25, 2021, was the second in a series of webinars organized by UPF under the title "Toward Peace in the Middle East."



Presentations were given by:

H.E. Shaikh Abdullah Al-Khalifa, ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the United States;

Hon. Roberto Rampi, a senator of the Republic of Italy;

Dr. Ali Al Nuaimi, a member of the United Arab Emirates' Federal National Council for Abu Dhabi and chair of the council's Defense Affairs, Interior and Foreign Relations Committee;

Mr. Suhail Ghazi Alghosaibi, the founder and chairman of the Bahrain Foundation for Dialogue;

Hon. Dan Burton, a former U.S. congressman;

Guy Taylor, the National Security Team leader of The Washington Times.

The webinar was expertly moderated by Dr. Samia Tawil Burton, a medical doctor and a professor of medicine at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and included opening remarks by Dr. Tageldin Hamad, vice president of UPF International, and closing remarks by UPF International President Dr. Michael Jenkins.



Dr. Tageldin Hamad in his opening remarks reminded us that "we must face complex challenges which cannot be solved by one nation alone." Whatever our political orientation, he said, "all of us need to re-educate ourselves, our children and our communities to replace the cycle of offense and retaliation with forgiveness and reconciliation."

Hon. Dan Burton described IAPP as having been created with the goal to stop war, and he praised the Abraham Accords as "a giant step" in the direction of world peace. He then gave a warm and expansive introduction to Bahrain's ambassador to the United States, Shaikh Abdullah Al-Khalifa, including the ambassador's 2016 receipt of an honorary award from Bahrain's King Hamad for his achievements.

Shaikh Abdullah described the Accords as "a game-changing initiative that will have historic implications for the region." Bahrain's signing was "driven by our desire and commitment to achieve security, stability and true, lasting peace in the Middle East."

He pointed out that this is in keeping with his country's long-standing policies; and he made clear that the very real benefits in the area of economy and trade brought with them new opportunities for all the peoples of the region. "Being proponents of Palestinian rights does not negate the ability to work with Israel," he said.

Later, in response to a question, Shaikh Abdullah added: "Ultimately, with a public and open relationship with Israel, we can be more beneficial to our Palestinian brothers in multiple ways. We can focus on incremental steps that simultaneously promote Palestinian freedom and prosperity while preserving Israeli security. We should encourage expanded people-to-people exchanges that build trust between Arabs and Israelis. And finally, it's important for the Palestinians to know that we have not nor will we abandon them or their goals. The two-state solution has been a goal which Bahrain has and continues to unwaveringly advocate."

Guy Taylor of The Washington Times described the Accords as "the biggest foreign policy achievement of the Trump administration" because "both Republicans and a good number of Democrats have supported and celebrated them."

Dr. Ali Al Nuaimi, a member of the UAE Federal National Council for Abu Dhabi, described himself as "part of the Abraham Accords," explaining that he had been involved from an early stage, and later in the finalization and promotion of the Accords in the Arab world.

He described the immediate benefits in terms of visits and joint exhibitions. Dr. Al Nuaimi said he would like to see Europeans more involved in this process "because they can play a major role, especially with the Palestinians, bringing them back to the table." He went on to say that, in his view, over the past six months the Palestinian mind has changed, as they can see the good side of the Accords. He said it is time to engage Palestinian NGOs, youth and women's organizations; with suitable initiatives, local partners will emerge who support the Accords.



Mr. Suhail Ghazi Algosaibi, the founder and chairman of Bahrain Foundation for Dialogue, told a personal story that revealed a radically different perspective on the Accords. Influenced by some of his primary school teachers in Saudi Arabia who had exalted the idea of martyrdom in the name of Palestine, he told us that he often had dreamed of joining the jihad against the Zionist state.

However, he said, "As I grew up and matured and my thinking evolved, I went from dreaming of the liberation of Palestine to finally accepting the idea of a two-state solution."



Commenting on the Accords, he said: "When the Abraham Accords were announced, I admit it took me by surprise. I felt that we gave up too much for too little in return. I also felt like the Palestinian cause was being abandoned. Something deep in my being was being affected. However, upon further reflection I came to the conclusion that the Accords were indeed the right way to go."

In his view, signing the declaration of peace does not contradict his nation's ongoing support for the Arab Peace Initiative, "which brings me great personal comfort."

"The truth is," he concluded, "the Middle East has been in turmoil and conflict for decades, and it is time

to try a different method, to find an inclusive solution that brings prosperity for all. In short, we need a new playbook. ... So I am [changing] from a skeptic to someone who is very, very optimistic."

Hon. Roberto Rampi observed that his country, Italy, more than other European nations looks toward the other side of the Mediterranean. "We in the past worked a lot as Italians to make peace and to make reconciliation as part of one world family, but in particular as part of Abraham's family."

Hon. Rampi spoke of his visits to both Jerusalem and Ramallah for important UPF meetings involving Israeli and Palestinian parliamentarians. "We understood how difficult the situation was because of the loss of hope for the future" and the lack of sense that something can change. He said he supports the idea of involving more actors in the process of finding a solution.



The question-and-answer session that followed touched on matters related to tolerance, education, youth and culture. Here are some excerpts from the answers provided by panelists.

For Dr. Al Nuaimi, tolerance does not convey the full meaning of the Arabic word they use. While tolerating implies doing someone a favor, "we believe in coexistence. The UAE is a very diverse community. ... We see the future ... not only in trading and investment and business: We see it in culture and values." He described an approach that focuses on helping people accept others, starting with education in kindergarten, where teachers come from all over the world. Dr. Al Nuaimi spoke of a conversation with a Brussels rabbi on his third day in the UAE. Asked what he had found in the UAE, the rabbi replied: "I saw those young Emirati boys and girls welcoming me and smiling at me. I felt that they were smiling from their heart." Dr. Al Nuaimi said, "This is the outcome of our investment."

Suhail Alghosaibi wanted to speak next: "I felt a bit competitive with Dr. Ali when he was talking about the tolerance in the UAE, which of course I agree with 100 percent. But I actually felt -- hey, [in Bahrain] we're more tolerant than the UAE! I just wanted to talk about some of the things we have here, just so that we don't feel left out."

This elicited smiles all around and a later comment from Guy Taylor: "Any time there's a competition over who is more tolerant, that's [one] I want to be present for." Picking up on Dr. Ali's mention of a rabbi, Mr. Alghosaibi spoke of a 100-year-old synagogue in Bahrain, and even older churches there.

In his closing remarks, Dr. Michael Jenkins pointed us toward the third webinar in this series, which will host speakers from Morocco, Israel and the United States; renewing UPF's commitment to continue this process and involve all stakeholders, in line with the 20-year legacy of its Middle East Peace Initiative.