

## Jerusalem Interfaith Forum: Holy Places as an Anchor of Stability

Nurit Hirschfeld

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Jerusalem, Israel—Thirty guests of UPF-Israel attended the Jerusalem Interfaith Forum on May 28, 2015 at Hebrew University. At a time when tensions are high and fundamental religious forces are gaining power in the region, the Jerusalem Interfaith Forum convened to discuss “The Holy Places in Jerusalem as an Anchor of Stability in a Long-Term Arrangement.”

The event opened with greetings, given by Sheik Ali Birani, president of the Jerusalem Interfaith Forum, who is from Daliat El-Carmel. Following Sheik Birani’s opening remarks, Dr. Nurit Hirschfeld, secretary general of UPF-Israel spoke about the topic of the forum: “Our session is dedicated to searching [for] paths for stable peace in Jerusalem, and [how] the holy places in Jerusalem [can be] a solution [to] the conflict, rather than an excuse for [it].”

Father Masoud Abu-Hatoum, a Greek Melkite priest from Nazareth, was the first speaker. He emphasized Jesus words’ of love, and the way of love and forgiveness, to point the way for peace for rather than conflict over the holy places: “God is living in us. If we want to feel God, we need to do to others only what we want people to do to us,” he said.

Sheik Samich Natur, editor in chief of Al-Amama, a Druze magazine in Israel, spoke about peace principles in the Druze religion, which call for the respect of all faiths, as long as the religion or faith does not harm followers of the Druze faith. Sheik Natur also said that the Druze religion respects all holy

places of other religions. The Druze religion's respect for and way of living in peace with all faiths was inspiring.



Rabbi Edgar Nof, chair of the Bridges for Hope, a non-profit in Haifa, said that holy places are not revered as holy by people today. He talked about his yearning, as a Jew, for the Western Wall and Jerusalem to be respected as holy places—not places to be disputed over. “We should elevate [ourselves] morally [so that] we can feel the holiness of these places,” said Rabbi Nof. He mentioned that several days ago, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) had destroyed pieces of art and holy places. The way in which they destroy holy places has become major news. “But, at the same attack, thousands of people were murdered. It seemed that the media cared less for the human lives [that were lost] than for the holy places that were destroyed,” he said. “Holiness should [begin within] ourselves, in our sensitivity for human life and for people, rather than for buildings,” concluded Rabbi Nof.