



INAUGURAL ALAN B. SLIFKA FORUM

May 23-24, 2013

Jerusalem

SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

The Forum Concept

The Alan B. Slifka Forum for a Shared Society was conceived and created by The Abraham Fund Initiatives, with the collaboration and support of the Alan B. Slifka Foundation and the Jerusalem Foundation's *Mishkenot Sha'ananim* international conference center, to honor the legacy of The Abraham Fund's visionary founder, a pioneer in thought and in action of the movement for advancing a shared society for Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens.

The Forum will convene annually for in-depth deliberation behind closed doors among a compact group of selected Jewish and Arab opinion shapers – women and men from academia, the private sector, civil service, politics, the media, religion and culture, and young emerging leaders – around some of the most sensitive and important issues in Jewish-Arab relations. Unlike traditional conference formats, the Alan B. Slifka Forum seeks to create safe space among this small and highly diverse group of thought leaders for discussion focused on the long-term policy and practice measures required to promote inclusion and equality.



The 2013 Inaugural Forum Program

Orni Petruschka, chair of The Abraham Fund-Israel, and Suheil Karam, CEO of Radio A-Shams, served as co-chairs of the 2013 inaugural Forum, joined by attorney and Abraham Fund Board member Basha'er Fahoum-Jayoussi who co-facilitated the plenary sessions among the 35 Forum participants. The 2013 Forum program was entitled "Advancing Inclusion in an Environment of Polarization: The Next Ten Years," and centered around two key themes: the identity of the Arab minority in Israel, and the participation of the Arab public within Israeli society.

A half-day plenary session was devoted to each of these two themes. Sessions were built around position papers specially commissioned by the Forum from four leading Jewish and Arab thinkers, and which identified both challenges and directions for future policy attention. The position papers and their authors were as follow:

- *The National Identity of Israel's Arab Citizens: Possibilities and Challenges*, by Dr. Adel Manna (pictured)
- *Arab-Palestinian Identity in Israel: Proposal for a Renewed Conversation and for Creation of a Shared Civic Identity*, by Dr. Sarah Ozacky-Lazar (pictured)
- *Recognition and Reconciliation as Conditions for Participation of Arabs in Israel*, by Adv. Sigal Horovitz
- *Is Participation of the Arab Public in Israeli Society a Matter of Consciousness?* by Yasser Awad.



The position papers – due to be edited by the authors to reflect the discussions that took place at the Forum – will be published at a later date and made available by The Abraham Fund to interested readers.

Special Forum Opening Event



In addition to the two half-day Forum plenary sessions, a festive opening event was held on Thursday evening, May 23rd, for which the 35 Forum members were joined by some 100 additional invited guests – representatives of various civil society organizations, Board members and friends of The Abraham Fund.

Following a cocktail and buffet reception, the evening's program was opened by Forum co-chair Suheil Karam, followed by a moving tribute to Alan Slifka's memory presented by former MK, cabinet minister and long-time friend Rabbi Michael Melchior (pictured).



Co-keynote speakers for the evening were Professor Mordechai Kremnitzer (Vice President of Research at the Israel Democracy Institute, and Professor Emeritus at the Hebrew University



Faculty of Law), and Professor Michail Karayanni (Bruce W. Wayne Chair in International Law, Silver Chair in Civil Procedure and Director of the Harry and Michael Sacher Institute for Legislative Research and Comparative Law at the Hebrew University). Professors Kremnitzer and Karayanni spoke powerfully and unequivocally about the legal and philosophical imperative of full equality and inclusion for Israel's Arab citizens.

The evening was capped off by a special concert performance – in Hebrew and Arabic – by Israeli music legend Ehud Banai and his quartet of Arab and Jewish musicians (*pictured*).

Forum Deliberation Highlights

While it is impossible to condense hours of intense deliberations into a brief summary, following are just a few highlights of the Slifka Forum discussions. The various points of view expressed by individual Forum participants were greeted with either a greater or lesser degrees of concurrence – and sometimes with outright opposition – from other participants. Nevertheless, these comments are brought forward here to illustrate the breadth and depth of issues raised during the course of Forum sessions.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel

- Resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a necessary but not sufficient condition for reaching a sustainable long-term arrangement for majority-minority relations in Israel
- At the same time, granting equality and rights to Israeli Arabs should not and need not be dependent on resolution of the cross-border conflict
- While “two states for two peoples” was the most commonly endorsed framework for resolution of the conflict, some can imagine other models (one state from the river to the sea, two states in one country), while others argued that the specific form of a solution to the conflict is secondary in importance to resolution of the matter of the nature of the state and its Jewish character

Jewish State – Democratic State

- Most believe that the democratic character of Israel must trump its Jewish character in conflicts of law, contrary to some points of view being expressed through current legislative proposals aimed at subordinating “democratic” to “Jewish” in the case of such legal conflicts
- Others suggest ignoring the question of “Jewish or democratic” and focusing on bottom-up strategies for removing practical barriers to inclusion and participation
- The Zionist axiom of Israel as the state of the global Jewish people – rather than as the state of its Jewish citizens – is a point of contention among some, including among those who accept Israel as the expression of the right of Jewish self-determination

- One participant argued forcefully that Arabs need “to let go” of the position that Zionism and the creation of the state were only a response to the Shoah, rather than a historically-driven, long-standing national movement of Jewish self-determination
- The “Law of Return” – by which native-born Arabs have fewer rights than immigrating Jews – is seen by some Arab members as a barrier to creating a truly shared and equal society, while it is not a deal breaker for others

Inclusion and Equality

- The framework for sustainable Jewish-Arab relations in Israel must include mutual recognition, equal citizenship rights, and a fair distribution of resources
- One member observed that Jews and Arabs in Israel are “Siamese twins” – Jews cannot actualize their identity unless Arabs can actualize theirs
- Jews need the courage to enter into a discourse about how to “stretch” the identity of the majority in order to make room for the identity of the minority
- Some members argued that creating “shared public spaces” should be a priority in Jewish-Arab relations, rather than focusing on “shared citizenship,” while others argued that we need to create a new civic lexicon based on shared society values, to reframe concepts of citizenship and nationality
- While there is a tendency to defer seeking solutions to the “problematic state symbols” (from the perspective of many Israeli Arabs) – the flag and national anthem – some Arab and Jewish participants argued that these issues should not be set aside, as they represent a key barrier to identity and participation
- One member noted that national/community service – if adopted by the Arab community – could bolster and legitimize demands for equality
- Another member observed that if Arabs “lower their demands” – accept the unique right of return for Jews, for example – then Jews will be more open to equality and inclusion
- Arab acceptance of a permanent Jewish majority can’t be a condition for equality and integration

Government Responsibility

- Affirmative action is a necessary strategy for promoting participation and inclusion
- Fair representation and equal services is not enough – Arab Israelis need to be “partners in power”
- Arab participation in governing coalitions is a key to more rapid change
- Government needs to create and consistently implement a master plan for eliminating gaps
- Jobs and economic development is a key, although not sufficient, strategy for achieving equality and inclusion

Other Thoughts for Further Consideration

- The new generation of Israeli Arabs merges Eastern and Western cultures, and government has yet to recognize the weakening authority of traditional leaders within Arab society; there is an across-the-board leadership crisis within Arab society – political, economic, social
- Transitional justice/reconciliation processes – like the “truth commissions” employed in South Africa, the Balkans and other post-conflict zones – might be helpful in addressing the damage done in 1948 and during the years of military administration; it’s not too late, and Israel need not wait for a solution to the conflict with the Palestinians to start the reconciliation process with those who are predisposed
- Religious leaders can and should play a more prominent role in reconciliation and coexistence

2013 Forum Participants

Dr. Thabet Abu Ras, Kher Albaz, Dr. Mohammd Alnabari, Dr. Meirav Alush-Levron, Rafa Anabtawi, Yasser Awad, Ami Ayalon, Oudeh Basharat, Amnon Be’eri-Sulitzeanu, Mohammad Darawshe, Adv. Basha’er Fahoum-Jayoussi, Prof. Ruth Gavison, Adv. Ali Haider, Prof. Tamar Herman, Adv. Sigal Horovitz, Suheil Karam, Rabbi Adv. Gilad Kariv, Prof. Mordechai Kremnitzer, Adv. Orni Lin, Dr. Adel Manna, Ami Nahshon, Adv. Aiman Odeh, Dr. Sarah Ozacky-Lazar, Orni Petruschka, Mike Prashker, Prof. Yitzhak Reiter, Gaida Rinawi-Zoabi, MK Reuven (Ruby) Rivlin, Anat Saragousti, Sarah Silver, Prof. Sammy Smooha, Maisa Totri-F’hori, Reja Zatara.

*Ami Nahshon
June 2, 2013*