

Community news

Jewish-Arab dialogue:

"The wish is to see Canada get back to the world of peace building"

By BERNIE BELLAN

Before Jews and Arabs can have any sort of a meaningful dialogue, they have to agree on a set of common values: "Respect, dignity, tolerance, and diversity."

That was how Howard Morry described the fundamental challenge facing the group of Arabs and Jews that has meeting informally in Winnipeg for the past five years (and which has already been documented by Myron Love in two previous issues of this paper), known as the "Arab-Jewish dialogue".

For the first time, however, on March 7, members of the group appeared together in public to discuss how the group came together and what it hopes to achieve.

The setting was the University of Winnipeg, as four members of the Arab-Jewish dialogue group sat together on a podium. They were: Ab Frieg and Osama Abou-Zeid, both Egyptian-born businessmen who have made Winnipeg their home; along with Howard Morry and Jim Carr.

Morry explained that the group of Arabs and Jews started with ten



Members of the Jewish Arab Dialogue (l-r): JIM CARR, OSAMA ABOU-ZEID, HOWARD MORRY, and AB FRIEG.

members. The original mentor for the group was Harold Buchwald, Frieg noted.

While membership in the group is by invitation only, it is not an exclusive club. At the present time, although there aren't any women involved as yet, members on the Arab side, in addition to Frieg and Abou-Zeid, include individuals from Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, and women are certainly welcome to join on either side.

Given the controversial connotation that entering into a dialogue with Jews would inevitably have among many Arabs here, however, Frieg admitted that extending invitations to other Arabs to join the group is something that has to be done with an eye toward keeping out individuals whose temperament might not lend itself toward this type of meaningful dialogue.

As the panelists expressed their views during the course of the evening, it was apparent that, if it were up to the four men on the panel, achieving peace between Israelis and Palestinians would be a relatively straightforward affair.

As Howard Morry put it, "What are you told not to talk about when you're with strangers? 'Politics and religion'."

"What do we talk about when we get together? 'Politics and religion'."

Yet, not everything has always been peace and light when the members of the group have got together. Morry admitted that the lowest point came during Operation Cast Lead (Israel's incursion into Gaza in late 2009 or, as the Arab members of the group would have it, Israel's "invasion" of Gaza). "For the Arab members of the group there was something really personal going on," Morry explained.

"I said to the Arab members: 'I really want you to know how sorry we are for the loss of life,'" he said.

"That was a breakthrough," Morry noted.

Ab Frieg gave an illustration how perceptions vary so dramatically between Arabs and Jews. He related how, upon reading of Harold Buchwald's death in the paper, he was surprised to see Buchwald described as a "Zionist".


Frieg said that his friends said to him: "He was a Zionist? But we liked him."

Similarly, Osama Abou-Zeid told how, as a young boy growing up in Egypt in the 1950's, the one phrase that was constantly repeated when the name "Israel" came up was: "Israel should be buried in the sea!"


It wasn't until he came to Canada in 1974 (after having fought in the 1973 Yom Kippur War) that he had his first encounters with Jews (other than at a distance on the battlefield).

"You find your lawyer is a Jew, your doctor is a Jew...you begin to have personal interaction with them...the best way to dialogue is to break bread with your Jewish friends."

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**Congregation
Shaarey
Zedek**



**Jewish Federation
OF WINNIPEG**

Japan RELIEF Benefit Concert

**Tuesday, March 29
7:00 PM**

Congregation Shaarey Zedek
561 Wellington Crescent

**Featuring the Fubuki Daiko
Japanese Drum Group and more!**

100% of donations will go toward the
Jewish Federation of Winnipeg Japan Relief Fund.
Visa, MasterCard, cheque and cash accepted.
A tax receipt will be issued for donations over \$10.
If you are unable to attend the concert, please make
a donation by calling 477-7427 or visit
www.jewishwinnipeg.org.

Admission: Free

Everyone is Welcome!

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Jewish Federation of Winnipeg 477-7427

Jewish Federation of Winnipeg Organizes Relief for Victims of Earthquake and Tsunami for Japan and the Pacific

(March 14, 2011) – The Jewish Federation of Winnipeg has opened an emergency Pacific Relief Fund to provide aid and support to the victims of the 8.9 magnitude earthquake and ensuing tsunami that struck Japan on March 11, 2011.

Donations received will be immediately channeled through our partner: the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) – the world's leading non-sectarian Jewish humanitarian assistance organization.

Donations can be made online at www.jewishwinnipeg.org or by calling (204) 477-7427. Cheques can be made payable to "Jewish Federation Pacific Relief Fund". Credit cards will also be accepted.

David Frum is Jewish Heritage Centre's 6th annual Sol & Florence Kanee Distinguished Lecturer, April 28

Two days before the February 11 fall of Mubarak, David Frum wrote about the Egypt-Israel peace (The Week, FrumForum.com, February 9): "If Mubarak's regime falls, not much will survive of the peace. If Egypt's most important international commitments can vanish with the departure of a single leader, how much less binding will be the commitments of the Palestinian Authority under Abbas, whose regime looks especially shaky?"

Lack of economic opportunity, lack of personal freedom, disgust with official corruption are issues cited by protesters. Not the Palestinian issue. Had that issue somehow been settled in 2000 or 2008, would Egyptians be any less discontented with their surging cost of living or their daunting unemployment?

Before the Egyptian protests, the big story on Al Jazeera was the leak of Palestinian Authority negotiating papers that sketched out a very aggressive set of claims, including Palestinian control of almost all of historic Jerusalem. These documents exposed negotiating bids that far exceeded the maximum imaginable concessions available from any Israeli government... Yet Al Jazeera and Palestinian public opinion generally have depicted the Palestine papers as an intolerable and humiliating betrayal. Rather than defend the positions outlined, which would require warning their public that peace will require many further compromises and concessions, Palestinian leadership has retreated into fantasy. Interviewed on the BBC this week, chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said the PA would never sign an agreement that terminated all Palestinian claims against Israel. Individual Palestinians would, Erekat promised, retain the right to demand resettlement within Israel as well as compensation from Israel. Obviously Israel would never sign such an agreement. Equally obviously, Palestinian leaders who promote such false hopes will not dare to sign a deal that they can actually get."

With the March 16 punctuation into the Middle East turmoil that Abbas would not seek re-election, the JHC anticipates Frum's lecture "Is Time Running Out for Israel?" with great interest. For tickets and lecture sponsorships, contact JHCWC @ 477-7460 or jhcwc.org.

SUSAN TURNER

SOL AND FLORENCE KANEE 6TH ANNUAL DISTINGUISHED LECTURE

Is Time Running Out for Israel?



Thursday
April 28, 2011
8:00 p.m.

Shaarey Zedek Synagogue
501 Wellington Crescent

DAVID FRUM

"one of the leading political commentators of his generation"
The Wall Street Journal, 1996

senior foreign policy advisor to Rudy Giuliani
presidential campaign, 2007-2008

special assistant to President George W. Bush, 2001-2003



\$36 Adults; \$24 Seniors, Students
Lecture sponsorships, with tax receipts \$100 & up
Contact JHCWC 477-7460 or jhcwc.org

Community news

Peace building

(Cont. from page 2.)

Zionism as an example.

"The Arabs say it was a great colonization force. For me Zionism was represented by the little blue box in my home growing up."

Yet, Carr noted, the members of the Arab-Jewish dialogue have reached a consensus as to what will be required in a peace treaty between Israelis and Palestinians, including: "A contiguous Palestinian state" established within pre-1967 borders, living alongside a "contiguous Israeli state"; a Palestinian state that will be allowed to decide where its capital could be located, including the possibility of Arab Jerusalem; and some form of compensation for Palestinian refugees, although without an explicit right of return.

Ironically, Frieg noted that the group has moved far ahead of the current Canadian government when it comes to acknowledging realities in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

"Our wish is to see Canada get back to the world of peace building," Frieg said.

"Canada has taken one side. In the past Canada did not. Canada has the ability to take leadership and bring the parties together. It can play a significant role...I'm very disappointed that it (the Israel-Palestine issue) has become a politicized issue."

Howard Morry, however, took pains to argue against foreign involvement in the peace-making process: "Israel's perception is that whenever the international community gets involved, it works less to their (Israel's) favour. It's called the 'internationalization' of the conflict. Israel feels it can look after its own security. Israel feels it hasn't been accepted in the region. Everything that has happened falls into the pattern of steps being taken to delegitimize Israel...The view is that Israel is the colonial occupier of the area."

Morry admitted that there's not a lot of room to bring those two perceptions together.

If there is anything in particular that can be taken from this groundbreaking Arab-Jewish dialogue here in Winnipeg, it is the hope that what has been going on in Winnipeg can be emulated in other cities across North America.

Howard Morry observed that: "This is 'ground zero' for a Jewish-Arab dialogue. There are no other groups like this in Canada or the U.S."

As the panelists reiterated, coming together in dialogue does not necessarily mean acceptance of the other side's position. What it does require is an understanding that Arabs and Jews have two different "narratives" of history.

In Morry's words, "Within the group it is possible to bring the two sides together. We, as Jews, can accept that Arabs were colonized and resisted that colonization, while Israel is a return to Zion of the Jewish people. The two views are not inherently in conflict."

"When agreement comes, it will be when both sides accept each other's narratives," Morry said, in conclusion.

Egypt resumes supplying gas to Israel

JERUSALEM (JTA) - Egypt resumed supplying Israel with natural gas after a six-week interruption.

The gas flow resumed late Tuesday night, March 15, after a fifth delay on Monday. The break in supply came after a gas line was sabotaged on Feb. 5 during the uprising in Egypt that ousted President Hosni Mubarak.

A leak was discovered shortly before the gas supply was set to resume Monday, the Ampal-American Israel Corp said in a statement.

Egypt supplies more than 40 percent of the gas that Israel needs to provide the country with electricity. The supplies had been expected to resume last month. It is not clear if Israel will now receive gas in the same quantities as previously.

The Israel Electric Company earlier this month received permission from Israel's Environmental Protection Ministry to use diesel and fuel oil to run power plants in the absence of the natural gas.

Some Israeli media have accused the Egyptian interim military government authorities of delaying the supply of gas to Israel for political reasons.

Egypt has suggested that it will not supply the usual amounts of gas when the pipeline is up and running again, according to reports, and wants to renegotiate better terms for its contract with Israel for supplying natural gas.

U.S. Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.), a leading Jewish Democrat, praised Egypt for renewing the gas.

"I deeply appreciate this very important decision by the Egyptian government, a decision that we should honestly acknowledge will not be welcome by many Egyptians," Ackerman said. "Nevertheless, Egypt's wise decision to accept its contractual obligation is a very welcome development, and an important sign that Egypt will continue to adhere to its international commitments; commitments that have served and protected Egypt's own vital national interests."