

Middle East Project

A program of the Middle East Peace Civic Forum in collaboration with the Fulbright Center and our partners

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"Peace is Possible – and Here's How," Declares Middle East Project

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(L to R) MEP Board Member Abeer Pelon Kayed, Chairman Joel Segal, Partner Majid Alsayegh, Executive Director Matthew Lakenbach, Congressman John Conyers, Jazz Musician Bill Brower, International Chairman Ghassan Manasra, and Vice Chair Sam Rasoul

The Middle East Project held a Congressional Briefing on Thursday, May 14, outlining our strategy and our commitment to shift the context of Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution away from enmity and blame and toward empathy and reconciliation.

Israeli Arab Sufi Sheikh and International Board Chairman Ghassan Manasra, Executive Director

Matthew Lakenbach, Former DC Congressman Walter Fauntroy and others addressed the audience of Congressmen, staffers and community members.

The briefing took place in the Cannon office building in the United States House of Representatives.

Three Members of Congress participated, including John Conyers of Michigan, Chairman of the Judiciary Committee; Walter Jones of North Carolina; and Dennis Kucinich of Ohio.

"Martin Luther King Jr. gave us the courage to take on this issue," declared Congressman Conyers. "We are going to deal with this intractable problem," he asserted.



Former DC Delegate

Former District of Columbia Congressman Walter Fauntroy, a 20-year veteran of Congress who also worked closely with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, also addressed the audience. "We are not taking the temperature, we are setting the temperature," declared Mr. Fauntroy. "We are calling on members of Congress to tell the truth with love and to have

Walter Fauntroy

the courage to speak out for peace," he announced.

Middle East Project Executive Director Matthew Lakenbach spoke about the urgency of Middle East peace and why the Middle East Project is the right vehicle to facilitate its realization. "We are not a blame movement, but a peace movement," asserted Lakenbach. "Now is the time for reconciliation in the Abrahamic family," he added.



Matthew Lakenbach and
Congressman John Conyers

Lakenbach also set forward the organization's strategy, which involves building as broad as possible a coalition of civil society and interfaith leaders and building a bridge to government officials, primarily in Washington, DC and in the Middle East.

Middle East Project International Chairman Ghassan Manasra, a Sufi Sheikh and distinguished thinker from Jerusalem and Nazareth, discussed the importance of including the voices of the people in the peace process. "The United States of America can play a very great role in resolving this problem," said Manasra. He noted that both Israeli and Palestinian peacemakers, including many pro-peace religious leaders, felt that they needed someone in Washington to speak up and share about their ongoing work for coexistence. "That is why we created the Middle East Project," said Manasra.



Center for Religious
Tolerance Director
Andrea Blanch

Andrea Blanch, Executive Director of the Center for Religious Tolerance, an MEP partner organization, spoke about the impact of civil society and interfaith leaders on the hearts and minds of the people. She highlighted the role of women in building conditions conducive to sustainable coexistence, noting that "women, especially women of faith, are the greatest untapped source of power for peace in the Middle East. "

Avi Meyerstein, Executive Director of the Alliance for Middle East Peace, or ALLMEP, spoke about the impact of interfaith dialogue and the necessity of carrying it out on a grand scale.



ALLMEP Ex. Dir. Avi
Meyerstein

Reverend Marcia L. Dyson, Middle East Project Ambassador at Large and noted social activist, spoke eloquently in the midst of a three-week fast in support of those who are suffering and underprivileged. "While we support self-determination for Israelis and Palestinians, our emphasis is not on territory because all of the land belongs to God," asserted Dyson. "This will take a long effort, but peace is possible because we are the one's we've been waiting for," concluded Dyson.

Salam (Sam) Rasoul, MEP Vice Chair and former candidate for Congress in Virginia's sixth district, spoke about the importance of creating a "civic forum" to allow multiple voices to be heard at the negotiating table in order to forge a just, lasting, and permanent peace agreement. "Let's start



Noted activist and author
Marcia L. Dyson

talking about some basic things," suggested Rasoul. "Do all people deserve running water? Most of us want peace, and by bringing all of the stakeholders together we can find solutions," Rasoul concluded.

Abeer Pelon Kayed, a Palestinian refugee born in the Shatila refugee camp in Lebanon who recently completed her PhD in Middle Eastern Studies, told her personal story of overcoming the effects of violence and statelessness to reconcile with her Jewish and Christian brothers and sisters and becoming a part of an interfaith organization. "We need the Middle East Project because people of good will, Jews, Christians and Muslims everywhere, are saying that enough is enough and now is the time to live in peace," declared Kayed.



Human rights leader
Timothy Cooper

Renowned human rights leader Timothy Cooper spoke of the nexus between human rights, international law, and religious peacebuilding.

Joel Segal, Chairman of the Board, emphasized his belief in the unprecedented nature of the Middle East Project and the extraordinary opportunity represented by the organization.

Several other MEP Directors were in attendance as well, including Jane Swensen, Peter Boyle, Christine Warnke, and Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid. Shaykh Rashid is the Founder and Executive Director of Legacy International, another important MEP Partner.



Executive Director Matthew Lakenbach,
Congressman John Conyers, and Abeer Pelon
Kayed



Harriet Fulbright and Ghassan Manasra

Following the reception, Marcia Dyson hosted an elegant reception at her home, where the distinguished guests included Christine Warnke, Harriet Fulbright, Congressman Conyers, Holly Shere and others.

The Middle East Project is a program of the Middle East Peace Civic Forum and its partners. Based in Washington, DC, and Jerusalem, we are the bridge between the grassroots, civil society and interfaith peacemakers in the Holy Land and the international diplomatic community. Copyright © 2009, [Middle East Peace Civic Forum]. All rights reserved.