

## Trusted Regional Partnerships at a Time of Shifting Alliances 2023 Arab-Israel-Africa Summit - Conference Highlights



On March 27-29, 2023, representatives of think tanks, applied-diplomacy institutes, and journalists from over 20 countries in the Middle East and Africa came together in Jerusalem for a conference tackling the war on terror and radicalization, as well as water and food security, initiated by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. Among the guests were representatives of countries that do not have diplomatic ties with Israel.

This review of the highlights of the conference features excerpts from the presentations of the participants:

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### **Introduction**



**Welcome – Isaac Herzog, President of Israel**

### **Join Our Collaborative Endeavors and Be Part of the Solution**

The common interests shared by the people of the Middle East have been transformed into a shared vision of the future, culminating in the historic Abrahamic accords. These point squarely to the power of our good will to re-sketch the boundaries of our political maps and our imaginations, and to the potential of collaboration to leverage the best of our abilities towards solutions that safeguard the future of all our people.

I firmly believe that working with partners old and new, we can transform our greater region into not just a new Middle East, but a renewable Middle East that thrives as a hub of sustainable solutions in food, water, health and supply of energy.

I invite each of you to step forward to join our collaborative endeavors and to be part of the solution to the problems we all face.



**Dan Diker, President, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs**

### **Building More Resilient Societies across the Middle East and Africa**

Jerusalem is in the center of the world and we really believe you feel it too. Jerusalem is our holy shared city for all of us - Jews, Muslims and Christians. The logo of the Jerusalem Center is taken from the Bunting Clover Leaf Map by German Protestant pastor, theologian, and cartographer Heinrich Bunting, published in 1581. Jerusalem is in the center of the map surrounded by the continents of Europe, Africa, and Asia. That was a geographic vision and it was a theological vision from his point of view. Is it not extraordinary that in 2023 we are sitting together in Jerusalem to concretize a vision that is nearly 500 years old.

We think about the concept of national security in a broad context. We usually speak about counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and the classic sense of security. But it is important to understand that food security, water security, agriculture, infrastructure, becoming net exporters, also becomes part of national security for each country represented here today. At the end of the day, we have to restabilize and build more resilient societies across the Middle East and Africa.

We also have to securitize in the classic sense. We have to make sure that we have physical security.



## **Introduction – Dr. Yechiel Leiter, Director-General, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs**

### **Provide the Policies that Can Be Translated into Practical Action**

The idea for this conference was actually born about four months ago in Addis Ababa. The Institute for Peace and Security Studies hosted a conference on the Horn of Africa and invited me to present a paper. Instead of talking about conventional weaponry and conventional warfare, I chose to speak about food and water security. I pushed the fact that 50 years ago we had few solutions to the problems of desertification, of clean water scarcity, of parasites, energy production, wastewater management and more. But today, there's no excuse for almost a billion people going to sleep every night hungry, suffering from malnutrition and disease, and being driven into tribal and ethnic conflict out of poverty and despair. Today, we have the solutions to those problems. Several of the participants suggested a follow-up conference in Israel and we decided to move forward.

The questions are great and the challenges are many. What are the effects of the U.S. stepping back from the Middle East? The expansionism of China and the aggressiveness of Russia? Will the apparent entente between Saudi Arabia and Iran spoil the normalization taking place daily between Israel and the Emirates, between Israel and Bahrain? What about the slow but steady understandings between the Saudi kingdom itself and Israel?

What will happen if Iran goes nuclear? How will that affect terrorism exported from Tehran to different parts of the globe? Will Lebanon collapse completely? What about Yemen? Sub-

Saharan Africa, which the UN has categorized as the epicenter of sovereignty-threatening terrorism? What about Nigeria and its troubles with Boko Haram, and Morocco, with the Hizbullah-supported Polisario? Will the West pressure Sudan into immediate civilian transition, and will that lead to greater stability or less? And what about Turkey? If Erdogan loses, will the military return to power? How will that affect Kurdistan? How will that affect Syria?

Will simmering tensions between Egypt and Ethiopia over the Renaissance Dam boil over? How will the new European-driven ESG [environmental, social, and governance] demands and regulations affect developing countries that have not yet fully industrialized? Will this save the planet at the expense of lives today? Is ESG an imposition or a solution?

In countries like Ghana, Kenya and Malawi, how can Israel help? How can Israel's technological innovations assist developing countries to feed their people, contend with international regulatory statutes, and grow their economies? Questions abound, and we need to think together

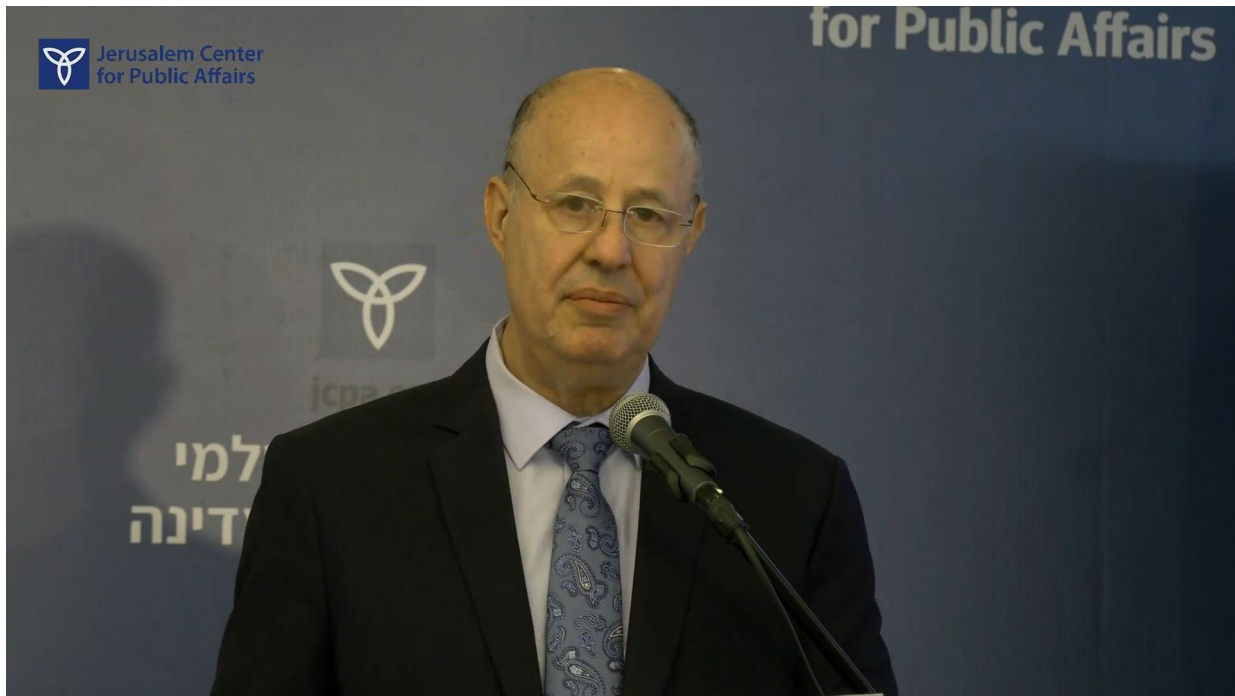
Governments act on the immediate. There's very little thinking. Think tanks must deal with the important. And our thinking has to provide the policies that can be translated into practical action - real, actionable plans that governments can embrace that bridge the private sector with its private interests, but are the real engine for economic growth, with governments which act on behalf of the public interest but are hamstrung in their top heavy bureaucracy.

That is what we're doing here - to ask the questions and together look for answers. It's a working session. Our hunch was that we should embark on this journey as a think tank - as a do tank - with a very broad view of the region - not Israel and the Gulf alone, not Israel and Africa alone. Our idea, rather, was to widen the circle and bring our northeast neighbors together with our southwest neighbors.

In Addis, I mentioned our common grandfather, Abraham, who came to the Promised Land and had to leave it immediately because of food insecurity. The Bible tells us that it was Joseph who solved the problem of food insecurity in Egypt on the African continent. Abraham's journey began in Ur Kasdim in southern Iraq, right near the Persian Gulf. Abraham was the first, then, to unite our region, and we would not be wrong to follow in his footsteps.

A high-level official in Abu Dhabi, an intellectual, an independent thinker of the first order, leaned forward in his chair when I presented this idea to him just a few weeks ago, and he said to me, "This is very important. Bridging our Gulf countries with Africa must be the highest on our agendas. You have my full support and encouragement."

At the JCPA we believe that this is the time to build trusted partnerships at a time of shifting alliances.



**Tzachi Hanegbi, Head of Israel's National Security Council**

### **Meeting the Challenges of Energy Security, Food Security and Water Security**

The impressive turnout by our friends from other countries in our region and Africa provides us with hope that, through this visit, we will be able to further advance the important perceptual changes that our region is undergoing. Regional partnerships are an important cornerstone in shaping the policies of Middle Eastern and African countries.

Continued destabilization by Iran and its proxies, the threat of murderous terrorism, global environmental changes, and the effects of the climate on the region all pose challenges to the energy security, food security and water security of many countries in our region. These challenges point to the necessity to work together and take joint regional action.

We must act together with our close neighbors, Jordan and Egypt, as well as with our friends in the Abraham Accords and Africa. Our goal is to create connections and increase cooperation in order to work towards a more prosperous and sustainable environment. Joint mobilization and the designated knowledge and tools to combat these existing challenges can ensure an environment where every child receives what so many of us take for granted: running water, food, proper shelter, quality education and, beyond that, hope and opportunities!



The Abraham Accords are a prime example of and model for courageous partnership. This cooperation, while working to repel common threats, also successfully identifies opportunities for real positive change. We also extend our hands to other countries in the Middle East, Africa and around the world, to come join us under Abraham's tent and together enjoy the fruits of this important process.

In addition to all the challenges I have mentioned, it is impossible not to refer to the largest and most significant threat, and that is the one posed by Iran and its terrorist proxies. The Iranian regime, which openly calls for the destruction of the State of Israel, views the regional connections formed between Israel and its partners in the region as a negative development. They are committed to disrupt it. They will fail, as long as we stand together with a clear and uncompromising unity.



**William Daroff, CEO, Conference of Presidents  
of Major American Jewish Organizations**

### **The American Jewish Community Is Ready to Assist in Making the Vision of the Abraham Accords a Reality**

The Abraham Accords are a monumental achievement that melted away 70 years of frozen hostility and shattered a paradigm of regional diplomacy. This diplomatic coup demonstrates

that mutual goals and cooperation can bring about regional cooperation. The Abraham Accords bring about a level of stability and cooperation to the Middle East that has not been seen since the fall of the Ottoman Empire over a century ago.

The Abraham Accords provide a model for regional cooperation between the Middle East and Africa in a time of shifting alliances and global instability. New relationships and partnerships will mutually benefit all involved and help us to prepare for the challenges we face in the future.

Collaboration and friendship between Israel and the countries in the Middle East and Africa is of the utmost importance to Jewish leaders in the United States.

David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, believed that, "The principles of mutual assistance and equality should also constitute the basis for international relations between people and must be based on the solidarity of all human beings derive from fraternity and mutual assistance in every sphere of life - the economic, the social and the scientific."

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which is the umbrella organization for 53 national Jewish organizations, has long supported ties between the United States, Israel, African countries and Jewish leaders. We embrace the opportunity to discuss how the American Jewish community can act as a bridge between African nations, Israel and the United States.

A Middle East and Africa bound by new partnerships and relationships, strengthened by projects that promote mutual benefit, is a source of stability for the region and the world. We in the American Jewish community are ready to assist making this vision a reality and believe that it is in the best interest of the United States that these benefits bear fruit.

## \Session 1 - The Abraham Accords: The Third Anniversary – How Far Have We Come, Where Are We Going?



**Jason Greenblatt, Senior Fellow, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs**

### **The People-to-People Component Is Critical to Success**

I was privileged to work at the White House on one of the most breathtaking events in the Middle East in recent times - the Abraham Accords. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to sit in rooms like this and see so many people gathered together to try to solve the world's problems. There were very courageous leaders who helped us create the Abraham Accords from the United States, Israel, and especially the Middle East leaders.

Let's be honest. There's no tranquility in the world today pretty much anywhere. So it's incumbent on all of us to sit and have these open and honest conversations. We're not going to agree on some of the topics, but there's so much we could agree on and work on together.

The people-to-people component is absolutely critical to success. Governments don't do people-to-people. Without informal ambassadors like you, the people-to-people work that's done, the success of the Abraham Accords, or anything like the Abraham Accords, or progress towards other agreements like the Abraham Accords, is much harder to achieve.

The Palestinians could benefit so much from the Abraham Accords. They deserve to benefit from the Abraham Accords. But unfortunately it's going to be very difficult, if not at the moment impossible, for them to benefit. When Jared Kushner created an economic

conference in Bahrain for the benefit of the Palestinians, the Palestinian leadership boycotted it.

We can change things. Let's not get stuck on things that at the moment are intractable. There are so many great things that we could do.



**Eli Bar-On (Israel)**

## **The Abraham Accords Are the Most Outstanding Diplomatic Achievement in the Middle East**

The Abraham Accords are the single most outstanding diplomatic achievement of the last generation in this region. For years we had this paradigm in which relations between Israel and the Arab world had to be perceived through the lens of the Palestinian issue.

Now, the Palestinian issue is just one issue out of several challenges that this region has to deal with, and the Abraham Accords changed the paradigm. The Abraham Accords got us to a point where they said the Palestinian issue is not sidelined. It's always going to be a top priority. But we shouldn't start with the hardest problem to solve if we want to look at this region from a broader perspective. That was the biggest achievement.

The Abraham Accords did not just change the region, they changed the world. Since we started MENA 2050, I'm meeting people not only from this region who want to work with us

on changing the region with MENA 2050. I meet people from China, Japan, the U.S., and Europe. All of them are saying, listen, something has happened here and we want to know what it is. We realize this changes our reality and that of the region.

The opportunities are endless. We never imagined three years ago that we would have more than 600,000 Israelis going to the Emirates within two and a half years, that we would have a joint R&D fund to finance Israeli and Emirati technologies, that we will have almost \$3 billion worth of trade between those two countries.

Yet there are not enough people-to-people engagements. We need more. We need to reduce government involvement and increase personal interactions but with the encouragement of the government.

Some people thought that the Abraham Accords will dissociate Israeli-Arab relations from the Palestinian issue. We now see that this was not true and should not have been true because this is something we should engage. The Palestinians should be included in all these new realities that we now see in the region, even if not on a political level to begin with. But they need to be included in all these regional developments to enjoy the economic and cultural benefits, as well as everything else that that comes with it.



**Khaled Abu Toameh (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs)**

## **For the First Time, I See Real Peace between Israel and the Arab Countries**

In my view, the Abraham Accords are the best thing that could have happened to Israel in the past 74 years and I see them as one of the greatest achievements. I compare them to other agreements that Israel has with other countries, and they are unlike the cold peace that Israel has with Egypt and Jordan.

For the first time, I see real peace between Israel and the Arab countries. If you had told me three years ago that an Arab from the Gulf would go on Twitter or Facebook and say things in support of Israel, I would have asked you what kind of medicine you are on. If you had told me that Arabs from the Gulf would come to Israel and sit here without fear and meet with people and engage in normalization, again, I would have asked you what planet you are living on.

Can a Jew walk on the streets of Amman or Cairo with any Jewish symbols or identify himself or herself as a Jew? Unfortunately, no. And that's the cold peace I'm talking about. Are Egyptians and Jordanians coming to visit Israel, or can they engage in public meetings with Israelis? Sadly, no. With the Abraham Accords, I see amazing things happening.

I see Jews celebrating Jewish holidays in Dubai and in other countries. I hear about Jewish restaurants opening over there. I see people from Israel, Jews and Arabs, who are not afraid to visit the Gulf states. You get the feeling that this is real peace - people-to-people. I see tens of thousands of Arab Israelis visiting the Gulf and benefiting from the fruits of this peace agreement. So I would like to see the peace with Egypt and Jordan be conducted in a similar way to the Abraham Accords. Unfortunately, that's not happening right now.

While the Abraham Accords marked the beginning of a process to legitimize Israel and integrate Israel into the region, I don't see that happening on the Palestinian side, despite the signing of the Oslo Accords. I see that the Palestinian Authority and other Palestinians are continuing to wage a massive campaign to delegitimize Israel and even demonize Jews, and that is very serious. It's being done through a campaign of incitement in the mosques, in the media, in the rhetoric on the campuses, on the streets.

And we must not forget that the Palestinians were the first people to denounce the normalization agreements that were signed between the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain and the U.S. and Israel. Not only did they denounce them, they came out with very serious accusations against Arabs who for many years supported the Palestinians financially and politically. They accused the United Arab Emirates of stabbing the Palestinians in the back, of betraying Al-Aqsa mosque, of betraying Jerusalem, and of betraying the Palestinians.

They gave you billions of dollars all these years. And when one of these countries finally decides to move on and do something good for that country, then you start attacking them and denouncing them and delegitimizing them. So the Palestinians, unfortunately, are not going to move forward on any track with Israel as long as they continue to have the same leadership that is dragging them from one disaster to another, leadership that never offers them any hope, leadership that deprives them of international aid, leadership that is not doing anything to improve the living conditions of these people. That's very sad.

## **The Palestinian Leadership Is Not Preparing Its People for Peace**

If you want to make peace with Israel, you need to prepare your people for peace with Israel. It's as simple as that. And I'm sorry to tell you that I still haven't seen any real attempt on the part of the Palestinian leadership to prepare Palestinians for compromise and concessions with Israel.

In fact, I continue to see the exact opposite every day. I see a massive campaign of incitement against Israel. And it's not new. It's been there, ironically, since the beginning of the Oslo Accords. It was there before, but it intensified after the signing of the Oslo Accords. Why? Because the Oslo Accords gave the Palestinian leadership the tools to incite against Israel - the media, the radio, TV, newspapers.

Unfortunately, this was all ignored by the international community for many years. Many people in the U.S., in the EU, who were funding the Palestinian Authority back then, immediately after the Oslo Accords, did not want to listen to what Palestinian leaders were saying in Arabic. In Arabic, Palestinian leaders back then, including Yasser Arafat, were acting against the spirit of the Oslo Accords.

They were acting against the spirit of peace with Israel. How? They were telling their people that it's wrong to make peace with Israel. They're were sending the exact opposite message to the Palestinians. Yasser Arafat, whom I met him several times, was repeatedly apologizing for signing these bad peace agreements with Israel.

He said we had no other choice. Our Arab brothers had dumped us back then because we supported Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. We needed the money. We also needed a foothold in Palestine. We were offered the chance and we came here. And if Israel does not give us everything we are asking for, there will be an intifada, there will be a *jihad*. These were the words of Yasser Arafat back then, and on top of that, he was inciting his people on a daily basis against Israel.

I never heard of any positive message coming out of the Palestinian Authority regarding the need for compromise and concessions. The words "compromise" and "concessions" have very negative connotations for the Palestinian Authority. Now if you are battling normalization with Israel, what message are you sending to your people? That peace with Israel is bad. You try to organize a meeting between Jewish journalists and Palestinian journalists in Ramallah and you receive threats and you're even kicked out. Some of my colleagues have been beaten up for organizing such meetings.

The Palestinian Authority is shooting itself in the foot because, on the one hand, you are radicalizing your people against Israel. On the other hand, your people see you working with Israel. So if you're telling your people that normalization with Israel is an act of treason, then the Palestinians will ask you, the Palestinian leader, why are you conducting security coordination with Israel? Why are you making peace with Israel? Why are you negotiating with Israel?

That's why many things have to change on the Palestinian side if you ever want to have the Palestinians join the Abraham Accords or any peace agreement with Israel or open up. The way I see it right now, and I spend a lot of time in the West Bank, I just don't see a brave Palestinian leader who can stand up right now and say, "enough is enough." We need a new direction. We need to think of something positive. I can't find one Palestinian who's willing to say that at least openly. So, unfortunately, as long as this massive campaign of delegitimizing Israel and inciting against Israel continues, we will not see the emergence of a new leadership over there.



**Michal Cotler-Wunsh (Israel)**

### **The Abraham Accords: Optimism vs. Hope**

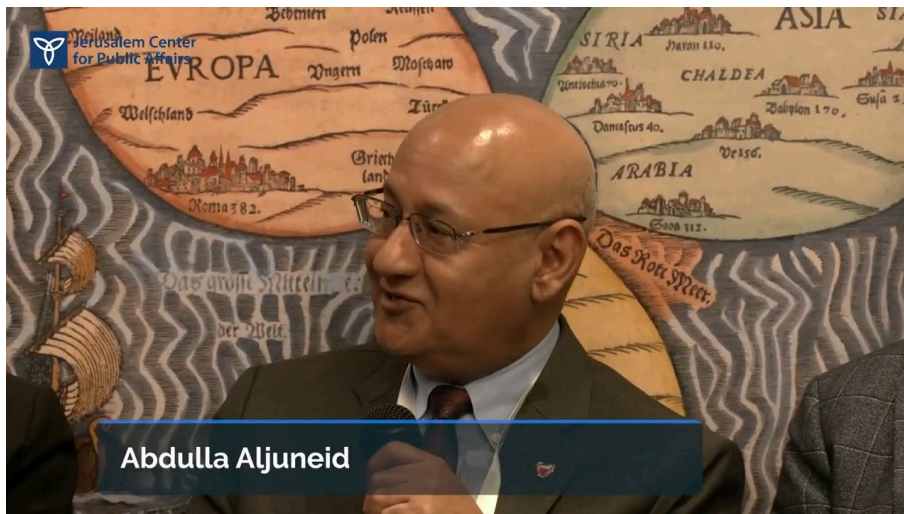
The most important word that the Abraham Accords offer is hope. The late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks differentiated between optimism and hope. He said optimism is the belief that everything is going to be okay. But hope is the belief that together, we can make it okay.

In that sense, optimism is a very passive virtue, whereas hope is a very active one. It doesn't take very much courage to have optimism and it takes a great deal of courage to have hope. So when I look out at the people in this room and when I think of this effort, it really resonates with what the Abraham Accords felt like as we voted on them in the Knesset plenum in 2020.



There has been a paradigm shift from the three “nos” of Khartoum - no to recognition of Israel, no to negotiation with Israel, and no to peace with Israel. They were actually flipped to the three “yeses” - yes to recognition, yes to negotiation, and yes to peace. Recognition was the first and vital step enabling negotiation, paving the path to peace.

Opposition to the Abraham Accords came from the Palestinian leadership. I have to differentiate between the leadership and between the people, because there is no doubt that the people who can most benefit from the paradigmatic shift of recognition - mutual recognition being the first and vital step enabling negotiation, paving the path to peace - are the Palestinian people, as differentiated from their leadership who immediately opposed the Abraham Accords. There was also opposition from the Arab parties in Israel's Knesset, which is another great missed opportunity because Israel's Arabs can benefit from them.



**Abdulla Aljuneid (Bahrain)**

### **The Palestinian Issue Is Just One of Many Challenges in the Region**

Three years ago, if someone told us we would have such a conference here in Jerusalem, we would have laughed. I look at my colleagues here and know they definitely could never come here before we had the Abraham Accords, which are most definitely the single most outstanding diplomatic achievement of the last generation in this region. We had gotten used to this paradigm where all contacts, connections, and relations within Israel in the Arab world had to go through the Palestinian issue.

Now, the Palestinian issue is just one issue out of many challenges that this region has to deal with. The Abraham Accords changed the paradigm. The Abraham Accords got us to a point

where the Palestinian issue is always going to be a top priority, but we shouldn't start with the hardest problem to solve.

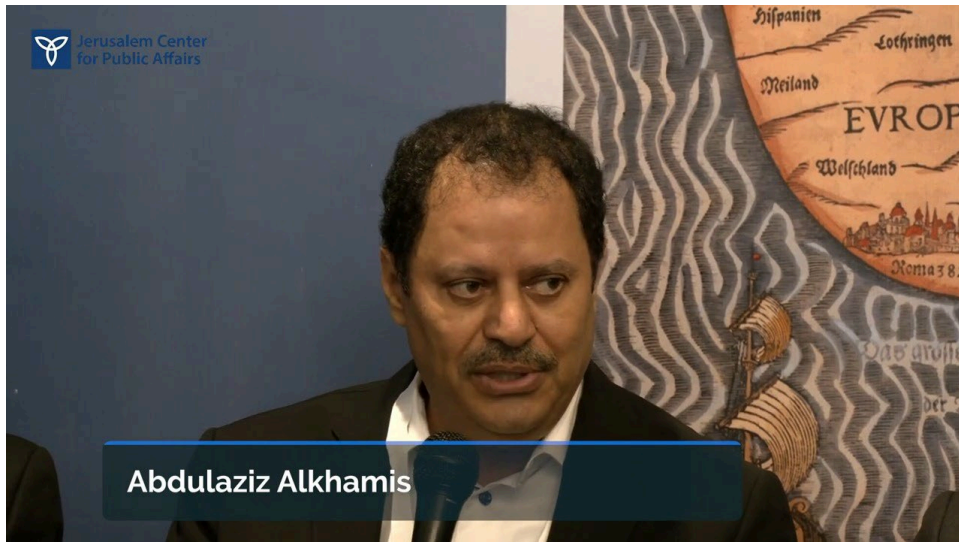
The Abraham Accords did not just change the region. They changed the world. I'm meeting people from China, Japan, the U.S., Europe. All of them are talking to us and saying, "We realize this changes our reality in your region." I think the opportunities are endless.

Who could have predicted three years ago that we would have more than 600,000 Israelis visiting the Emirates in just two and a half years, that we will have a joint R&D fund to finance Israeli and Emirati technologies, that we will have almost \$3 billion worth of trade between the two countries, and a free trade agreement with Israel that was negotiated in less than six months.

The Abraham Accords were not trying to sideline or bypass the Palestinian issue but were a change of paradigm - a way to look at it in a new way. In many ways it was an awakening. We now have the experience of seven and a half decades of anti-normalization as the main paradigm of dealing with Israel.

How has this paradigm helped the Palestinian cause? How can you help the Palestinians if you're not talking to Israel? How can you influence Israel if you're not talking to Israel? What the Abraham Accords did was to show the Israelis how they can benefit from this partnership relationship and in a way show them what they might lose if they are not attentive, if they're not listening to their Arab partners.

We should be careful to make sure that it works. You should be very attentive to what we hear from our partners in Jordan, in Abu Dhabi, and everywhere across the Arab world, not offend anyone and make sure that their concerns are heard. I think the Abraham Accords and whatever comes after that with Saudis and every other partner will eventually also bring a solution to the conflict with the Palestinians. The Palestinians have to be included in every success that these Accords bring to this region. They have to enjoy the fruits of this relationship. We have to make sure it happens. Otherwise it will not work.



## Abdulaziz Alkhamis (Saudi Arabia)

### Saudi Arabia Is the Core of the Region

I'm happy to be in Jerusalem. I think of Jerusalem as the capital of all the religions in the region. It's very important to start from here working for peace in the region. And it's very important for the Saudis to look to Jerusalem as the starting point for cooperation.

Saudi Arabia is the core of the region. It's the most important country in the region now. It's the leader of the region. And when Saudi Arabia goes forward with any peace agreement with Israel, all of the countries in Arab and Muslim world will come. They will look to Israel as a friendly country, and there is a possibility to cooperate with Israel. Without Saudi Arabia, there will be no full solution in the region.

It's not only a business of economic relations, it's more than that. It's history. It's about talking with the land of Arabia, talking with Mecca and Medina. Saudi Arabia is not in the queue. Saudi Arabia is alone. If you go to Saudi Arabia, you should go with a new approach, not the Abraham Accords approach.

You go to Saudi Arabia with Red Sea security. It has a border with Jordan, with Iraq, with many countries. We share a lot of interests with Africa. In the Red Sea there are now Iranian, Chinese, and Russian military bases. We need a full solution for the region.

Another thing we look at is how the Saudis accept Israel as a nation and as a country. You will find that in social media there is a lot of acceptance. The new technology makes it very easy to negotiate and to talk and to get to know each other.

We need to look to Saudi Arabia not about economic opportunities but as the gate to the full solution in the region and in the Arab and Muslim world. We are not happy with the media in Israel and the Israeli political leaders when they talk about how Saudi Arabia is in the queue.

Just wait for them. No. Saudi Arabia is a big country, it is very different and has a lot of responsibilities. Saudi Arabia is not following what Washington says. We have our own interests.

The Iranian and Saudi deal is good for Israel. A lot of leaders say the deal is very bad and against the normalization of relations with Israel. It's not. It will cool the support of Iran for the radical groups in the region. This is part of the agreement and this is good for Israel.



**Dr. Yaroup Aljouni (Jordan)**

### **“Cold Peace” between Israel and Jordan**

I have witnessed the peace process between Jordan and Israel since 1994 and I have heard today the world “cold peace” to describe peace with Jordan, Egypt and Israel. I have to put this on the table as a worry, because Egypt started early and now it's “cold.” The Jordanians started in 1994 and it's now described as “cold.” So I am worried about the Abraham Accords. Even some of my friends in Israel think that the Abraham Accords may be a “bubble.” People are building big hopes around the Abraham Accords.

Jordan’s priority is the economy and Jordan does not have an interest in Israeli products. Many of the Israeli technologies are not needed from Israel. China is more important and more suitable because Chinese products are cheaper. At the same time, Jordan is not interfering in the cooperation process in the region.

In Jordan, the top issue on the agenda is the Palestinian issue. Jordan believes that the Palestinian case is a priority. We want to find a way to go back to a bilateral discussion between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

The Jordanian people don't feel the added value of the current trade agreement between Jordan and Israel. In the streets, you don't find Israeli products, nor Israeli agencies. People in Jordan are used to UK products. If they want to pay a much higher price, they will buy U.S. technology.

While Jordan is not able to declare everything publicly, we were very happy with the Abraham Accords in general because they create a chance for Palestinians and Arab Israelis to travel and visit other people in the region. The Palestinians should benefit from the Abraham Accords. We are supportive. We have no obstacles. We don't put up any walls on doing business in the region.

People don't think politically when they want to buy items. When you go to the Dubai malls, you see the food from Israel is double the price of other products.

If we keep the mentality of superiority in the region, we will not create peace and stability. My understanding of peace-building is to sit at the table during negotiation. I hope the Abraham Accords will not be a new failed attempt at the peace-building process in the region.



**Aviram Balleishe (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs)**

## **We Want to Apply Policy More than Talking about Policy**

As a do-tank and not just a think-tank, we at the Jerusalem Center want to work on a people-to-people approach. You really want to talk with people, not only reading publications. When you're talking about policy, it's one thing to write about it, but if you want to apply policy, you need to do it through people. This is what we are trying to do.

The second thing is real collaboration, not talking about writing another essay, but doing things together. For example, we are doing an agrotech experiment in one of the research centers in the region. When one center brought a problem, we brought a technology solution and together on their soil we will try to solve that problem.

While doing that, then we want to bring other countries that don't have any agreement with Israel - like the Saudis, Kuwaitis, or Iraqis - to see the solution. So this is how you apply policy in the region.

So here you have a unique opportunity to work through the tool of people-to-people and to engage more people. The Jerusalem Center allows more of a people-to-people approach. And this approach will try to apply policy more than talking about policy and really do things on the ground.

## Session 2 - Africa and the Abraham Accords: Prospective African-Arab-Israeli Partnerships



**Dr. Belete Belachew Yihun (Ethiopia)**

### **A Longstanding Silent Partnership between Ethiopia and Israel**

Ethiopia and Israel have enjoyed a very strong relationship for some time now. The Abraham Accords add a new flavor because it brings actors from the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. But it is not the format of the relationships that matter. What brings Israel, Ethiopia, the Middle East and the Horn of Africa together is the silent partnership between Ethiopia and Israel. There were times when the formal diplomatic relationship was severed between the two countries, for example, immediately after the Yom Kippur War. So between 1973 and 1989, there was no formal relationship. But still the security architecture continued. And it is not only a bilateral relationship, rather it affected the entire region. So the joint Ethiopia-Israel relationship has been instrumental in bringing peace in South Sudan, and also in containing other belligerent powers in the northeastern part of the continent.

First we have to take care of security and the political arrangements. Then we can also diversify into agriculture, food security, etc. But these two countries have to navigate a very delicate region. Yes, it is good to talk about food security, environment, etc. But the peace and security dilemma that we are facing is more crucial. So for Ethiopia and Israel and there is a role to play.



**Dr. Amare Aweke (Ethiopia)**

## **The Abraham Accords Offer an Important Template for Solving Problems in Africa**

We see the Abraham Accords as an important template in bringing as security cooperation in the region and specifically in the Horn of Africa where we have been facing so many identity conflicts as well as resource conflicts, such as over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. We have been in conflict with our neighbors with whom we share resources, specifically the Nile waters. And this is going to be a very significant template in trying to solve a regional conflict with regional solutions.

This is going to be a template in bringing adversary parties that have been just looking at each other as enemy states and bringing them to the table to discuss the issues rather than just looking at them as an enemy state or an adversary state forever. So with the help of the Abraham Accords we will be able to bring a solution for Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan to solve the issues amicably.

The other most important issue that I want to raise here is that we've been witnessing identity conflicts. Identity conflicts are the simplest to start but the hardest to solve. So if we are able to bring the entire Arab world and Israel together with the Abraham Accords, this is going to be a very significant precedent for whatever type of identity conflicts that we are facing in Africa.



So the template of the Abraham Accords is a very significant template and we look toward it to solve these problems.



**Col. (ret.) Dr. Jacques Neriah (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs)**

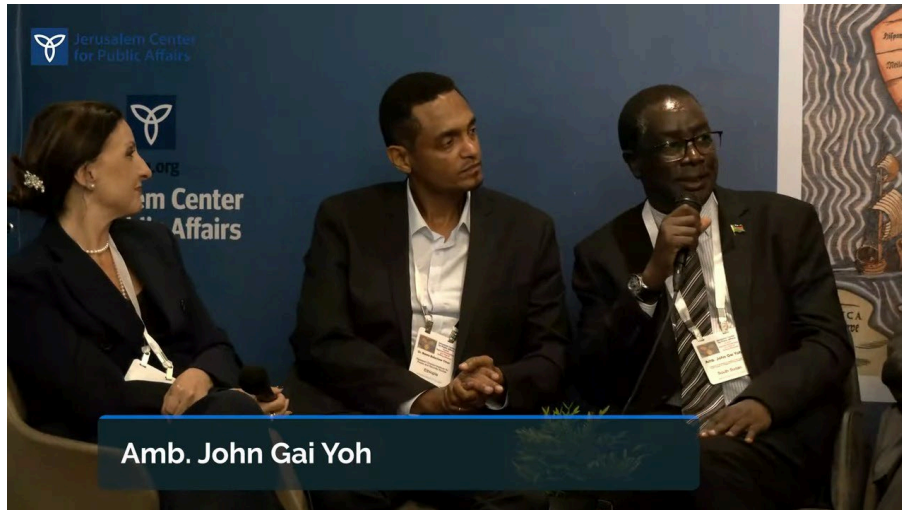
### **The Abraham Accords Are Facing Headwinds from Iran**

I will speak as a former intelligence officer and I'll say very bluntly and plainly that the Abraham Accords are facing headwinds. The headwinds comes from the East, from Iran. Iran is very active in subversive activities all over places where Israel has an interest, whether in the Gulf area, in Saudi Arabia, and in Africa.

We've seen Iran intervening in Algeria in light of the rapprochement between Morocco and Israel. Iran is providing weapons and training and equipment to the Polisario just to create a problem between Morocco and Algeria.

We've seen Iran going down to Nigeria, where they are trying to convert the local Muslims into Shia. They're pouring millions of dollars there. We have the famous Sheikh Zakzaky, the spiritual leader of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, who has been parading thousands of combatants that he has trained, 100 kilometers from the capital Abuja, and raising flags and banners with Khomeini and with Hassan Nasrallah. This is what we are facing.

The Abraham Accords are also facing headwinds from disruptive *jihadist* factions in the area, which most of the countries that are here also suffer from. And because Libya has become a failed state, the whole south of Libya is in the hands of the *jihadists*.



## **Amb. John Gai Yoh (South Sudan)**

### **African Countries Must Grapple with Issues of Security and Israeli and Palestinian Wishes**

Right from the Camp David agreements and then to the agreement with Jordan and the Oslo Accords, up to the Abraham Accords, it seemed that Africa, with almost 1 billion people, has been at the backdrop of all this, more of an observer, and sometimes active because quite a number of our countries are members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League.

Quite a number of African countries all along did have diplomatic relations with Israel and also did have diplomatic relations with the Palestinians. So you have to grapple with issues of security and how to take care of Israeli wishes and Palestinian wishes. Number two, we have concerns of security at the Red Sea. A good number of African liberation movements were supported by Israel.

So these dilemmas of the Arab-Israeli conflict created within Africa a feeling that what has been taking place from the 1980s up to today with the Palestinians and the Israelis was in fact a process that at some time in history they will have to come to an agreement. In Africa we would say, "These are brothers and cousins. Why have they been fighting for that long and they are not coming to an end." The reason is that you cannot deal with a complicated issue that is embedded with security in a very simple way.



**Mohamed Ahmed Abuelgasim (Sudan)**

### **Sudan Fought Against Israel in 1948 and 1967**

Sudan has a history. Sudan fought against Israel in 1948 and 1967, unlike any other African country except Egypt. So the situation of Sudan is totally different. We have two problems in Sudan: Arab culture and political Islam. For Sudan to change the culture, you need a different mechanism. For most African countries, they didn't need the Abraham Accords because already they have no main problem with Israel. The problem with Israel in this region was for some Islamic or Arab countries. For other countries, they have no problem with Israel.



**Suzan Quitaz (Kurdistan/Sweden)**

## **Israel Has Been at Peace with the Kurds for Decades, But Unofficially**

Israel is the only country where, when they ask me where I'm from and I say I'm a Kurd, they don't ask what that is. And I like that. I'm talking about the average man in the street, the taxi driver. But before speaking about the Kurds, I need to speak about Iraq because, sadly, Kurdistan is not independent. Last October, the Iraqi parliament approved a law against any Iraqi citizen or institute having any ties with Israel. But I will tell you that most Iraqis do not support this law. I was brought up as a child to have no aggression or hatred towards the Jews, and my family was not unique. I was brought up in the diaspora with my mom telling me stories about Iraqi Jews, how we all lived as Iraqis.

Not too many people know back in the 1930s, 40% of Baghdad was Jewish. The Jewish community in Iraq is one of the oldest in the region. The Babylonian Talmud was written in Iraq. So I was brought up to have no aggression about Jews or Israel.

I always wanted to visit Israel, but I was scared because at the same time, when I grew up, I was a journalist and I used to work for Qatari media and Israel is said to be dangerous. If you go to Israel, it's horrible, it's awful. I didn't believe in that, but I didn't have the courage. I was scared how the community will react. And I'm not talking about the Kurdish community because the Kurdish community has absolutely nothing against Israel. We have been at peace for decades, but unofficially.

There is hope because when this law was approved, some Iraqi politicians, and especially Moqtada Sadr, went on Twitter and said, "Oh, what a great achievement." And he asked the Iraqi people to come out and celebrate. And surprise, surprise, only a few hundred Iraqis went out on the street and chanted.

Iraqis have no issue with Israel. In fact, most Iraqis, if Iran wasn't so involved in Iraq, would welcome to be part of the Abraham Accords. I'm a strong believer that it will happen, but it will happen only when Iran is out of the equation.



**Amb. Idd Bedel Mohamed (Somalia)**

### **Somalia Is Heading to Join the Abraham Accords**

I am very thankful for the President of the State of Israel, Isaac Herzog, for his speech of peace and harmony between the State of Israel and the countries who are participating in this conference. I can assure you, Mr. President, your message of peace will be delivered in Somalia and we will convey to our president and the prime minister and the government of Somalia the wish of creating a close partnership between the State of Israel and Somalia at large.

Regarding the state of Somalia's relationship with Israel, I can assure you that some sort of strategic relationship has started, not only recently, but has existed since before Somalia became independent. By the time Somalia became a state in 1960, the Israeli foreign minister was invited by our president to come and join our celebration for being a newborn African state.

That relationship has existed and I think that there is a window of opportunity that we have some sort of relations, that have existed. The State of Israel formally or informally has contributed to Somalia.

There is a debate in Somalia over the Abraham Accords. I can tell you all indications are very positive. Sudan, Morocco, United Arab Emirates, and before, Egypt and Jordan, have signed agreements. Then there is no point why somebody does not have an agreement with the State of Israel. The question is one of how. That is where we are.

We have a new, unified leadership in the country that can galvanize any agenda and pass legislation in parliament. I'm 100% sure that they would welcome the signing of the Abraham

Accord. Without hesitation, I'm sure that the president and the prime minister not only welcomed the signing of the Abraham Accord, but also, at the time of their choosing, they will join and sign an agreement with the State of Israel.

When I was in New York as UN ambassador, I had good relations with the Embassy of Israel at the UN. On the day that I needed them the most, Israel voted with me at the UN General Assembly where Somalia had a candidate for the International Court of Justice.

So we have that kind of convergence of interests between Israel and Somalia. There will come a time that the leadership in Somalia will somehow have formal or informal relations with the State of Israel.

We have a new leadership in Somalia. We have a new leadership in Ethiopia. We have a new leadership in Kenya. We used to be rivals. We are no longer rivals. We are allies and friends, working with one another. Somalia. Ethiopia. Kenya. Djibouti. Sudan. South Sudan. Our region in Africa is having the best time in history.

### **Session 3 - Anti-Radicalism and Counterinsurgency: National, Regional, and Global**



**Ahdeya Ahmed Al-Sayed (Bahrain)**

#### **The Biggest Elephant in the Room is Iran**

This meeting is about “trusted partnerships.” The biggest elephant in the room is Iran. Now we speak about diplomatic ties being established between Iran and some of the countries in

the Gulf. Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran has been the worst neighbor the Arab countries could ever have. Everything Iran has done since 1979 until today isn't something that the people of our countries can forget overnight. 169 people in Bahrain were arrested in 2018 for being part of Hizbullah Bahrain, in cooperation with Hizbullah Lebanon and Hizbullah Iraq. In 2017, 54 people were arrested who were associated with Hizbullah and involved in acts of terrorism in Bahrain.

When the normalization between Bahrain and Israel took place, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards threatened Bahrain by saying on September 12, 2020, that we will get our revenge in the most cruel manner against Bahrain for normalizing its ties with Israel. On November 22, 2021, a terrorist cell of 15 people was arrested, associated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and who were trained in Iran. Nasrallah has described our leaders as tyrants as recently as August 9, 2022. And Rouhani, the Iranian president himself, has been describing the UAE and Bahrain after the normalization agreements with Israel as "shameful behavior." Now the Iranian ayatollah regime is taking its final breaths after everything it has been doing in the region, funding Hizbullah, funding the Houthis.

Do you think that we can forget overnight that Aramco and the UAE were targeted by the Houthis that are funded by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards? We cannot forget that overnight.

As long as the ayatollah's regime exists, there is not going to be any two-state solution because this regime is going to continue to fund Hizbullah and the Houthis.

Now they need some alliances to cover up for what they are doing, But they will remain the regime that rapes women in prisons, that throws them into prisons just because they remove their hijabs, whether it's compulsory or not. So when it comes to "trusted partnerships," the Iranian regime is an entity that cannot be trusted, with all of these interferences going on, with all this funding of Hizbullah and Hamas. Iran is a regime that has been capable of bringing Sunni extremists and Shia extremists together to discuss how to attack us against our security.

So how can that regime ever be trusted? I have trust issues with Iran, and no matter what happens, this trust issue will continue. I do not believe that they have good intentions. I do believe our leaders have great intentions. But Iran will fail because this greed that it has had towards the region to dominate the region is not a dream that will end. This was Khamenei's dream since 1979. It continues to be, and it has been repeated by all the ayatollahs and all these so-called "supreme leaders" of a so-called Islamic nation.



## **Amin Sophiamehr (Iran/USA)**

### **The Iranian People Used to Have a Great Relationship with the U.S. and Israel**

I believe in the distinction between the Iranian regime and Iran as a country. The Islamic Republic's foreign policy has three pillars. One, anti-Americanism. Second, anti-Israel. And third is supporting Islamic extremism. Nothing in Iranian culture actually supports these three. It started from the 1979 revolution. Before that, Iran had a great relationship with the United States and had a great relationship with Israel. Iran was the second country in the Middle East after Turkey that recognized Israel as a sovereign state. Iran had an extensive agricultural relationship with Israel. Also in intelligence and technology. Iranian culture was not anti-U.S. before the revolution.

But when the Islamists came to power, they changed everything. Now, after 40 years of having an Islamic state in Iran, you can see that Iran has become the most secular society in Middle East.

I believe that Iranian society, not the Iranian regime, is actually much more similar to Israeli society and American society than any other society in Middle East, even Turkey.

If Iran didn't have an Islamic regime, maybe people would go in a different direction. The Islamic Republic showed the Iranian people in a very hard way that if religion will rule a country, it will turn into hell. In the last four years, Iranians have had three major nationwide uprisings to demand exactly what people want in the West: women's rights, toleration, democracy, free elections.

The Biden administration still thinks they can change Iran's behavior by appeasing it. It hasn't happened. If Iran's regime changes in nature or changes its behavior, it becomes a different regime, and it cannot become a different regime.



Talking about having a more stabilized Middle East, think about the day that Hizbullah is not funded by the Islamic Republic. Think about a democratic Iran that can help Hizbullah to become part of the Lebanese political process, to be part of the solution, not the problem. This will not happen as long as this regime is ruling over Iran. If you want to have more stabilized relations, if you want to solve Iran's nuclear threat, you cannot solve it as long as this regime is ruling over Iran. This regime cannot act differently because of the limitations that its ideology defines for itself.



**Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser  
(Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs)**

### **The Entire Picture Is Going to Change Once Iran Has Nuclear Weapons**

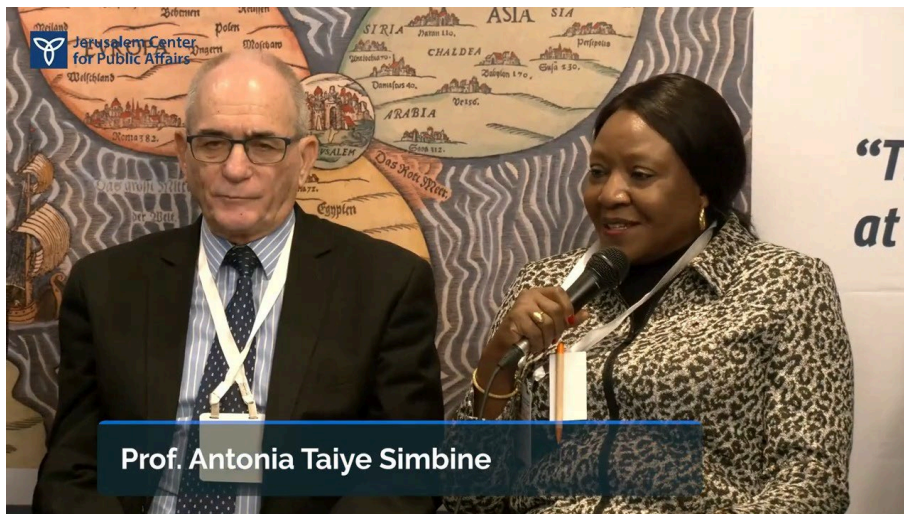
One of the things that brings us together is this concern about Iran or concern about radicalism. Radicalism is first and foremost an ideology. We oppose this ideology and we are worried about the tools, the structures, that this ideology uses in order to promote itself.

We have an extremely good reason to be worried, because Iran has become so close to having the capability to produce a nuclear weapon within a very short period of time and not much is being done about it. The entire picture is going to change once Iran has nuclear weapons. In my mind, the way the Saudis responded to the Chinese initiative to have a rapprochement with Iran was based on their assessment that nobody is going to stop Iran from having a nuclear weapon. So it wants to be friends with Iran instead of confronting Iran because they don't have anybody to support them, especially not the United States. And they are not even sure about Israel, unfortunately, because what happened here with the agreement about

natural gas with Lebanon will raise some questions about Israel's commitment to do what needs to be done in order to protect its interests.

That's where we stand right now. The structures that Iran has built, especially Hizbullah but also all the other groups that they are cooperating with - the Houthis and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad - are feeling that the forces that are there to stop them suffer from weakness. That's what makes them feel that they can reshape the rules of the game in the Middle East, first and foremost, and elsewhere as well. We see both in the fact that the Iranians are getting so close to producing 90% enriched uranium. That was supposed to be a red line.

We have to sit together and cooperate much more and show more determination to stop it. We don't seem to be determined enough to stop this radicalism. Look at the number of terror attacks around Africa in recent years. It's enormous - and very vicious ones. We have to remember what's been done to Christian villages and other targets around Africa. Radicalism is not shy about acting in these horrible ways.



**Prof. Antonia Taiye Simbine (Nigeria)**

### **Israel Can Do Much More with Nigeria**

The situation in Nigeria is really precarious. You see the refugee situation increasing, poverty of very high dimensions. One of the ways to counter radicalism and terrorism is really by dealing with the day-to-day lives of people. But as long as this situation continues, even the government is hamstrung in terms of dealing with these day-to-day situations. No matter how much effort is put in place, it's like a cycle and you end up back where you started.

I think there's much more that Israel can do with Nigeria. We have the impact of the Shiites in Nigeria trying to form counter administrations in the northern part of the country, questioning

the sitting governments. You see that even among core Muslims, they are not widely accepted.

Knowing that, there's room for a partnership, there's room for Israel to come in to make the relationship stronger and assure that it is sustainable. Areas and sectors like agriculture and energy are areas that can be focused on, in support of the Nigerian government, to move the nation forward, and to see that instances of counterinsurgency are really broken so that we do not continue in this cycle that we find ourselves in.



**Lt.-Col. (res.) Dr. Anat Berko (Israel)**

### **Terrorists Live in an Alternate Reality**

I'm speaking as a criminologist, this is my expertise as someone who sat face-to-face with terrorists inside jails for more than 20 years. I'm of Iraqi origin. My parents and all of my extended family were refugees from Iraq. I want to mention this because in the West, people do not understand the mentality and the mindset.

I remember that one time I gave a lecture at Columbia University and I spoke about a female suicide bomber who wanted to cleanse her honor, and her parents said, "Okay, you will be a *shahida*, you'll become a female suicide bomber." And it was a great solution for the whole family. Then one American woman asked me, "But why didn't she take a flight to London?" They do not understand that we are speaking here about an obsession, the same psychological process that we see with drug addicts that want to find the next fix.

We're speaking about an alternative reality. Take Muhammad Atta from the September 11 terrorist attack. He had a problem with sexuality. A lot of them had repressed sexuality and

the only woman that they can hug and touch before getting married is their mother. And the mother is key here because the mother emotionally can be very influential.

A few years ago, I interviewed a Kurdish terrorist from the PKK that was on her way to the target to explode herself. And she said, "If my mother told me to stop, I would change my mind." And I saw it many, many times that the mother is the key here.

We see people with very low self-esteem, marginalized, that think that if they cannot fulfill things here in this world, they will get it in the next world. I remember a 15-year-old boy who stuttered. He was the first minor to carry out a suicide bombing attack in Israel. And his sister was also a female suicide bomber. She was a divorcee. So she had a "reason" to erase the shame of the family. But he said, "I was a very shy boy" and we see a very introverted boy. "And I didn't know anything about girls. And I thought that in the next world, I'll have sex and beer. And I didn't have experience in these matters." So 72 virgins for the male virgins is what we're speaking about.

It's very tangible. We cannot say that we see here mental illness. It's not mental illness. Sometimes we can see a borderline personality with the suicide bombers. For sure, we don't see that with the dispatchers of suicide bombers or terrorists. The dispatchers, the senders, are the key to understanding this phenomenon. We can have many levels of dispatchers and they are much more important. So we are not speaking of the individual as mentally ill, but one who has this obsession.

I wrote about "*shahida*-mania." This is something that we see also with *jihad* terrorism that you see with ISIS in Syria. It is the obsession to carry out the self-sacrifice. And this is someone with tunnel vision who cannot see and change his or her mind. It's very robotic behavior. Also they perceive life in shades of black and white.

I interviewed Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the founder of the Hamas organization, with Dr. Reuven Birko, my husband. He's from an Ashkenazi-origin, Holocaust survivor family, but he's much better than me in Arabic. I asked Sheikh Yassin, "Is there any age limit that you'll send somebody to be a *shahid*? Would you send your own child as a minor to blow up a bus?"

He said they wouldn't send their own children to carry out terror attacks. The mother of a *shahid* told me the leaders will send their children to get the best education in America, in Europe, and we will pay for it. Sheikh Yassin answered, "At the age of 15, it will be okay." Then he said, "But if he looks like a man, we can send him before that." So it's ridiculous. They send children, they abuse children.

Now we are getting to social media, which has become a tool for terror. It's so dangerous because they want to have a short film on tiktok or to put their poster on the wall, and I'm going to show that I'm a man. This perception of manhood is so twisted, it's so different. They look at the men in the West like they are very feminine. They are not real men. And they also cannot suppress violence. They use violence as a tool. They compete.

If you have *jihad* tourism, and you see girls or boys that are leaving their country to join ISIS in Syria or elsewhere or al-Shabab, don't let them come back to your own state. Protect your

own citizens. Don't import this radical perception and mindset and this illness because you think about human rights and they don't have any other citizenship so we cannot take it from them.

I think that human life is much more important than human rights. And we have the obligation to protect our own people from terrorism. In my book, *The Smarter Bomb: Women and Children as Suicide Bombers*, I tell of a woman that boarded a plane with explosive tampons. Who can stop her?

You can have so many tools to do that. And you see right now that the technology is so advanced and terrorists and Islamists take this technology to harm our life and harm all of us. So we need to protect ourselves.



Dr. Dawit W. Giorgis

## Dr. Dawit W. Giorgis (Namibia)

### The Evolution of Israel's Relationship with African States

I'd like to talk first about the evolution of Israel's relationship with African states. In 1967, I was a young officer in Fort Benning, Georgia, taking advanced infantry training. There were Israeli officers there with me and the Six-Day War started. They were recalled to Israel. They went and after two weeks they came back. It was an exciting moment for me because during that time, during the Six-Day War, the entire Ethiopian Church, over 1,000 churches, were open for 24-hour services, and bells were ringing and there were prayers for Israel.

That was historic and that explains the relationship with the Ethiopian Coptic Church and northern Ethiopia entirely, how that relationship existed throughout history. Then they heard

the news that Israel had been victorious. Then all the churches were closed. But that is the kind of relationship Ethiopians have with Israel.

It is not transactional, it is not diplomatic, it is natural, it is biblical, it's religious, it's spiritual. Whatever happens in the world, that relationship cannot be changed. If you walk on the streets of Addis Ababa, or on any street in Ethiopia, and somebody hurts you or somebody does something wrong to you and you want to stop him, you just shout, "In the name of the God of Israel, stop," and he will stop. And if he doesn't stop, the crowd will think it really strange because he should stop.

Sometime later I was an official in Ethiopia. I was the deputy foreign minister and I was a commissioner during the 1983 drought crisis during Operation Moses. So I had connections with many Jewish organizations.

During all that time, towards the end of the era of the emperor, there was a decision by the African Union that every member-state should suspend relations with Israel. While it was easier for many African states, it was extremely difficult for Ethiopia. How do we sell this to the people that we are not going to have any more formal relationship with Israel? Fortunately, the Israeli government said, "We understand your problem, but we can always do it in a different way."

So that relationship continued in a very discreet way without anybody else in the world knowing it. It continued. I came to Geneva one time in the 1970s for another meeting in a safe house with the director of African affairs of the Israeli Foreign Ministry. We had to do it in a safe house because we were afraid that if others knew about it, then it would reflect on Ethiopia's image in the African Union.

I'm trying to describe the evolution that we have gone through. Israel in those days was completely disconnected from Africa. But over the years, today now a great majority of African countries recognize Israel. They work very closely with Israel. So it's more the consciousness and the efforts of the successive Israeli governments and knowledge that has really brought us to this level. Now we are in the next level of how we can strengthen that relationship. It's a very great improvement, a great success for Israel.

I had an organization and then an institute, the Africa Institute for Strategic and Security Studies, and I founded this after my fellowship with the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies. I was the only African fellow there. I saw the gap because when there was no knowledge about Africa in most of the institutes in the United States, its experience is short-term experience. Those who call themselves scholars, who have short-term experiences in Africa, come up and tell us about Africa. My idea was to have African scholars or even European or American or Israeli scholars who have stayed in Africa, who have experience of life in Africa and who have written about Africa, together with African scholars who can write about Africa. So we focused on strategic and security studies mainly, because at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies I was working on terrorism and violent extremism. So the main focus was violent extremism and transnational crimes, human trafficking, migration, and arms trafficking.

The headquarter is in Namibia. I'm not Namibian, I'm an American. But I've been working in Namibia as a United Nations official and I decided to have this office in Africa in Namibia.

On the subject of security and extremism in Africa, I'm very pessimistic ever since I encountered the Shia and Hizbullah in Africa. I wrote an article on Hizbullah in Africa. I encountered this organization in Nigeria while studying other extremism in Africa. There is an exact duplicate of Hizbullah right in the center of Nigeria. It has a vast militia. They have uniforms, they have tanks, and no government official can enter their compound. They are protected. And I wondered why a large, independent, democratic government like in Nigeria would allow such an organization and militia to exist in the heart of Nigeria.

So I started digging. I even went to Nigeria, and I wrote a big article. And it was a surprise for many Nigerians themselves. Eventually they found out it was true.

Recently I heard that the Nigerian army raided the compound and disbanded the organization. Nigeria has got a more serious problem of Boko Haram. Imagine having both a Sunni-inspired terrorist organization and a Shia Iran-inspired organization in Nigeria?

In Africa now, violent extremism thrives more than it did a few years ago. It involves leftovers of Boko Haram and 11 Sunni-inspired organizations and two Shia-inspired organizations which operate in Nigeria, and over ten organizations operating along the Sahel. There is a lot of destruction. A lot of people are dying. A lot of governments are being destabilized in Africa. Three-quarters of Africa is involved in some kind of conflicts, mostly through these extremist organizations. So security-wise, Africa is moving backwards in every aspect.



**Dr. Burak Bilgehan Özpek (Turkey)**

## **Erdogan Dramatically Changed Secular Turkey**

There was hope because Turkey was the first modern state actually in the Middle East and it had a secular character. Secularism was extremely compatible with the Turkish society and culture. Mustafa Kemal transformed Turkish culture and Turkish society into modern citizenship, with integration into the Western security architecture and close relations with Israel after 1948.

The identity of the state was quite clear. It was pro-Western, but it was not a full-fledged democracy because the Army's tutelage was like a monitoring mechanism over politics. The Army was functioning as a mechanism to limit the political parties, to marginalize the political system. And the national security definition was the main instrument in the hands of the army. By that I mean the army was using national security to demarcate the framework of legitimacy in the political system.

Some political parties were legitimate. Some political parties were not legitimate. For example, Islamist parties were not legitimate parties, according to the national security conception of the military. Kurdish secessionist parties were not regarded as legitimate. They were closed down.

This was a very fundamental principle of the army. They were the guardians of the nation-state and secularism. But when Erdogan's party came to power, this dramatically changed. Erdogan declared himself as the champion of democracy after the Cold War ended. Democracy was a very popular term and many circles in Turkey, including conservatives, liberals and businessmen, supported Erdogan just because they wielded Erdogan as the champion of democracy. They expected Erdogan to integrate Turkey into the Western global economic world and Western organizations such as the European Union.

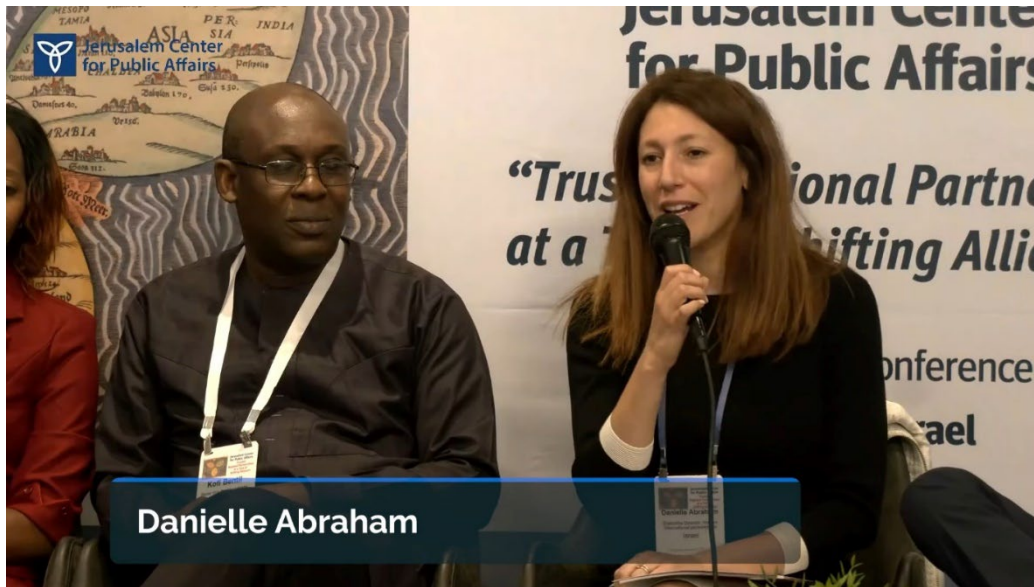
But this story ended in a very tragic way because Erdogan undermined the autonomy and power of the military, which was the guardian of secularism. And democratic institutions could not be a replacement for the army. We were expecting a supreme court or an independent judiciary or independent media to be the replacement of the Army, to be totally in the political system. But all of these bureaucratic institutions and all of these democratic institutions have been dominated by Erdogan. He still is dominating all these institutions.

This also changed the identity of the state. The state's identity was secular before Erdogan because the army was in power and in control. The army was secular and the state's identity was secular. Now the state is represented by Erdogan, and Erdogan is not secular, he is a conservative.

But Erdogan is not very sophisticated. He's a pragmatic guy. Everyone is looking for having pragmatic and rational relations with Egypt, with Israel, with Saudi Arabia. Erdogan is a conservative guy, he's a very well-known Islamist figure, but he also is very pragmatic, So if it serves Erdogan's survival in domestic politics, he can have very close relations with Israel. No question. If Erdogan inflames Islamism or nationalism, this means that Islamism and nationalism will help him to survive in domestic politics. Erdogan's Islamism is very result-oriented, is very pragmatic, is very cost-benefit-based.



## Session 4 - How Can Government Policy Assist in Deploying Innovation-Based Solutions to Enhance Food and Water Security?



**Danielle Abraham (Israel)**

### **Israel's Golden Triangle Method for Agricultural Success**

Israel is an unthinkable place to do agriculture. It really makes no sense. When we say it's a miracle, it is really not far short. We are a tiny country, with two-thirds desert, and a limited amount of agricultural land. There's a shortage of water resources. We normally say we're situated in a difficult neighborhood, which means our export markets are just that much further afield. So how did Israel not only realize food security, but position agriculture as a key driver of economic growth and then emerge as a global leader in agriculture and water? I was asked this question quite often.

Some people answered that it is because of the kibbutz, a collective and agrarian community in which people share their economic and social needs. Others said it is because of drip irrigation. I actually think that neither of those answers are correct. I can tell you that the key element is the Israeli government's policy and research approach.

There are a lot of policies that Israel implemented, but the one I wanted to highlight is something we call the Golden Triangle. This is one of the key secrets to Israel's agricultural success. What the government of Israel did is it invested very heavily in Israel's agricultural innovation ecosystem, that we depict as a triangle.

At the top is research and development. Israel poured money into the development of its scientists and enabled them to do research. At the bottom right hand corner is the extension service, which seeks to train and teach those who wish to work in the farming world. Israel poured money into the establishment of a brilliant extension service. And at the bottom left is the private sector, which is critical, because agriculture must be treated as a business.

What is in the middle of this triangle and is the most important part is the farmer. We so often talk about food security, but most overlooked are sometimes the farmers. So you've got the R&D, the extension services, the private sector and the farmer is in the middle.

Something that is critical and that you can't see on that triangle is the absence of hierarchy in Israel. This is why we're not afraid to share our ideas. And what that means, which is not very common in many countries, definitely across Africa, is that this farmer in the middle has no qualms whatsoever about picking up the telephone and calling the top professor in the country and saying that he has an issue with his crops.

The professor will gladly help him, because the actors in this Golden Triangle are all interacting and the government has a critical role to play in enabling that.

In the north of Israel, there was a group of farmers who identified an opportunity in the basil market. The issue for these farmers was that they had to grow the basil in the winter and it was too cold in the north of Israel.

They approached the scientists which are part of the extension services and shared their ideas with them. They claimed that what needed to be done was to raise the temperature in the growing environment for basil, but without using energy, because it's too expensive.

The innovation ecosystem went into overdrive and they started brainstorming with the farmers and they came up with a very creative idea, which is to fill plastic polythene bags with water, and they laid them down between the rows of the crops. During the day, the water absorbed the heat from the sun, and when the temperature dropped at night, it started emitting heat, raising the temperature in the environment.

It wasn't quite enough, so they decided to build a fence with the plastic polythene bags and they got excited. They called the farmers claiming that they found the solution. In true Israeli innovation style, they invited the farmers in the middle of the night to come and see the basil growing.

They gave them infrared goggles so they could see the temperature and so it was, these plastic walls of water were raising the temperature. Now, we have a thriving basil market in the north of Israel. This is just one of many examples we've got that actually demonstrate the role that the government played in enabling the innovation ecosystem and how critically it works with an entrepreneurial mindset and engaging the farmer.



**Febbie Gross Kandaya (Malawi)**

### **The Government of Malawi Should Do More to Solve Food Insecurity**

There is a very big platform for transformation in the agriculture sector. We are actually using Israeli technology to train local farmers in Malawi. There has always been a gap between the elite and farmers in the rural areas, and yet the people who can also transform Malawi's economy are smallholder farmers. When we saw this, we started using Israeli expertise and technologies to bridge that gap and train farmers in rural areas to increase their productivity and for them to perceive farming as a viable business.

We are working with the government of Malawi, but it has not been supportive in training the farmers. Rather, we use our own resources in order to train the farmers. The government of Malawi is not yet supporting us. The government of Israel actually is. We also experience cyclone flooding and out of 28 districts in Malawi, 12 have been affected, meaning that these 12 districts will be food insecure. We need the government to support those smallholder farmers in order to ensure food security, but the government is not doing enough. It should build centers for excellence in innovation, where all of these innovations can be supported technically and financially with the objective of being adapted and implemented.

A second option would be to link these innovations to sectors. In agriculture, there are different innovations, but if the government can take specific innovations with high impact in food and water security and ensure that they are integrated into the agriculture sector, this means that food insecurity will not be an issue.

Malawi has plenty of resources. For example, we have thirteen rivers and three lakes with fresh water. When I'm training the youth in agriculture, they have land, they have water, so they have what to work with.

In order to change how the youth perceive agriculture, we are conducting webinars with vocational institutes. The youth need to perceive agriculture as an important business, a vital business, and that agriculture actually pays. We can't live without food. So it's important for the youth to venture into agribusiness.



**Kofi Bentil (Ghana)**

## **The Government Is Hindering Agriculture in Ghana**

In my view, what's more important is for governments to get out of the way. And it's not just an ideology, because we have a lot of youth in Ghana and the opportunity is there for them. We are opposite Israel in terms of our resources. For instance, Ghana has one of the largest manmade lakes in the world, the Volta Lake, and it literally flows from the north through the south and has very potable water.

We are also cut across by rivers. Every place in Ghana is arable land and the weather is fantastic. You can grow crops on the highest mountain in Ghana. You can farm every day, 12 months a year.

Despite our agricultural opportunity, only 30% of arable land has been farmed thus far. If you go to the northern parts of Ghana, which is about half of the country, we have beautiful agricultural land and nobody farms it.

Furthermore, the satisfaction threshold for the average Ghanaian is pretty low. It's a good and a bad thing. It's a good thing because we've never had a civil war in Ghana. A Ghanaian will adjust and take whatever you give him.

And because of that, life is pretty good in Ghana. But the flip side of the coin is that the average Ghanaian will farm just what he needs to eat. And once his needs and his neighbors' needs are fulfilled, he will not go further. But things are changing because young people want to go into agribusiness, yet they are restricted by the government.

They are faced with all kinds of regulations. Just last year, one of the biggest problems in farming was the lack of fertilizer. When you didn't have government subsidies on fertilizer, you had them in abundance and they were well distributed. Now the government is subsidizing them because it wants everybody to get ahold of them. Because of tight regulations on fertilizer, there is a lot of smuggling and black-market trafficking.

In other words, if the average Ghanaian did not have to face government regulations around fertilizer, many would be able to farm easily. One of the things I hope we can do is for Israelis to come to Ghana and farm. If you ask me what should governments do, I would say that they should appreciate people's tendency to do something on their own.

However, governments have a role to play in the research field. And we have quite a number of research institutions for agriculture in Ghana. My disappointment with them is that I think they should make it more locally relevant.

I think there is a disconnect between the policy institutes, academics, and the farmers. The answer is not just to spend money in research, it is to make research relevant to people in Ghana. And I believe if that's done, there'll be a positive difference.



**Eran Doron (Israel)**

## **How Israeli Innovation Can Impact the World**

I agree with the philosophy that the best thing governments can do is not to disturb. This is a basic principle, because governments have the tendency to disturb innovation. However, the Israeli government does support R&D, and thanks to its involvement, we probably have the most advanced agricultural system in the world.

From my experience, farmers often perceive researchers as being inefficient. This is also the case in Israel. We basically know how to do everything in the desert. We need to understand that farming in Israel is strongly connected to ideology. You cannot disconnect it, because when farming was not so profitable, the government needed to subsidize it either with water or other incentives.

But in terms of R&D, in the last five years we understood we needed to go one level above, which is to perfect the technology. Most of the R&D in Israel was focusing on different crops, and now we want to be more efficient. Israel is a startup nation and we now realize that there is a big demand for Israeli expertise in desert farming, and to connect it with other fields.

Once you do this integration between technology, startups, and hi-tech, those very dynamic industries, with farming or the agriculture industry, interesting things happens. But you need to take into consideration one of the basic rules. Without failing, there won't be any success.

We are now developing desert truffles and if it works, it will be something outstanding and many of our farmers will make good money from it. But it will take us another two or three years to develop it.

What is crucial is to initiate, think out of the box, and make desert farming unique. Ben-Gurion was the one who saw tremendous potential in the desert.

Now we see it with climate change and the relationship with other countries. And we are definitely working with countries in Africa, in the Far East, and in most of the world.



**Richard Morrow (South Africa)**

### **Governments Should Not Be Involved in Business**

I believe that in order to be successful, you have to be scared to fail. I think governments are inherently risk averse. They don't want to fail because they know they'll suffer when the next election comes. That's probably the biggest concern. I also share the opinion that governments should get out the way. Governments should not be in the business of doing business.

The biggest challenge that we've seen when we've sat down with governments and heads of state is that governments want to control as much as possible, and that's ideological as much as it is economic.

If we look back at when governments gained independence during and at the end of the Cold War, African governments have had a very strong state-centric mentality. There is the focus on "we know best," we will deliver for our people, and we can make a bit of money once we do it as well.

But there is an uncertainty around the private sector in many countries. In South Africa, we are notorious for not wanting to work with the private sector. So it's about trying to break down those barriers. In my experience, the best way you can do that is by "seeing is believing." We've all heard about Israel and the success it's had in agriculture. I know many people here have come to Israel to see that with their own eyes.

There is something known as neocolonialism which believes that Africans need to be taught everything. They need to be shown, they need to be taught, they need to be essentially managed by a Westerner.

From the government's perspective, it wants to stay in power. If it wants to stay in power, it requires support from the electorate. The best way it can get that is for the government to be seen as bestowing good upon the people. So they want to get foreigners such as Israel to come in and actually not just hand over the technology or train them, but actually give them the tools. You can give a man a fish, but if you teach a man to fish, you feed him for life.

This really goes back to the origins of Israel's endeavors on the continent. Israeli agronomists were lauded for their ability to roll up their sleeves and actually work in the fields with their local African counterparts, whereas the Brits and the Americans wanted to have tea and coffee and lunch.

So Israel, for the most part, has enjoyed the benefits. I've seen it in countries like Tanzania, Kenya and Ethiopia, where there are Israelis working in the fields that they've been living on. They've been training locals and they really do have a lot to give and a lot to offer.

But, ultimately, it does come down to the following question: how do you tie this particular policy to government benefits? In many cases, that's difficult. Sadly, in South Africa, our government doesn't want really anything to do with Israel. We've recently downgraded the embassy here to a liaison office. It goes to show that just because the government says one thing, it doesn't mean that the benefits aren't being felt at a grassroots level and that everyday folk don't actually stand to gain.

## **Session 5 - The Challenges of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Compliance and Its Implications for Commodity Industries**



**Emily Neilson-Winkler (Israel)**



## The Relevance of ESG in Today's World

What is ESG? Environmental, social and governance compliance. Essentially, the world today expects companies to comply with those criteria, whether they are public or private. In some cases, it's voluntary, but in many cases, it's now becoming mandatory to measure these indicators across the environment, social activity, and internal governance.

Why are companies demanding to comply with these measurements? There are over 600 entities in the world today that will report and rank a company as a third-party asset. The company has no say except for that one report that they put out. It is a big deal because that rank goes straight into the stock market to investor reports and recommendations and directly to your stakeholders.

Environmental and social issues through ESG compliance are now tied directly to the performance indicators of corporations around the world. The CEOs and the CSOs, the Chief Sustainability Officers, which is a rising career due to these indicators, now report to stakeholders on how their company is doing and making sure that they leave the people and the planet in an okay or better situation than when they first came in.

Through ESG, for the first time in modern history, corporations are 100% aligned with national agendas to move forward with national goals, to ensure environmental and social justice, equality and prosperity, good health, wellbeing, decent work, economic growth, responsible consumption and production, peaceful, strong institutions, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities.



Dr. Kenedy Onyango Asembo

**Dr. Kenedy Onyango Asembo (Kenya)**

## **Responsible Business Practices in the Horn of Africa**

The Horn of Africa is currently undergoing the worst drought in 40 years, and that has had a lot of impact on food production, livestock production, fishing, aquaculture. But we do have massive opportunities in terms of the agricultural potential of the Horn of Africa. Today, we realize that only 7.7% of the land in the Horn of Africa is arable and a massive 45.3% of agricultural productive land is not yet put to use.

The Horn of Africa has an average of 500 million millimeters of rainfall every year and massive underground water, particularly the Turkana Aqua Resources that were discovered recently in Kenya. So when we look at this potential, it presents a massive opportunity for the private sector, especially in the agricultural supply chain, with opportunities in food processing, post-harvesting, and marketing.

But how do we ensure that the private sector gets into the Horn of Africa? We must show responsible business conduct. And what defines responsible business conduct in the agricultural supply chain in the Horn of Africa? That is one question that we are asking, and I want to particularly focus on Kenya in terms of ESG compliance.

In the Constitution of Kenya, Article 69, as well as the Climate Change Act 2016, protection of the environment is provided. Kenya actually committed to net zero greenhouse emissions by 2030 and a commitment to ensure 100% transition to green energy and clean cooking gas by 2028.

The Capital Markets Authority in 2015 released guidelines on U.S. compliance. The Central Bank of Kenya actually equally released the guidelines, and in 2017, Kenya banned the use of plastic in packaging. These had great impact on the manufacturing sector that had to adopt friendlier packaging for their products. We equally have regulations that were recently issued by the Nairobi Securities Exchange that unveiled their 2021 disclosure manual that required firms to be ESG compliant.

By the end of 2022, they were given a one-year window. Of course, the Kenya Bankers Association actually launched what we are calling the Green Bond program that was encouraging farmers to use the bond for ESG compliance. But all these are on top of other policies that have been developed by the government of Kenya on climate-smart agriculture.



**Dr. Hosni Guedira (UAE/Tunisia)**

### **Exploring New Resources in the UAE and Tunisia**

I was fortunate to participate in the 2012 UN Sustainability Conference in Rio, during which the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed, and I participated in working groups on some of these SDGs as well. At that time, the debate was on adaptation because each country is different.

We have many indicators that some of them are not relevant to some countries. The challenge we are facing today is the adaptation of these indicators to specific countries. I will take the UAE as an example, and the water energy nexus, and the idea that the United Arab Emirates started the renewable energy program in 2006-2007.

And that time, people were asking why oil rich countries are investing in renewables. In 2007, with the first 100 megawatt plant in the UAE, the hourly fee per kilowatt cost 32 cents. Today's price is about 4 cents.

The question of saving water in the UAE is not about saving natural resources because 100% of water is coming from desalination. Saving water is saving energy because one liter of water can be converted to a kilowatt hour. This has completely changed the philosophy of saving natural resources by preserving water usage in both agriculture and in households. This is putting the question of how we can give more incentive to saving water in households.

At that time, the idea of investing in renewable energy for the UAE revolved around water, energy and food. The question is how can you sustain life in arid environments after there is no more oil. The idea at the time was that if we can capture solar resources with efficient technologies, we can use seawater. Seawater is an infinite resource, and thus no one would be concerned about lacking seawater.

If you produce water from the sun and you can irrigate, you can produce food and you can close the loop in terms of the food, water, energy, food nexus.

In Tunisia, 80% of the water is going to irrigation and 20% for industrial and household usage. In order to saving water, you need to invest more in advanced technology, such as irrigation, instead of thinking to do so in more expensive desalination technology.

We have several partnerships with Israeli universities. In my role as director of research engagement at our university, I am coordinating many collaboration programs. One of them is with the Weizmann Institute, and we also have a very active collaboration with the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

They have one of the most advanced schools for agriculture. In terms of innovation and the ecosystem surrounding the university, we are producing amazing technology and we see how we can leverage this knowledge. We have similar environments to Israel. How the Jewish state managed to develop innovative technology and make agriculture despite its difficult climate can be an example and benefit to many other countries. We can take advantage of the advances made here in Israel and see how we can implement them and adapt them to the needs of the UAE and in the region as well.



**Jones S. Williams (Nigeria)**

## **Innovation and Youth in Liberia**

I would like to say that, as an African, ESG compliance is not an issue. It is a good thing that every African won some level of compliance. For example, I worked for the U.S. government for about 16 years when there was an oil spill in the U.S. and the lawmakers go crazy. But when there is an oil spill in Liberia, nobody knows about it. It doesn't even make *CNN*.

So it is important to comply with the rules. I also want to stress that, from an African perspective, what we want is to get some social benefits whenever a company comes to our region. For example, before I was born, there was a company called Firestone.

Firestone has a rubber plantation in Liberia right now, but that operation is going down. Firestone did not leave any major infrastructure in those areas. Mining companies did some business in this area. They built incomplete houses. Some of their houses did not even have bathrooms.

These companies settle in African countries and exploit their resources. And once they are done doing so, they are gone. There are no rules. So what people want is to see companies with responsible business practices who are investing in these areas. If a company wants to use our resources, they have to leave something behind so that tomorrow, when the resources are no longer available, the people can still have some benefits.

That is why ESG compliance is vital and this point brings me to innovation. Today we are living in an age of knowledge-based economics. The big companies - Apple, Facebook, Google - they have the most revenue. The kids in Liberia, they want to be Mark Zuckerberg. They want innovation. They want technology. They want to become part of the global labor market. They want to stay in Nigeria, in Liberia, and work for the companies in Israel.

Most of the youngsters in Africa want innovation and technology and they look up to two countries only. They do not look up to America. They look up to Israel and Singapore. Singapore doesn't have diamonds. It does not have gold. Look at how successful Singapore is and see what Israel can offer in terms of feeding its people and offering tech solutions. If we use technology and we apply the different innovative methodology that Israel offers as well as other countries, I think Africa would become a better place to do business.