

# The “Two-State Solution” and Beyond: Perceptions for the Future of the Palestinian Cause and Possible Settlements

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In the light of the raging crises in the Arab world and the lack of balance between regional and international systems alike, the position of the Palestinian issue has regressed taking with it the opportunities for the “two-state solution” which was adopted by UN Security Council Resolution 242 after the 1967 war. This resolution later became the reference in the 1993 Oslo Agreement negotiations. Some consider that the two-state solution was never taken seriously by the Israelis and that it was put aside by the reality enforcement policy Israel had adopted, especially in terms of expansion of settlement and judaization. In fact, with the political and social growth of the extremist right in Israel, settlements spread in the West Bank to the extent that it became impossible to settle the Palestinian-Israeli struggle on the basis of the two-state solution as the “Palestinian Entity” became severed and under siege by Israel. Others consider that the internal Palestinian division contributed to the undermining of the two-state solution with the failure of the “land for peace” formula, the rise of jihadist Islamic movements, and the interference of regional entities that aimed at failing the diplomatic process and continuing the pathway of armed resistance as the only solution for the Palestinian issue. What does the future hold for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? What are the prospects for possible solutions? Can the two-state solution be saved or will the one-state-two-nations solution (one bi-national state) be adopted? Or will a regional multilateral solution based on exchange of territories with neighbouring countries be adopted to form a Palestinian entity? Or will the status quo remain as is while sliding towards violence or any type of comprehensive chaos?

In an attempt to foresee the future of the Palestinian issue and analyse possible solutions, *La Maison du Futur*, in collaboration with Al-Quds Center for Political Studies, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies organized a conference at their headquarters on June 9 and 10, with the participation of a number of decision-makers, experts, researchers, and academics.

President **Amine Gemayel** opened the conference by wishing the participants a holy month of Ramadan and by welcoming “the diplomatic freedom-fighter Nabil Shaath representing dear friend, President Mahmoud Abbas.” He thanked the director of the Al-Quds Center, Oraib Al Rantawi, and the representatives of Konrad Adenauer and Martens Centre for their contribution to the success of this conference. He stressed the importance of holding such an event at that exact time as this year commemorates the passing of 50 years since the 1967 war. He confirmed that since the establishing of *La Maison du Futur* in 1975, it has dedicated a large part of its activities to the defence of the Palestinian issue because “it is a righteous cause that is deeply rooted in the consciences and beings of every Arab and non-Arab.” Although Lebanon was drowning in a civil war, “*La Maison du Futur* never lost its way and continuously held the banner of the Palestinian cause.” He reminded the participants that the most important of their publications is *Haliyat* Magazine which dedicated a third of its content to the Palestinian issue. Furthermore, he shed light on the reasons that join between Lebanon and the Palestinian issue, with at least hundreds of thousands of Palestinians residing in Lebanon. He said that there are

many similarities between the Lebanese and the Palestinian issues: Starting with land occupation; concerns over sovereignty and being; following a democratic system; combatting terrorism, fundamentalism, and extremism; paying the price for the inter-Arab struggles; interference of some Arab countries in Lebanese and Palestinian affairs; and hindering the reaching of solutions and settlements. President Gemayel also mentioned that despite the tragic circumstances that the region is currently passing through, the Palestinian issue is still in the forefront due to the struggle of the Palestinian people and the popular movements in some Arab and foreign countries, plus the diplomatic and political efforts of the national authority headed by the movement of President Abou Mazen. He hinted at certain information concerning future initiatives that would push the diplomatic process forward towards a solution for the Palestinian issue and that shall be disclosed after Ramadan.

He also warned against the danger of falling in the trap of waiting for the conflicts in the region to die down before aiming at solving the Palestinian issue. He considers this to be threatening to the efforts to reach a settlement and would lead to an increased spread of terrorist movements. He said that the Palestinian and Lebanese issues have long been used for other unrelated purposes, giving utmost priority to the Palestinian issue being the Mother issue. Solving these issues would lead to the settling of the other crises in the region in terms of fundamentalism, terrorism, and Islamic extremism; while the opposite does not hold true.

President Gemayel then spoke of the negative impact of the absence of a strong Arab leadership that is capable of bringing all Arabs together around one rescue plan to solve all the current Arab crises including the Palestinian issue. He wondered about the role of the League of Arab States and invited all Arab leaders to wake up finally and compensate for the decade-long bad performance in Arab politics and create a suitable framework for the Palestinian issue that would open new spaces for a permanent settlement to all the conflicts in the region, mainly the Arab-Israeli conflict. He added that the Lebanese and Palestinian issues are closely linked: to solve the Palestinian issue could be the beginning to solving the Lebanese issue.

**Nabil Shaath**, representative of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, took the floor and started by thanking President Gemayel and all the organizers. He conveyed President Abbas's heart-felt greetings especially that "Lebanon has a special standing in the heart of every Palestinian because the Palestinian revolution started from Lebanon, and it played the largest role in supporting the establishing of the Palestinian entity and international recognition in its existence and the rights of its people." He added: "Thank you from every Palestinian in the State of Palestine." He then stressed the importance of achieving Palestinian national unity because the schism that is currently present has alienated democracy: it is impossible to hold elections in the West Bank alone, for this would lead to further division. The return of democracy and people's participation in authority are two essential factors, for no one more than Palestinians know what it is to be oppressed and that authority emanates from the people to serve the people. "We must regain legitimacy by achieving national unity through holding elections which will lead to a coalition where everyone will have a share in authority with no exception. This is the position of the national authority and the position of Fatah: Unity is the key to the return of the PLO, the umbrella under which all different factions were gathered." He confirmed that the major concern today is fighting the only colonial settler left in the world – Israel: "We consider this confrontation to be the mother of all battles." He also disclosed that settlement has increased by 55% during the premiership of Benjamin Netanyahu. Despite Israel's pledge in Camp David to

stop the process of settlement, it did not respect it and the number of settlers in the West Bank reached around 400,000 in 128 settlements spread all over the West Bank from South to North. As for East Jerusalem, which is considered by the United Nations to be occupied Palestinian territory, there are around 350,000 settlers living in 20 settlements.

He added that Israel controls 92% of our water which serves 800,000 settlers. Palestinians only use 8%. “Had we been a full-fledged state having clear borders, the internal division of the Palestinians would have been non-existent.” He continued that the two-state solution for us is a state with 1967 borders having East Jerusalem as its capital, enjoying the right to self-determination and the return of refugees. This is what President Abou Mazen expressed during US President Trump’s recent visit to Bethlehem.

He concluded: “We do not know anything so far about any new American initiative. But, for us, our future project is the establishing of a Palestinian state. We must regain PLO’s legitimacy and achieve internal unity. We must agree to put an end to our division and to form one administration under a national unity government that excludes no one. Hamas is a part of our existence, no one wishes to exclude it. We realize all the difficulties that we are facing especially with the obscurity surrounding the world order and the dispersed Arab situation, yet, we will exert all our efforts to achieve our unity and continue our struggle. Our motto remains: Revolution until victory!”

Representing the Al-Quds Center, Director Oraib Al Rantawi took the floor welcoming the participants, thanking President Abbas for selecting Doctor Shaath to represent him in this conference, and President Gemayel for hosting and sponsoring it. He also thanked President Gemayel for his speech with which he completely agrees. He thanked Konrad Adenauer and Martens Centre for their contribution. Al Rantawi highlighted the importance of the conference and its timely organization as it falls on the commemoration of “the great Arab defeat in June of 1967, after the six-day war, which is yet to be ended” and which transformed Israel from being a mere foreign entity transplanted in the body of the Arab world into a regional superpower. Despite that fact, Israel was not able to break the Palestinian people and stand against their struggle: “Israel did not rest on the seventh day!” He added: “The conference is also held at a time when the region is burning up with other crises putting the importance of and the interest in the Palestinian cause on the back-burner. This conference reconfirms the significance of this cause which we consider to be the mother of all causes in the Arab world and the region. Through it we are sending the message that the region will never have security and stability until a just and permanent solution is found for Palestine.” As to the importance of location, the holding of this conference in Beckfaya is a testimony that the Palestinian-Lebanese discord during the “hurtful and bitter” Lebanese civil war has been overcome. Consequently, it should be considered a model of the pathway we should follow to solve all current crises and achieve reconciliation between all the conflicting internal parties in the Arab world, so we can overcome these conflicts especially after the rise of *takfiri* thought, hate speech, and regional and international political exploitation of these crises to serve narrow interests.

He concluded by expressing his hope for the conference to be able to “draw a clear picture of the Palestinian scene, in its internal, regional, and international dimensions,” in order to be able to set possible solutions to the Palestinian issue and future options for the Palestinian people, their national cause, and the future of their struggle for freedom and independence.

**Peter Rimmele**, Resident Representative of Konrad Adenauer Foundation, started his intervention by wondering: “will there ever be peace between Israelis and Palestinians?” He said that it had always been a leading question at Konrad Adenauer especially under the values they believe in, such as freedom, justice, and solidarity, which lead all their efforts in dealing with the different crises all over the world including Palestine.

He expressed the Konrad Adenauer Foundation’s belief in the two-state solution as was confirmed during “President Mahmoud Abbas’s visit to our headquarters in Berlin.” He added that when we think of what is happening in Palestine, we think of Israel’s settlement activities, the difficult living conditions of the Palestinians in the Israeli-controlled territories, and the sufferings of two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, in addition to those of the Palestinian refugees in diaspora. He continued by saying that the word “apartheid” has become a common word when talking about the situation in Palestine, this underlines the necessity to change the status quo. He reminded the participants that the Balfour declaration which promised the establishment of a Jewish state will be commemorating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and that the first Intifada will commemorate 30 years in December. We must therefore “begin with crucial steps within this never ending conflict. And the two-state solution is certainly such a step.” The situation in Palestine and Israel has witnessed several changes “unfortunately hardly positive ones.” The Israeli elite is shifting towards the right and are showing tendencies towards religious and national extremism, in addition to the growing number of Israeli settlements with very little effort from the Israelis to put an end to their colonial spread. As for the Palestinian national authority, it is suffering from a lack in political capacities and financial stability and the dire conditions in Palestinian territories which keep resulting in escalation of violence such as the 2015 knife intifada.

Despite all that, certain positive changes have taken place on the international level: first by recognizing Palestine as a non-member observer state at the UN since 2012, which is a step towards full membership; and second, the UN Security Council Resolution which denounces Israel’s settlement policy and confirmed the UN’s support of the two-state solution. He added that if Israel wishes to remain a national democratic state, then the only way forward is the two-state solution: “Yet, who will work on this solution? What will the Trump administration’s take on this subject-matter be?” especially that both sides of the conflict are in a constant state of emergency, and it does not help anyone on either side. He concluded by warning against managing the conflict rather than solving it, as this is also dangerous for the Palestinian refugees and the security of the hosting countries, particularly Lebanon. He added that “we from the KAS are not for one side or against the other,” we aim at implementing our values on all sides. “The fact that we are gathered here today makes me hopeful that the two-state solution is not forgotten.”

Session one, entitled “**The Crisis of the Palestinian National Movement**,” with moderator **Nawaf Kabbara**, university professor and writer, introducing the speakers: **Nabil Amr**, former minister in the Palestinian authority; **Fahd Suleiman**, deputy secretary general of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine; and **Mohsen Saleh**, Head of Al Zaytouna Center.

Kabbara said that the Palestinian factions and leaders are trying to find a solution to the internal crisis swindling between the national tendency and the ideological tendency of political Islam. What are the reasons behind this crisis? What are their repercussions on the future of the

Palestinian issue? And what are the best means to solving them in light of the major regional and international changes?

Deputy Secretary General of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, **Fahd Suleiman** first took the floor and said that the crisis in the Palestinian National Movement is complex as it is a crisis in the official national strategy, which is still based on two tracks that have been paralyzed for years: the bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, on one hand, and the building of “state institutions,” on the other. It is also a crisis in the standing political system “whose representative capacity and activities have shrunk at all levels.”

He spoke of Israel’s stubbornness and refusal of any pathway towards acknowledging the national rights of the Palestinian people as a cause of the collapse of the Palestinian-Israeli bilateral talks. Another cause was the negotiations structure itself which led to its own demise because it did not link between the international resolutions and the goal of the negotiations, it did not set a specific timeframe for the talks, there was no honest and influential international reference capable of monitoring the negotiations process (except for the United States which was biased to Israel), and the absence of mechanisms that ensure that the balance of power does not tip in favour of one party against the other, such as the settlement activities and judaization which weakened the Palestinian side.

On the other hand, he claimed that the failure of the political process was due to the absence of a national Palestinian strategy able to restore the balance of power through providing the elements of internal cohesion and to the lack of serious attempts to untangle the ties with the Oslo Agreement, notably concerning security and economic dependence on Israel. He considered that the building of state institutions was not enough to lift all the obstacles (especially those placed by Israel) in the way of establishing an independent state, taking into account that these institutions cannot be considered national state institutions in the absence of sovereignty.

Suleiman clarified that the crisis in the Palestinian political system is based on the fact that it is built on two pillars: the PLO, which is the legitimate and only representative of the Palestinian people; and the Palestinian National Authority – or the Palestinian Self Governing Authority – in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which was established by the PLO in 1994 after the Oslo Agreement. So, theoretically, the PLO is the high reference in authority, but practically, this is not true because the PLO’s role has shrunk upon the rise of the Palestinian Authority and the transfer of all its main institutions under the latter’s jurisdiction. In addition, the role of the people’s movements, such as popular and professional unions, in the diaspora shrunk as well. Knowing that they played an essential role in mobilizing and uniting the energy of the Palestinian people. Plus, the absence of political Islam movements from the PLO has destabilized its representation, for these movements enjoy a wide-scale popular base and political power as a result of the social aid they provide and their resistance of occupation.

He also spoke of the division of the Palestinian Authority on itself, institutionally and geographically: It is now in the hands of two conflicting ruling parties which led to the deepening of bureaucracy and oppressive practices. Added to this, the Palestinian Authority has been designed in Oslo to serve for only five years and constitute an independent administrative entity that functions under occupation. When the five years had passed, it found itself incapable of providing for the needs of society especially with the rise of other negative factors such as the hegemony of a rentier economy, rampant corruption, spread of settlements, judaization, and the siege imposed by Israel on Gaza Strip.

Suleiman acknowledged the responsibility of the Palestinian forces in the crisis, especially the two largest and most influential parties – Fatah and Hamas – and the responsibility of the Palestinian left-wing. He considered that the roots of this crisis go back to the Oslo Agreement and its unjust conditions which led to the establishing of a self-governing authority while the land was still being settled, the right to return was discarded, and while Israel kept its security control over the Palestinian territories, cross points, and borders.

He added to the aforementioned the emergence of new balances governing the Palestinian internal relations and the transformation of Fatah from being the first among equals in the PLO to a ruling party that monopolizes funds, weapons, and official political representation, and controls service and employment facilities. That same bug was also caught by Hamas after it came to power in Gaza. Consequently, the status of each of Fatah and Hamas decreased in all 1948 Palestinian territories and in the Palestinian diaspora, in favour of the Palestinian left-wing, such as the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality and the National Democratic Alliance, and other political parties and figures.

He considered that the solution to this national crisis is now laid on the shoulders of the Palestinian left-wing through “the rebuilding of self, strengthening alliances, and joining the mass movement while following a realistic political program far removed from the Oslo Agreement which can never achieve the national rights of the Palestinian people.”

As for the future of the two-state solution, Suleiman considered that the term became popular in the political scene after the speech of the then US President George W. Bush in June 2002; that is, three months after the launching of the Arab Peace Initiative which he did not want to go through. He said that the two-state solution is a vague term that is very different from the Palestinian national program which is based on three pillars: A sovereign independent state according to the 5 June 1967 demarcation lines with East Jerusalem as its capital, guaranteeing the right to return of Palestinian refugees as stipulated in UNSCR 194, and acknowledging the 1948 Palestinians as a national minority of equal citizenship. He clarified that the two-state solution requires three major concessions: a change in the 1967 demarcation lines, making Jerusalem the capital of two states, and cancelling the right to return. He added that “regardless of our opinion of the two-state solution, it remains a fact that the current situation does not allow the Palestinians to impose it especially when the Quartet has turned its back on them, and Israel refuses it, while the US Trump Administration does not even mention it.”

He revealed that the prospective solutions being juggled in the American administration right now revolve around the impossibility of reaching a peace agreement on the basis of the two-state solution. They merely aim at providing facilitations to Palestinians, which the Israelis consider to be concessions on their part, while there should be concrete and open Arab steps to justify them.

To him, the two-state solution is unlikely in the near future, even the one-state solution “does not enjoy much echo” which brings us back to the origins of the struggle; that is, the 1948 *Nakba*. Hence, the “only viable option remaining for the Palestinian issue is a solution based on the valuable achievements of the Palestinian national struggle to implement the three-pillar national program through relaunching and renewing the anti-occupation popular movement wherever there are Palestinians, at home and in the diaspora. In addition to pursuing the internationalization of the Palestinian issue by broadening the circle of recognition of the state of Palestine and the rights of the Palestinian people, increasing the state of Palestine’s membership in all international agencies and organizations, suing Israel for violating the Geneva conventions and committing war crimes, and promoting the campaign to boycott it.” He also spoke of the

importance of overcoming the internal division and going back to the Mother organization (i.e. the PLO and the National Authority), and providing the means of survival and resilience to the Palestinians of Palestine and the diaspora.

Head of Al Zaytouna Center, **Mohsen Saleh**, gave an overview of the crisis in the Palestinian National Movement. He said that the national Palestinian project is currently weak and frail, which greatly reflects on its capacity to work and benefit from the available opportunities and the great capacity of the Palestinian people, inside and out, and invest in the Arab and international circles that sympathize with the Palestinian people and their aspirations.

He added that the major features of the crisis in the Palestinian national movement are the withdrawal of the role of the PLO internally and in the diaspora and the weakening of its institutions, plus the disruption of its National Council ever since the 1993 Oslo Accords which gave rise to the Palestinian authority in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Other features include the failure of the PLO to assimilate effective Palestinian forces that enjoy a wide representation base (especially Hamas and the Islamic Jihad) which weakened its representation of the Palestinian people and made it a shadow of the Palestinian Authority. He believes that this led the Palestinians to lose “a joint national umbrella that brings them together, manages their project, resolves their differences, sets their direction, and effectively channels their energy.”

Mr. Saleh also considered the Palestinian national project to be suffering greatly from the opposing trajectories of its effective forces and from the deep disagreements over the political agenda, the priorities, and the constant values such as the possibility of relinquishing certain parts of Palestine. He confirmed that the state of division was reflected on the process of the national project. It became evident since the PLO’s signing of the Oslo Accords (led by Fatah) and the opposition of the alliance of the ten factions against them. The division was later consecrated with Hamas’s control of the Authority in Gaza and Fatah’s control of the West Bank in 2007.

On the other hand, the peaceful settlement approach adopted by Fatah and its allies has reached a blockade and has failed in light of the attempts of the Israelis to fail it. It also failed due to the increase in Israeli extremism, national and religious fundamentalism, judaization and settlement activities in Jerusalem and the West Bank, and the lack of international (more specifically, American) will to pressure Israel to commit to the settling project with Palestine. He further clarified that in return, the armed resistance project, adopted by Hamas and its allies, is also suffering from a crisis within the Palestinian division, the blockade of the Gaza Strip, and the presence of an Arab and international environment that does not support it, but rather opposes it.

He spoke of the crises that Fatah, Hamas, and the Palestinian left-wing are each going through. Fatah has a slouching organizational structure and suffers from a crisis in leadership with unclear goals. Hamas’s leadership is dispersed, its infrastructure in the West Bank is hit hard, and it is the target of international and regional currents of political Islam. As for the Left, it is suffering from chronic problems related to lack of popularity, its political discourse, and youth structure. In addition to this, he noted the state of weakness of the Palestinian diaspora due to the different systems and environments they find themselves in. This has led to a weak capacity to self-organize and make independent national decisions. He confirmed that the absence of democracy in the region has had repercussions on “the national movement’s ability to manage conflicts and diversity in a constructive and civilized manner.”

He concluded by saying that despite the wide hopes that the Palestinians have hung on the Arab

Spring, the desperate situation in the strategic milieu surrounding Palestine, the wars taking place, and the many conflicts have all reflected negatively on the Palestinian situation and will continue doing so in the near future.

**Nabil Amr**, thanked President Gemayel and all the organizers of the conference, expressing his admiration in the session's title because it links the internal situation with the political solution to the Palestinian issue. He said that, to be honest, he fears the internal situation in case there was a settlement to the Palestinian issue in the near future explaining that the situation in the Arab world may cause adaptation to any American solution or initiative. "I mostly fear that the Palestinian internal situation is not prepared for a solution." He considered the main reason for the crisis in the Palestinian national movement not to lie in the different political visions or ideologies "but in the power struggle" and the non-renewal of the PLO's leadership, in addition to the practices of different factions "that no nothing of democracy." He added that the PLO is weary of Hamas's boycott, of the "seasonal sulking" of some factions, and the state of stagnation it is living in. He confirmed that there are no political or ideological conflicts that explain the crisis in the internal situation: the left-wing, Hamas, and Fatah agree on the political formula, there is no ideological disagreement between them, and the three have joined the political process. So, "the struggle is a struggle over power." More importantly, the two parties to the internal struggle are both coordinating with Israel on security issues: indirect coordination of the missiles between Hamas and Israel, and direct coordination of the knives between Fatah and Israel. He confirmed the presence of stronger regional entities that are guiding the situation in Gaza: Turkey and Qatar.

He reconfirmed his fear that internal Palestine is not ready for any solution, saying that this fear is escalating in light of the presence of many proposed solutions that could push forward the political path and "lead somewhere." The two-state solution has dwindled down, but there is no other alternative. If Trump presents a new initiative, there is no doubt it will take Israeli interests into account rather than Palestinian interests. What to do in this case? "Shall we tell them we are two entities and that the Arabs are divided into two camps if not more? We live in a whirlpool that is difficult to come out of because matters are not in our hands, we are the product of an international agreement." He concluded by saying: "My disagreement with Abou Mazen is on being strict not on leniency, as being strict and adamant at this time will lead us into an inescapable impasse."

During the Q&A session, the participants asked the following questions:

- None of the interventions mentioned the Palestinians inside, that is, the 1948 Arabs. Even the authorities neglect them, despite the fact that their presence preserved the Palestinian cause. Could there be a solution without taking them into account?
- Oraib Al Rantawi said: "The speakers are representatives of major currents in Palestine. I would have wished them to talk about the problems that each of their organizations are going through, not only criticize the authority. It is easy to criticize authorities and Abou Mazen, but what about the others? Hamas is in a deadlock, the only solution before it is to go back. Shouldn't we look within ourselves?"

In answer to the questions, **Suleiman** mentioned the presence of several developments in the

1948 regions that are very promising in terms of maturity of political thought, which gives priority to action on the front despite the struggle between the different components. “We, the Palestinians of other regions, need to learn from this.” He considered the experience of the 1948 Palestinians to be as important as that of the Palestinian left-wing. The speakers considered that a large number of the 1948 Arabs have contributed to developing the Palestinian effort in setting initiatives for solutions, noting that their political leaders are the Palestinian left-wing despite it being weak in other regions.

**Amr** was surprised with what Al Rantawi had said, confirming that the situation in the interior of Palestine is heartbreaking, and we need to put the finger on the problems to be able to come out of this crisis. He considered his approach to be realistic and to be based on finding an exit within what is available. He noted that the philosophy of fundamentalism was not beneficial in the past and will remain so in the future. The first step towards the right path is in reviving the PLO and its institutions, for without them the political decision will be lost due to unavoidable factors. He also stressed the importance of the role of the Palestinian people through holding local and parliamentary elections that would fill the gap between the factions and the people. He also stressed the necessity of renewing the legitimacy that emanates from the people and being flexible in the settlement process “because if we do not voluntarily accept, it will be forced on us.”

**Saleh** reminded Al Rantawi of the title of the session, which is the crisis of the national movement and not the crisis in Palestinian factions. He confirmed that he does not represent Hamas but himself, and to say that Islamists do not believe in democracy is a fallacy especially that they were not given the opportunity to show that. He confirmed that Hamas did not boycott Fatah, but that it was the PLO that closed upon itself. “We talk about sharing power, while we monopolize it and prevent anyone from taking part.”

Before the beginning of the second session, former Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Sanioura said: “I may shock you with what I am about to say. Let us put ourselves in the shoes of the extremist Israelis. They are surely asking: Why should we concede to the Palestinians? It is sad that after 80 years of the *Nakba* and 50 years of the *Naksa*, the struggle we see between the Palestinian factions over power and decision-making has made them lose the cause. How can we transform this sad situation into a real revival? It is no longer acceptable for the Palestinian situation to remain as such because this means no solution.” He added: “We are not worthy of this noble cause. How can we join our efforts at the Palestinian and Arab levels? It is unacceptable not to hold elections in Palestine to know who truly represents the Palestinians. Thus, the first step towards internal reform is to hold these elections. On the other hand, the Arab initiative that was launched some 15 years ago should be activated. The Arabs have sufficed themselves with this initiative considering that they have done their part, while not one Arab country was able to seriously and effectively promote it. This initiative constitutes the framework that we should present to the world because it promotes the two-state solution and represents a certain Arab consensus. We must follow this double Palestinian and Arab track while addressing the world and demanding a just solution for the Palestinian issue. We must carry this cause to the heart of every Arab and to the world, or else we will not be able to make progress. We do not want more despair; we stand today before an opportunity that we must take advantage of in order to have a real Palestinian, Arab, and international revival.”

The second session, entitled “**Transformations within the Palestinian Society, internally and in the Diaspora,**” started with moderator **Sami Aoun**, Professor at Sherbrooke University in Canada. He introduced the speakers in the session: Former Prime Minister of Jordan **Taher Al Masri**; Director of Masarat Center **Hani Al Masri**; and Chairman of the Palestinian Human Rights Committee **Suheil Al Natour**.

**Sami Aoun** started the session by asking a question on the way to preserve Palestinian identity when the Palestinians are spread all over the world and are scattered internally between those in the 1948 territories, the West Bank, and Gaza.

**Taher Al Masri** began his intervention by saying that the identity of Palestinians was self-evident in Jordan, emotionally and mentally, referring to the deeply-rooted relation between Jordan and Palestine and how their existential fate has been historically intertwined ever since “the British issued their birth certificates together.” He added that the Jordanians of Palestinian origins are of two categories: The citizens of the West Bank which was annexed to Jordan who are of Jordanian nationality, but who had it withdrawn from some of them after disengagement in 1988; and the two-million who were displaced from Palestine in 1948 and who are mostly concerned with the right to return and reparation.

He stressed that the Palestinian are a part of the Jordanian social fabric and are completely integrated in it, and at the same time, they are included in the UN resolutions in terms of their right to return and to reparation. The Jordanian nationality does not abolish this right, and it allows them to be full citizens who enjoy full rights and obligations. In 1970, the situation took a different course when the Jordanian army clashed with the PLO. This led the Jordanian government to take certain measures against the Palestinians, such as defining the professions they are allowed to work. It was followed by the disengagement “after which I resigned from office as a sign of protest.” The problem of who is Jordanian and who is Palestinian became present only recently in the Jordanian circles. In the early 1990s, it was limited to a group of intellectuals when an anti-Jordanian-of-Palestinian-origin current was on the rise demanding the retraction of the Jordanian citizenship from them under the pretext of enhancing the Palestinian cause.

He added: “I will not explain the components of the Palestinian and Jordanian identities from an academic historical perspective. There is no need to state that these two identities are still in the process of formation and maturation under the organic bond between Palestine and Jordan.” He wondered whether it is possible to be optimistic that there will be a formula that expresses the unity between both identities stating that what differentiates the Jordanians of Palestinian origin and those of Jordanian origin is thin line related to the right to return. This line led to a disagreement among the elite on the definition of who is Jordanian and who is not. Realistically speaking, the issue of Palestinian identity is for the Palestinians of the inside, while the Jordanian of Palestinian origin are Jordanians as they are fully integrated in belonging, nationalism, geography, and social fabric of Jordan; although, they have some nostalgia for the past, which is only human.” He started with two constant factors that the relation between the two is based on. First, Jordan’s recognition that the PLO is the legitimate representative of the Palestinians, and that consequently it shall not negotiate on its behalf. Second, the Palestinians’ refusal of the alternative state in Jordan. It is necessary to hold on to the right to return so the cause is not lost and to support the Palestinian identity as that of resistance against occupation. “In Jordan, we must agree on all that to prevent the occupying force from establishing an alternative nation.”

**Hani Al Masri** then took the floor and highlighted the “complete dilemma” that the Palestinian cause and the Palestinians of the inside and the diaspora are equally going through. He considered the root of the problem to be the failure of the Palestinians to establish a national project, “neither the one they started, nor the one they accepted,” so much so that they have reached a dead end. He clarified that the resistance strategy had reached an impasse as a unilateral strategy. Hamas finds itself today in an unenviable position, and the options before it will remain limited to the Iranian option in the event that it continues with the same strategy. This holds true as well with the Authority which has followed the political track. He continued: “No one can say that we are in a good position: we are all in deep trouble and Israel is targeting us all, moderate and extremists,” especially with the marginalization of the Israeli left-wing, the increase in the right-wing’s hegemony, and the competition between the moderate-right and the extreme-right on who is able to capture more Palestinian territories. The number of Israeli settlers is around 600,000, and Israel was able to revive the map of Greater Israel. He added that although the two-state solution is important, “we are facing the no-state solution, and here lies the greatest danger.” He clarified that Israel is still considering the displacing of Palestinians (similar to what happened in 1948) especially in light of the displacement from Syrian and Iraq. He revealed that in Israel there are talks revolving around establishing seven principedoms, instead of the Authority, based on family leaderships, to be under the security control of Israel. This is exactly what Israel wants.

He considered that the realistic solution would be that which can achieve the maximum possible gains. Any initiative by America President Trump and Israel will not be in the benefit of Palestinians. It is necessary to focus efforts in order to abort the Israeli plan and put an end to the spread of settlements. “We can do this because the Palestinian issue is a just cause, and there is international recognition of its justness and of the Israeli violations. More importantly, the Palestinian people is determined to resist militarily, politically, and culturally even if the authority is weak. This is a clear indicator that the Palestinian people will not accept this reality.” In his opinion, the problem lies in the absence of an entity that organizes their effort and in the widening gap between the factions and the Authority. “The people are ready, but the Authority is not at the same level of preparedness. A new situation is forming, but it is still not fully envisaged. Yet, if the factions do not conduct the required reforms, the new components will become more evident.” As to holding the elections as a means out of the crisis, he questioned the point of holding elections under an occupation: “If democracy is guaranteed under occupation, then why fight it?” He noted that the occupying forces allowed elections to be held after Oslo to give it, and the concessions it stipulated, the required legitimacy. The second elections were held to make Hamas part of the Authority, also for the sake of Oslo.

**Suheil Al Natour** spoke of the PLO and the role of the Palestinian refugees today: “The Palestinians now prefer to talk about the state of Palestine and its sovereignty rather than the slogan of the two-state solution because one of these two states – Israel – has become entrenched in the region’s reality to the extent that the official representative of Palestinians recognized it on 9 September 1993, in addition to the recognition of Egypt and Jordan, and it has become part of the Arab settlement project.” He added that the Arab discourse on the two-state solution no longer mentions the intrinsic rights of the Palestinians such as the full withdrawal from occupied territories, ending settlement activities, releasing the detainees, annexing Jerusalem, and border demarcation according to the lines of June 5. “On the contrary, the discourse now focuses on normalization, lifting the boycott, security coordination, preventing incitement to fight and resist,

and even waiver of the right to return for the refugees.” After overviewing the path of the Palestinian refugee crisis since the *Nakba* in 1948 and the *Naksa* of 1967, he said that the PLO adopted in 1974 a comprehensive program in which it clarified its objectives as follows:

1. The right of refugees to return to their homes from which they were forcefully evacuated by the Israeli occupying forces.
2. Imposing Israeli withdrawal from the regions that were occupied in 1967 and declaring the establishing of the independent Palestinian state.
3. The right to self-determination of the Palestinian people on all their national territories.

He clarified that this program was first met with a performance contradicting with the Arab regimes, and this led to the eruption of the situation in Jordan, Lebanon, and the Palestinian internal ranks as well. Later, it was met with the Oslo Agreement, which made no reference to Resolution 194 nor to the right of self-determination, and which transferred the problem of refugees to the negotiations on the final solution, without linking it to any legal reference. After that followed the political practices and the positions of Palestinian officials that indicated laxness towards the right to return, such as:

- The first paragraph of Article 7 of the Beilin-Abou Mazen agreement of a final status dated 31 October 1995 states: “Whereas the Palestinian side considers that the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes is enshrined in international law and natural justice, it recognizes that the prerequisites of the new era of peace and coexistence, as well as the realities that have been created on the ground since 1948, have rendered the implementation of this right impracticable. The Palestinian side, thus, declares its readiness to accept and implement policies and measures that will ensure, insofar as this is possible, the welfare and well-being of these refugees.”
- Item 4 of the Ayalon-Nusseibeh Plan (July 2002) states: “Recognizing the suffering and plight of the Palestinian refugees, the international community, Israel, and the Palestinian State will initiate and contribute to an international fund to compensate them. Palestinian refugees will return only to the State of Palestine .... The international community will offer to compensate toward bettering the lot of those refugees willing to remain in their present country of residence, or who wish to immigrate to third-party countries.”
- The road map (30 March 2003) which was initiated by former US President George W. Bush postponed the issue of Palestinian refugees to the third and final phase within the permanent status issues.
- The Geneva Accords of December 2003, between Yossi Beilin and Yasser Abd-Rabbo which reiterated that the solution to this problem must be agreed upon.
- The Annapolis Conference in 2007, where the then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert conditioned that the Palestinian authority must acknowledge the Jewish nature of the State of Israel, which practically means to waive the right of the Palestinians to return.

He then went over Israel’s policy to undermine the two-state solution and make the right to return void in order to preserve the “Israelis’ preferential rights” over the Palestinian territories under its occupation, and Israel’s land grab policy through building settlements. Israel is no longer satisfied with colonial expansion, it is aiming at gradually annexing the settlements and other target areas. The “settlement laundering law” adopted by the Knesset was issued to legalize the official annexing of settlements through implementing the Israeli law. Israel escalated its activities to cripple the political process, for example Netanyahu’s condition to only resume the

negotiations if the Palestinian authority recognizes Israel as “the national state of the Jewish people”, knowing the many political repercussions this has on the civil and political rights of the Palestinian people in the 1948 region, and considering the struggle with Palestinians to be a struggle over national identity. It is no longer sufficient for Israel to have the PLO recognize the right of Israel to exist, but to recognize its right as a national state for the Jewish people on all the Palestinian national soil, that is, a Jewish nation for the resident Jews and for all non-Israeli Jews from all over the world. In brief, he added, “what is now required from the Palestinians is to forsake themselves and relinquish their land.” This has led to a policy which revolves around calling for negotiations within an Arab framework instead of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, which are no longer of interest to the Israelis. This would lead to the normalization of Arab-Israeli relations, the marginalization of the Palestinian project, national rights, and nationalism, and the reforming of the Arab regional system into an alternative Middle East system where Israel is under the umbrella of Washington and provides it with a security and economic foothold. For this reason, Netanyahu has declared recently that even if there were an agreement with Israel, it will neither let go of the settlements, nor of the security control over the West Bank, nor of the complete refusal of the right of Palestinian refugees to return.

facing this policy, the Palestinian policy followed several lines: from the policy of waiting, to a unilateral policy, and the policy of uncertainty towards popular movements and suppressing them. With the decrease in the role of the PLO and the dismantling of its institutions, “the official leadership did not hesitate to waive the right to return.” He finally mentioned the demographics of Palestinian refugees: He said that the number of Palestinians, according to many sources, is estimated at 12.7 million, of whom 6.4 million reside inside Palestine, from the sea to the Jordan river. Out of the total number of Palestinians, 66% are refugees, that is, 8.3 million; while those registered at UNRWA are 5.5 million.

He considered that the Palestinian authority in Ramallah is not exerting any effort to regain the element of power in national unity, by virtue of the agreements that were signed. The *de facto* authority in Gaza is also far from this unity. All this weakens the Palestinians’ capacity to fight off the Israeli plans, which are supported by the Americans, especially after Trump became president. Currently, Arab countries are dealing with the Palestinian refugees that were legally registered according to their own national laws. This is why the socio-economic living conditions of the Palestinians differ from one country to another. In Syria, for example, they hold refugee status, but they enjoy civil and human rights, except for the right to run for elections and to vote. While in Lebanon, they are deprived from these rights, except for a slight amendment to the right to labor law in 2010, but it was never practically implemented. As for Jordan, they are treated as citizens and are prohibited from acquiring the Palestinian identity which deprives them from any Jordanian citizen rights.

He concluded by stating that the most dangerous issue when it comes to the situation of refugees is not only being deprived by the Israelis from returning, even for those who were displaced since 1967, but the Israeli expansionist policy which threatens the mere existence of Palestinians in the West Bank. He considers all the advertising surrounding President Trump’s willingness to reach a solution to the crisis of the regions is but part of their policy of false promises. This is because an Israeli 30 to 40-year gradual withdrawal from parts of the West Bank means that the state of Palestine will not truly enjoy full sovereignty, even if the independent state were declared, and because of the Palestinian authority’s preliminary approval of having international or American forces present inside the occupied territories to protect Israel. All this makes the fate of the refugees unknown. This is why the Palestinian forces must regain their national unity on

the basis of a program of resistance, for the declaration of the State without the actual return of the refugees, according to Resolution 194, does not truly achieve the right to self-determination for the whole Palestinian people.

The following questions were raised during the Q&A session:

- Do you think that the Palestinian refugees are no longer part of the two-state solution because they are outside the centralized Palestinian decision-making circles?
- Why do the speakers insist on using terms that even the PLO and Hamas have dropped from their jargon when they became part of the coalition government, terms such as “liberation” and “resistance”?
- Doesn't the building of separation walls naturally mean having two states and demarcating the Palestinian borders?
- It is inappropriate to adopt claims that consider some Palestinian factions to be terrorist. It is necessary to differentiate between the acts of terror perpetrated by some and an organization that is engaged in armed resistance against Israel, knowing that armed resistance is no longer an option today. Isn't it true that the problematic relation between the nationality and identity of the Palestinians will always be subject to discussion as long as there is no nation for the Palestinians? Despite our opposition to the Oslo agreement, we cannot but acknowledge that it led to the rise of the Palestinian National Authority and the self-governing region, which has become their sanctuary. It is the mission of every Palestinian in the diaspora to support it.
- Don't you believe that peace has failed to give rise to the wanted Palestinian state because of the meeting between Israeli extremists and Palestinian extremists, supported by Syria and Iran? Isn't this what led to the current impasse?
- Why are we discussing Israeli hypotheses as being facts? The issue of refugees was not relinquished by the Palestinian authority, but is part of the final-status issues for negotiations.
- Aren't the elections considered to be an Israeli recognition of the National Authority?
- Oraib Al Rantawi asked: “We have digressed from the subject of this session as we heard nothing of the transformations in the Palestinian communities. What we discussed were the disagreements among factions, while this is not the time to do so.”
- Nabil Shaath: “With all due respect to what Oraib mentioned, the diaspora represents part of the Palestinian reality and supports the interior. We cannot organize the exterior unless we acknowledge the right to return, which was never wavered. The national authority is working according to a certain program which has as a priority the ending of the settlement activities and the occupation, and acknowledging the two-state solution, and then it will go to the final-status negotiations with the right to return. During the Taba Negotiations in 2001, the right to return was discussed and there was an agreement to fully implement Resolution 194. Which means the right to return and reparation to the 1948 and 1967 refugees. We must differentiate here between the right to return and family unification.

The speakers answered as follows:

Hani Al Masri: “I must correct a piece of misinformation: the PLO did not annul the Palestinian

national charter. In the letters exchanged between Arafat and Rabin, we read the PLO is committed to annul some items that contradict the Oslo Agreement, but the Palestinian National Council took a decision 21 years ago stating that it had been notified of the annulment of the Charter, but that it shall refer the issue to legal study and revision. Since then, no practical step was taken to annul it.” He added: “We cannot place Palestinian extremism on the same footing as Israeli extremism, as the latter is that of an occupying force that we cannot match. The problem is that every time we show some flexibility, Israel shows more rigidity, to the extent that we started make concessions without having serious initiatives at our disposal. As to the elections, I am not against them, but we need them to be democratic and consensual so are organized under a sense of unity. Plus, they must be held outside the status of occupation, for what is the use of elections when Israel can arrest the elected members of parliament and ministers; knowing that it had arrested 94 MPs and ministers at once, thus confiscating the results of the elections. Israel interferes in everything, even in the municipal elections, because they are not an external factor, but an internal factor with its own interests, and they can impose their interests by force.”

Taher Al Masri said: “We agree on the right to return, but when we seriously discuss it, we hear different opinions. Most refugees in Jordan are Jordanians, 43% of them live on Palestinian territories. There are refugees in Syria and Lebanon, and their rights need to be preserved regardless of the right to return. The Jordanians of Palestinian origin are Jordanians; they only talk of a Palestinian identity from the perspective of holding on to the cause.” He stated that the Palestinian National Council elections are problematic because of the situation of the two million Palestinians of Jordan: “If they participate in the elections, they will have a problem concerning the Jordanian nationality; and if they do not participate, it will be a problem for us.”

Suheil Al Natour said: “The PLO is officially declaring its support of the right to return, but some initiatives launched by Palestinian officials failed to mention the refugees and let go of their cause. I fear this will repeat itself during the final-status negotiations. The PLO left Beirut, and we continued supporting it. It too must continue supporting us. The issue will not be solved unless the refugees return. We cannot impose on the PLO the convening of the national council when we are not represented in it. When the State of Israel was established, it was supported by the World Zionist Organization. As soon as the Israeli state was declared, the organization’s functions changed, and it became part of the political leadership. The same must happen for Palestine.”

Former PM Sanioura concluded the discussion by saying it had been vital and important as it discussed issues that may have been unknown to many. Yet, “we must not leave here by adding more schism to the already existing gaps, or else the issue will remain as is. I truly hope we could come out with a solution to the Palestinian dispersion.”

The third session, entitled “**Transformations within the Israeli Society: Tendency to religious and social extremism and the impact of the conflict on the future perceptions for solving the Palestinian issue,**” started with the moderator’s introduction of the speakers. Moderator **Khairallah Khairallah**, journalist and writer, introduced: **David Makowski**, senior researcher

in the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and **Lara Friedman**, President of the Foundation for the Middle East. Both joining via Skype.

**Khairallah** said that the rise of the Israeli right-wing since 2000 has constituted a main obstacle to the two-state solution. He clarified that in 1977, the then Prime Minister Menachem Begin was surrounded with people capable of making concessions, such as Moshe Dayan and Ezra Weisman who clearly knew the importance of a reconciliation with Egypt in terms of the change in the power balance this would make in the region. Nowadays, we can say that the right-wing Netanyahu is considered to be moderate compared with the ministers in his government, such as Naftali Bennett, who is a settler. Furthermore, the loss of Shimon Peres in the 1996 elections before Netanyahu was a point of transformation indicating the Israeli society's tendency towards the left-wing and the decrease of the pro-peace and two-state solution current. He considered Ehud Barak's premiership between 1999 and 2001 to be the last opportunity for a settlement based on the two-state solution. Yet, neither Barak nor Arafat made any concessions then as none of them was ready for a settlement that did not include East Jerusalem. The Israeli society has been undergoing changes, ever since, moving it towards the far right and distancing it from the Arab milieu, to make it more closely tied to Europe and the United States. The most important change that took place was the migration of the Jews of the former Soviet Union. In answer to the question of whether the two-state solution is still viable, Khairallah said that it is not, and wondered whether the right-wing Israelis can present an alternative to it, especially when considering the demographic changes that are and will be taking place.

**David Makowski** began his intervention by revealing that 56% of Israelis have declared in 2017 that they were closer to the right-wing. He confirmed the need to know the reasons behind such a transformation and how to change it. He said it is important to be careful when talking about the right and left-wings because they no longer mean what they did in the past: The right-wing parties were considered illegitimate in the past, but today it is not the case because the Israelis are also listening to the Arab voices highlighting the vulnerability of the Arab situation and the escalation against Israel, similar to what happened in 2006. He considered that some steps taken by Arab governments have slowed down the two-state path, but the Arabs can make a difference if they take more positive steps towards that end, especially that there are still many who support the two-state solution. He added that despite the fact that opinion polls state that both Palestinians and Israelis are convinced that the other side will not accept the two-state solution, and despite the many disagreements between them, both Netanyahu and Abbas made important and positive declarations, in recent years, concerning essential matters. For example, in his 2011 speech before a joint Congress session, Netanyahu stated: "we seek peace ... where the Palestinians are not subject or citizens of the State of Israel. They must have a national life filled with the dignity and freedom of an independent people capable of staying and living inside their own state." Abbas also publicly declared in June 2010: "No one can deny the history of the Jews in the Middle East, a third of the Koran speaks of them in this region. No one can deny that the Jews were indeed in Palestine and the Middle East." Later that same year, he said: "We can put an end to the struggle and the historic claims ... when we elaborate and sign an agreement no one will be able then to make historic claims." He considered that unfortunately, many such positive declarations are discarded or forgotten because they are dispersed and uncoordinated. People remember the bad and forget the good. In addition, one party cannot make too generous declarations in fear of being criticized by the extremists of his camp who see that these steps will not be reciprocated. In order for these messages to be effective, they must not be fragmented or

presented sporadically: They must be repeated in order to achieve maximum effect. The general direction is important for peacemaking after the time of the great leaders who showed the way to peace has ended. Anwar Sadat and Yitzhak Rabin are no longer with us to mobilize the moderate majority of both countries. These majorities used to follow in the footsteps of their leaders, but today, pessimism and doubt are preventing the leaders from actually leading. A change in the general direction will not be easy, but it is an essential demand for any decisive political action.

The main Palestinian concern is that Israel will extend its border to the River Jordan. With this it will annex the West Bank and prolong the occupation. The Palestinians always refer to the continued expansion in settlements as evidence of lack of Israeli intentions to have peace. They fear that the peace process will not lead to Palestinian sovereignty. The main fear for Israel is that the Palestinian Authority will not recognize the legitimacy of Israel as a state for the Jewish people where all citizens have equal right.

He added that despite it being easy to fall into desperation and lose hope in light of the current stalemate, grabbing the attention of the masses, on both sides, can and must be done to have any progress. Unfortunately, the situation today does not allow us to forecast any near peace agreement due to the large unprecedented gap between both parties. The Palestinians inside are weak and divided and they consider any negotiations with Israel to be a concession. The current Israeli government is not willing to provide any concessions to the Palestinians, due to its conviction that it will get nothing in return. In addition to this, the ruling Israeli coalition includes political parties that refuse PM Netanyahu's commitment to reaching a two-state solution under which Israel has to coexist with an unarmed Palestinian state. Hence, it is necessary to change the formula used in dealing with this struggle. He continued by saying that the efforts to relaunch the bilateral talks and find a comprehensive solution will not be of benefit, and the one bi-national state solution will lead to a permanent conflict between two different national identities. Thus, it will be almost impossible for a Middle Eastern state to enjoy peace when it has more than one nationalistic or sectarian group. So, instead of aiming at achieving comprehensive peace, it would be better for the time being to work on gradual peace. The United States has attempted to engage in comprehensive peace process initiatives three times, and three times it failed. "I am worried it will also fail the fourth time if it follows comprehensive peace all at once." In this frame, the new American administration must focus its efforts on reaching an agreement with Israel on steps that could preserve the two-state solution for another time, and mitigate the level of tension among the Anti-Israel Arab current.

He also highlighted the role the Arab countries play in filling the gap between both sides, considering that we are going through a historical period when Arab and Israeli interests intertwine, "we must benefit from this opportunity to push the peace process forward." He concluded by saying that there is a lot of history and little geography: both peoples must share the geography or we will remain trapped in the vicious circle of violence. For this to succeed, there must be some interaction between the Israelis and the Arabs who can positively influence the position of Israel.

**Lara Friedman** began by thanking the organizers. She spoke of the tendency towards extremism in Israel and Palestine alike which negatively impacts the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian struggle and does not fall in the interest of any of the two states. She considered the tendency towards religious extremism to be not limited to Israel or Palestine, because this can be seen

even in democratic states. Yet, in Israel and Palestine there are other factors that push towards religious extremism due to the many changes in the Palestinian and Israeli societies.

In answer to the question on where we are after 50 years of the 1967 war, she answered: “I can only say that the myth about Israel transforming into a democratic state after 1967 was not fulfilled. Jerusalem today is more divided than ever, Israel is practicing occupation policies in the West Bank, and there are Israeli citizens who enjoy their full rights while the Palestinians are deprived of theirs.” She added that Israel pretends to have rule of law but what is actually happening is that it is amending laws to legalize what is illegal. She referred to the speech of Israeli Minister of Justice concerning the implementation of Israeli laws in the settlements, considering it to be a form of annexation. She continued saying that the problems are spreading all over Israel because the institutions that are linked to the Israeli right-wing are threatening democracy and there are laws being issued that threaten the freedom of expression and the freedom of association in civil society organizations that oppose the settlement activities with acts of intimidation being practiced on individuals and organizations. She said: “I have a friend who works for peace, he woke up one day and found pictures of him with a gun to his head posted on the walls. This is done to intimidate anyone who does not agree with the government’s policy, which contravenes previous Israeli practices even within the Israeli right-wing.” She spoke of a strong tendency towards a permanent policy of silencing all voices, which she considered to be alarming. On the other hand, she said that the Israeli courts, that used to pride themselves for not being politicized, have truly become politicized and biased against anyone who opposes government policies.

Israeli practices in the post-1967 occupied territories have transformed greatly and reflected on Israel’s foreign policy. She clarified that Israel has issued laws that consider anyone who separates between Israel and the settlements to be anti-Semitic and will be banned from travelling to Israel. She said: “I am against settlements, and this position is considered anti-Israeli, so, I may be prevented from going there.” The current Israeli government is gambling with the future of Israel, they even pressured the FIFA to acknowledge the settlements under the threat of being accused as anti-Israeli. She also spoke of the US attempts to issue laws that penalize anyone who boycotts the settlements, and considered that such measures violate the freedom of expression. She agreed with Makowski that we are in a historical moment when the Arabs can play a vital role in pushing the peace process forward. Yet, she disagreed with him on one point in which she is convinced that the Israelis will not listen to the Arabs or take what they have to say seriously. She said: “I am not optimistic that the signals sent by the Arab world will be heard in Israel, but I still believe that now is the time to annul the discrimination policy of Israel, and that both Arabs and Israelis must reach a solution to this issue.”

The following questions were raised during the Q&A session:

- While agreeing with the importance to work with both parties, and in order to be able to achieve that, everyone must agree on which pathway we are taking – not necessarily on the details. But how can this be done?
- You have spoken of the revival of religious extremism without detailing the element of Islam. What about the revival of religious extremism in the United States especially among radical Christians?
- Israel is proving, day after day, that it is indeed a colonial settler. It is even acting daily as a state of racial segregation. Do you believe that right-wing parties in the Congress and

the Knesset, together, are an element of confrontations or of peace between Israel and Palestine?

- The problem in gradual agreements is that many things may happen in between such as the spread of settlements and many other violations. The more we wait, the more the problems. The peace between Israel and Egypt, or between Israel and Jordan, was not gradual, but final. So, why are the Palestinians required to follow a gradual peace process?
- What Israel are we talking about? Is it political Israel? Is there an Israel beyond the Torah project? Can there be any agreement which touches upon its Torah existence? To say that Israel is moving towards the right-wing is somehow naïve because Israel has always been in the far right, especially when it comes to its state-establishing ideology. It was the leftist Israeli Labor Party that waged all the Arab-Israeli wars and not the Likud Party, which signed the peace agreements with the Arabs. The correct definition for Israel is not a state of racial segregation, but of racial extraction, because it is working on extracting the Arabs from Palestine.
- It is worthy to note that after the Oslo agreement, many Arab countries opened representative offices in Israel and vice versa, but this did not alter Israel's conduct, especially at the level of settlement expansion. On the other hand, you spoke of the three failed attempts that the US made to reach a comprehensive solution, why did they fail? Is it because the proposals were not implementable, and they were not able to set mechanisms for them, or is it because Israel does not want to reach this comprehensive solution?
- We are talking here about the two-state solution but no one mentioned that the Trump administration does not support it. In addition, Netanyahu believes that the countries of the Gulf need his help to face Iran, and he too does not support the two-state solution. The Arabs are always asked to make concessions, they have nothing more to give, now is the time for Israel to give Palestinians something.

In answer to these questions, Makowski said: "The United States tried to present an initiative for a comprehensive solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict three times, and it failed every time. The problem was that it was focusing on the final goal regardless of the rules of the game. The Arabs must understand that the US took their advice to go to final negotiations and solve all lingering issues three times already. It did not work for the Palestinians nor for the Israelis. It is their problem. This is why I do not think the US should attempt that for a fourth time, following the same approach of all or nothing. This is why I spoke of the gradual approach. As for the issue of settlements, I agree that settlement activities must stop especially when the peace process has been discontinued."

Friedman said: "Concerning religious extremism in the US, it has always existed but was never influential internally or abroad. We spent a long time trying to solve the Palestinian issue, and the US policies remained consistent all throughout, but not everyone responded favorably. The current president has said many things, but none has been achieved. And still, the American policy remained consistent and did not change. It is a policy that is biased towards Israel, that's true, but things are beginning to change with the rise of a new current that is presenting progressive ideas. Even the Jews have become more neutral, and their majority is against the

Land Grab policy. On the other hand, I do not believe in magical solutions or attempts to predict what shall happen, but I try to be clear at the intellectual and mental levels. I too was worried about President Trump's policy in the region, and to tell you the truth, I do not have any answer on what might happen concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It has been 50 years since the *Nakba* and we can notice some change is Israel's attempt to normalize with the Arab world. On one hand, Netanyahu said last week that Israel is leaning towards the approach of normalization, but on the other hand, reality shows that Israel cannot let go of the settlements. The US administration might force Israel and Palestine to make concessions and we need a new reality where we can differentiate between what is possible and what is not. As a defender of the two-state solution, I can say that I support it because it is the only possible solution that meets most of the needs of the conflicting parties. This was the case with the peace with both Jordan and Egypt. The status quo will not lead to a solution but will keep the crisis open-ended."

She continued: "There is a light at the end of the tunnel, which is the possibility of reaching some kind of regional agreement between Israel and the Arab countries based on the common security and political concerns emanating from Iran's expansion and the threat of Jihadists. Yet, we need to be careful that this does not happen at the expense of the Palestinian cause. The possibilities laid before us by this historic moment in time and by the reality of the regions force us to view any kind of rapprochement in a positive manner. Every party needs to take a step forward. Trump too wants to move forward by attempting to solve the conflict, and he even considers it to be his personal challenge. As for Netanyahu, he wants, through Trump, to show the world that his disagreement with Obama was personal and not with the US administration."

She added: "We hear many things in the US, and sometimes we propose solutions that we know cannot be executed, but we propose them to get lesser gains. I believe that peace will happen within a process of land exchange while respecting the 1967 borders and Israel putting an end to building settlements. A problem that will linger is the issue of Jerusalem, but I think that both parties should display some seriousness in the efforts to achieve peace. The first step would be for Israel to stop building settlements. It is true that Israel is ideologically a state of racial extraction if you believe that it does not have the right to exist, but I think it does. There are two peoples trying to claim the right to self-determination, and we must work on instilling peace between them."

Makowski ended the session by saying: "I agree with Lara. We must focus on solutions that preserve the identity of both. This is what happened with the agreement between Egypt and the Likud Party. Everyone doubted the sustainability of that agreement, but it did survive. I hope the Arabs would be convinced that Hamas and Hezbollah can make reaching a solution difficult and that their existence is leading to the rise of the right-wing in Israel. I would like to say that the Arabs can take steps to pave the way before some type of solution. On the other hand, allow me to remind you that the judge who sent the Israeli president to prison was Arab. The Israeli democratic processes are very active and we need to take them into account. I am not saying that the situation is exemplary, but I think that Israel has reached a good level with the support of the civil society. We must think of advanced steps in this field and we must search for points of agreement between both parties."

As to the policy of the new US administration towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said: "The vision of Trump's administration concerning the two-state solution is not clear yet. But I think that it will closely resemble what the members of the administration think, and they approve of it. As to Netanyahu's support to Gulf countries against Iran, we need to clarify that

Israel cannot engineer a new state in the region, and they are neither Arab nor Persian, so they choose to remain outside this conflict and avoid its aftermaths. No Israeli believes that the Palestinian issue can be avoided, but there must be cooperation at the security level. I believe the Arab countries are living several crises, this is why they are not focusing on the Palestinian issue as a priority. The Arabs can influence the political map of Israel, and Netanyahu's government cannot remain as it is now."

## **Saturday 10 June 2017**

The conference was continued the next day with three sessions. The first session of the day (session 4) was entitled "**Palestine in a changing regional environment: Analysis of Arab positions and of important regional positions – Turkey and Iran.**" Moderator **Mona Fayyad**, university professor and writer, introduced the speakers: **Hassan Nafiaa**, university professor and writer; **Mahmoud Soueid**, former general director of the Institute for Palestine Studies; and **Oraib Al Rantawi**.

**Fayyad** said: "Putting the lust for glory and power, and colonial aspirations, which usually lead to wars, aside, is dignity worth fighting for? What about the open symbolic wound that the Arabs and Muslims were afflicted with when Palestine and Jerusalem were occupied? It is not glory that moves the Palestinian and Arab masses to fight Israel, but their injured dignity."

She added that dignity is rarely taken into account in the attempts to understand the stamina of the Palestinian cause, and its ability to move the masses. Some believe that the cause will die down and be forgotten with time. Perhaps, this is what Israel is wagering on, and this is what is hindering the solution to the issue, which is getting even more complex now that the whole region (including Israel) is suffering from different forms of extremism. The peaceful revolutions and uprisings in some Arab countries demanded freedom and dignity, but the counter-revolutions of the regimes have drowned the region in an unprecedented level of violence and launched ethnic, religious, sectarian, and, more dangerously, identity struggles. At the time when support for the Palestinian cause is increasing – especially in the public opinion of the West, we notice the Netanyahu government and the new US Administration issuing policies that show otherwise. This could widen the circle of violence especially for the Palestinian youth of the interior, and it justifies the question raised yesterday by PM Sanioura: "If you are an Israeli or a settler, why compromise now?"

What is happening in the Arab world, especially the war in Syria, has shown everyone's cards and exposed all pretexts. It also contributed to making Israeli terrorism appear to be relative compared to the atrocities perpetrated by the Syrian regime against its people. To the extent that the killing, oppression, and brutality practiced by the Israeli occupation against the Palestinians seem dwarfed in comparison. In light of what is happening in Syria we must not implement double standards: Those who condemn the oppression and occupation of the Palestinian people cannot turn a blind eye towards the crimes of the Syrian regime, although its supporters are all part of the resistance that refused a peaceful solution, in general, and the two-state solution, in particular.

In brief, the Arab world did not find an exit to its dilemma, and now, is not only threatened by Israeli aspirations, but is drowning in complex wars. It found itself in a weak position of self-

defense, so, how can it exert pressure to reach a solution to the Palestinian issue? “When we look at the maps of the two-state solution from 1916 to 1937, and of 1947, 1967, 1994, and 2006, we will realize that Palestine is shrinking in size with the passing of time notably after the 1967 defeat. Israel today includes 78% of the historical land of Palestine. The Palestinians only have 22% remaining, and these are penetrated by settlements, making it look like Swiss cheese! What about the future of the two-state solutions knowing that all these maps do not take into account Palestinian Israelis, who are always forgotten but who were able to preserve the Palestinian dimension of the state of Israel and who stir its Jewish purity.

**Hassan Nafiaa** began his intervention by saying that when we talk about the region, we usually mean Arab countries, Turkey, Iran, and Israel. Each of these states has its own vision and interests depending on its level of wealth or poverty. In addition, the Arab states have very different positions, not only when it comes to the Palestinian issue. He then went over several problematics in the relation between Arab countries and the Palestinian issue. The first problematic is related to the extent Arab peoples have understood the Israeli threat as a national security threat or stood in solidarity with the Palestinians. The second problematic is related to defining the relation between Arab countries and representatives of the Palestinian people, may it be bilateral (between each country and Palestinian representatives) or between the League of Arab States and the Palestinian representatives.

He clarified saying: “The Zionist project started in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The Arabs only became aware of it in the 1948 war.” When the Arab countries reacted to it, they did so from the perspective of the Arab regimes, and each country acted according to its own interests and not necessarily based on the interests of the Palestinian people or the higher interest of the Arab world. When the League of Arab States was established, its bylaws and charters mentioned the Arab countries commitment to preserving the Arab identity of Palestine and helping the Palestinian regain their territories. The Arab countries entered the 1948 war under pressure from public opinion and refused the decision to divide Palestine as an expression of their commitment to preserve the Palestinian territories. These same countries entered the *Nakba* war, but each for a different purpose. In all cases, after the signing of the truce, the Arab countries played the most negative role and contributed to the demise of the Palestinian cause by placing the West Bank under Jordan’s rule and the Gaza Strip under Egypt. Neither the Arab countries, nor the Palestinian National Movement succeeded in defining the relation between the two. Many struggles took place, some even escalated to military conflicts between them. He believes that one of the reasons for the dysfunctional relation between Arab countries and Palestinian factions is the absence of criteria that govern this relation in a way that preserves the high interest of the Palestinian cause. This was the case even with Gamal Abdel Nasser and the struggle with the National Movement after he had accepted the Rogers Plan in 1969.

He added: “We cannot separate between the Palestinian issue and other issues related to national independence and independent development. The countries that followed this approach were anti-Israeli, as for the countries that chose to adapt to colonialism, they remained in the backlines of the war with Israel.” All the wars waged by the Arab states were not in favor of the Palestinian cause but for personal interests. We can even say that the only war the Arabs fought for Palestine was the 1948 war.

The third problematic is linked to the position of the Palestinian issue in the struggle over identity in the Arab world. He clarified that there are no Arab countries that are based on

institutions, but they revolve in a sphere of struggle between what is national, nationalistic, and religious. The nation-state was refused under the pretext of aiming to achieve on Arab nation or the Islamic state, to the extent that the struggle became that among tribes, over national belonging, and between religious denominations. The Arab world thus became a group of failed states, and the issue of lost identity reflected on the Palestinian issue with the transformation of national and nationalistic sense into religious and sectarian fervor. The last problematic is the lack of good governance in Arab countries. This is why Arab countries failed to achieve sustainable development, set modern and effective educational systems, establish democracy, and implement rotation of power and power sharing. He concluded by confirming that the first step starts with the reforming of the Palestinian house and filling the gap between the Palestinian factions; in addition to organizing Arab affairs on the basis of institution-based national states. He said: "I expect the worst in the Arab world. The situation will remain the same for a long time. For that, I see attempts to annihilate the Palestinian issue and not to solve it."

**Oraib Al Rantawi** agreed with Nafiaa, but added: "If we think about it logically, we will reach pessimistic solutions, but if we leave matter to our willpower, we will remain optimistic." He confirmed that there is no Arab system due to the differences in interests and priorities between different Arab countries. We see Arab leaders meeting in summits, issuing statements, and throwing them away the next day!"

All the Arab initiatives that were proposed to solve the Palestinian issue were in fact to serve interests other than that which was declared. Since 1981, when the first joint Arab effort was made to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict with the initiative of Saudi Crown Prince Fahd Bin Abdel Aziz in Fez's first summit, two important developments took place: First, the Cold War Summit which aimed at ending Russian presence in the region; and second, the first use of the term "the New Middle East" by US Secretary of State Alexander Haig. In order to implement the initiative, it was necessary to remove the PLO from Lebanon, and this is what happened after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. The second initiative came after 9/11, when the Arab countries accused of being terrorist found themselves forced to save face, hence the King Abdallah which no one took into account "and was taken on tour from summit to summit." The Iraqi-Iranian war erupted between these two initiatives, then followed the fall of Bagdad "which is linked to the declaration of the Roadmap." He said: "When we closely follow all that has happened, we can see that these major initiatives were always linked to regional and international transformation, they did not aim at solving the Palestinian issue."

"What is happening today is very similar to the past: Retrieval of the King Abdallah initiative whose demands are less than that of Crown Prince Fahd," and withdrawal is no longer a condition for normalization which is already taking place. This initiative is implemented at the Arab level and not at the Palestinian and Israeli level, which indicates to the liquidation of the Palestinian issue. "In brief, there is no need for saving facing even." Speaking of the latest Riyadh summit, he wondered about the reason for speaking of a new Middle Eastern alliance and not an Arab or Islamic alliance? In answer to this question, he said that the intention is to include Israel in the alliance, considering "what we witness today to be an attempt to annihilate the Palestinian issue and not to solve it." He also added that "the Arab corrupt and oppressive regimes have exploited the Palestinian issue and have issued the initiative to cover up their corruption and oppression."

While analyzing the Arab regional scene, he spoke of three currents, the most eminent of which

is the quartet composed of Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, although there are many disagreements between them. This current calls for a regional solution to the Palestinian issue and the rise of a new Middle Eastern alliance which considers Iran to be the number one enemy. This axis also calls for the solving of the Palestinian issue in order to be able to be free to face the Iranian danger. He confirmed that this axis is willing to give Abou Mazen the opportunity to adapt while keeping the possibility of overthrowing him close at hand.

The second is the Turkey-Qatar-Muslim Brotherhood axis which is preparing the leadership of the Phase II in Palestine with "Hamas being its internal knight." Qatar tried to work with Hamas in Gaza to be able to extract it to the West Bank at a later stage. This axis is currently under siege, and the whole world now knows that Qatar has been supporting terrorism for a long time.

The third current is the Damascus-Iran-Hezbollah axis which "is preparing itself to delve into the Palestinian issue as Iran is still awaiting the mega transaction with the West. And if this does not happen, Palestine will become the battle ground."

He concluded by saying that every regional pole has its allies in the Arab world, stressing that the current phase is extremely dangerous because of the struggle between these currents. "All the conferences that were organized in parallel, from the conference of Tehran, to that of Istanbul, Ain Sokhna and London, all had their innocent agendas." He considered the road to salvation to begin with an Arab system that is based on democratic nation states: "The road to Palestine passes through citizenship, the state of modernity, modernization, and good governance. Without these, we cannot solve the Palestinian issue. Old problems today can only be solved using new tools."

**Mahmoud Soueid** started his intervention by saying: "I was entrusted with a subject that I found difficulty putting a title to until I decided to name it: The relation between some illegitimate Arab regimes and Israel beyond Egypt and Jordan." He stated that he was unaware of the process of reconciliation between some Arab countries and Israel, and he mentioned certain facts, that the media had already covered, concerning the relation between some Arab countries and Israel. He continued saying that Saudi Arabia has a certain level of relations with Israel in addition to certain positions that they agree on. Among the public events that reveal this relation is the visit of a Saudi delegation to Israel headed by Anwar Eshki. It was described by being an academic delegation, but such a visit can only happen upon official approval. In addition to that, he said that Prince Turki Al Faysal is well-known for his meetings with Israeli officials. As for the United Arab Emirates, it conducted military maneuvers with the United States and other countries, including Israel. He spoke also of the presence of Israeli trade offices in Qatar, the Sultanate of Oman, Tunisia, and Mauritania. Concerning Morocco, a Moroccan media team went to Israel as guest of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In Marrakech, they raised the Israeli flag above the venue of the Climate Change Conference, and Morocco justified this by stating that the land on which the venue is located is United Nations territory.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia refused to have its soccer team play in Israel, as it did not issue visas to Israeli journalists who were part of the media team accompanying President Trump in his recent visit. King Mohamad V of Morocco cancelled his participation in the ESCWA summit held in Monrovia because Netanyahu had been invited.

Soueid said that the official Arab position is defined by the Arab peace initiative, for none of the Arab countries digressed from its principles and all the signatories are still committed to it. He reminded the participants that the Arab peace initiative stipulates the complete withdrawal from

the Arab occupied lands, finding a just solution for the refugees, and approving the rise of an independent Palestinian state according to the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem its capital. However, there are many concessions being made in this initiative, starting with describing the Arab-Israeli struggle as a conflict, which “undermines its importance and history,” excluding war as an option, and the waiver of the right to return. He considered the largest crime committed by the Arabs towards the Palestinian cause is relinquishing the whole of Palestine and only acknowledging the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. He added: “I think what is required from these Arab countries is to say no to one thing only: no reconciliation with Israel without a solution within what was agreed upon, which is the establishing of the State of Israel in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem its capital.” He spoke of the importance of keeping the Arab peoples as the “faithful guardians” of the cause, as was the case with Egypt and Jordan which did not normalize their relations with Israel, despite the agreements between them. He also referred to the role of the Palestinian people in stirring the remaining Arab countries – which “aren’t many” – in the absence of Syria and Iraq, and the drawback of Egypt and the Gulf countries. He considered that “today’s situation is much more dangerous than it had been after the 1948 *Nakba*.” He concluded by saying that Israel has found salvation in the regional reconciliation formula as a way to reconcile with Palestinians. He confirmed that any settlement must begin with Netanyahu government’s preliminary acceptance of the Arab initiative and the ending of settlement activities, and of course, holding negotiations under international sovereignty. Without that, Israel would be practicing a hoax, knowing that in essence it wants neither the two-state solution nor the one-state solution, but complete Judaization and land grab of Gaza, under the pretext of ending the struggle by placing Gaza under Egyptian administration.

The following questions were raised during the Q&A session:

- Some described the speakers’ interventions as being “nationalistic clichés,” and they referred to the necessity of analyzing an important turning point, which is the Riyadh declaration of 2006, to find a new definition of Arabism: The Arab language as a joining factor while respecting the nation states and their interrelations. As for the Palestinian issue, the declaration dealt with it objectively by stating that the Palestinian people want a state according to the 1967 borders. Israel demarcated its borders with Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon; now it must do so with Palestine. They considered that this is the position that needs to be today’s foundation, not any other previous perceptions.
- What hasn’t the Palestinians taken any position concerning what is happening in Syria?
- While agreeing that the Arab regimes are trying to annihilate the cause and not settle it, what are the Palestinians doing? Are they part of the axes mentioned by Mr. Al Rantawi, to be part of the game, or are they not?
- Concerning Mr. Al Rantawi’s classification of the three axes, there are three clarifications to make: First, what is Israel’s position towards them? Second, can any of the three act freely without the approval of the national authority? Third, can the authority remain neutral towards these three axes?
- What about the roles of Turkey and Iran?
- Arab countries ignored the fact that when the Israeli enemy was placed in Palestine, it constituted a danger on the whole nation and not only on the Palestinian people. But later, only the Palestinians fought it as the Arabs turned out to be unfaithful to the Palestinian

cause. As to the Syrian war, Abou Mazen was clear when he called upon all parties, the regime and the opposition alike, to find a peaceful solution to the conflict.

- What we are saying is not a hate speech against the Arabs because the Arab peoples have 400,000 martyrs who fell in Palestine. The speakers are talking about regimes, not the people, for the people have always held the Palestinian cause to heart. Plus, most wars waged by Arab countries were because of Palestine, and the main contributors to the resistance are Arab as well. None of the speakers mentioned the issue of economic normalization, as figures reveal that Israeli exports to Arab and Gulf markets reach 100 billion dollars.
- The theme did not take the popular dimension of these changes: Can't the Arab spring youth play a role for the future of the region?

In answer to these questions and concerning the Palestinian position towards the Syrian war, Al Rantawi said that the Palestinian leadership has decided not to repeat Kuwait's experience, and did not take any position with or against any of the parties to the conflict, especially that there are around 1 million Palestinians inside Syria. On the other hand, he said that the speakers did not neglect the popular dimension while speaking of the relation between Arab countries and the Palestinian issue, but we must admit that there is a change in the Arab social scene, since the number of those who have joined ISIS is much larger than those who have joined the Palestinian cause. He added that in order for it to remain alive, there must be a Palestinian revival movement that starts with resuscitating the national movement with young blood and achieving democracy, liberalism, progressiveness, uniting the factions, and then building a network of Arab and international allies.

As for Nafiaa, he said that Israel is following clear steps: it presents a solution knowing that the Arabs will not approve of it, then it presents a second solution a little less demanding than the first, it gets rejected, and so on. He considered the Arab people to be more aware than their leaders who are acting from what they call national interests, but in fact it is in the interest of what keeps them in power. Arab peoples do not participate in the decision-making process in any Arab system, only when we become national states, will they be able to do so.

Soueid spoke of the Arab state of collapse considering that the major victory for the Palestinian cause today lies in continuing the struggle while avoiding being stabbed in the back by an Arab-Israeli reconciliation that does not lead to reaching a just and historical solutions.

The fifth session, entitled “**Palestine in the new international environment: Europe after the Brexit, the rising Russia, and the United States under Trump,**” began by its moderator, **Sami Aoun**, introducing the speakers: **Mohammad Shtayyeh**, Member of the Central Committee of Fatah; **Hussein Ebsh**, Writer and Researcher in Palestinian and Arab Affairs; and **Roland Freudenstein**, Policy Director at Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies.

**Mohammad Shtayyeh** started his intervention by clarifying that he will be focusing on the influence of international changes on the Palestinian issue from the perspective of the two-state solution and the positions of Europe, Russia, and the United States which, in addition to the UN, are the members of the Quartet which has deployed great efforts to end the Arab-Israeli struggle. He said that there is a Palestinian, Arab, and international consensus on the two-state solution for

the first time in 50 years although it can still be implemented, but it will not remain so indefinitely.

He also clarified that the urgent issues in the region did not make the Palestinian cause lose its importance or urgency, though many important changes on the international arena could leave their traces on the Palestinian issue, such as the tensions in Europe as a result of Brexit, Russia's new strategy in the Middle East, and Trump as President.

He spoke of the efforts exerted by France to activate the peace process through several initiatives. He also considered that Germany "has always followed France's footsteps when it comes to the Palestinian issue." As for Britain, he said that has always played the role of the US's Trojan horse. With the new American Administration and its exit from the European Union, Britain will remain even closer to the US in its foreign policy. He spoke of historical European friends, such as Greece, and the large difference between European countries and peoples concerning their positions towards the Palestinian issue. "As Israel has allies at the international level, Palestinians have allies too in addition to having the support of different peoples and parliaments, as we can clearly see in the events and campaigns to boycott Israel in universities and municipalities." He considered that Europe has accepted to be in the backset of the Palestinian issue and to be the "check payer" in economic aids. He then referred to his request from a group of European Consuls to take necessary steps to prevent Israelis holders of European passports from residing in settlement, as he estimates the number of those to be around 1.2 million, many of whom actually live in the Israeli settlements. He clarified that Europe supports the two-state solution and refuses settlement activities, but it has not taken any new steps awaiting what Trump will do. However, Europe did issue the decision to brand the goods imported from Israeli settlements. Although this is different from boycotting them, the decision is considered a positive step that expresses an anti-settlement position, on one hand, and that leaves the choice to the consumer to make.

Concerning the United States, he said that former President Obama did not support his Secretary of State John Kerry's efforts to relaunch the negotiations process. But Trump, although he announced his intention to find a settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, he said that his vision is still unclear towards the solution, and that the new administration in Washington will not change its historic position of supporting Israel. He further added that Trump is a populist leader and that "this type of leaders is said to be selfish and unpredictable, and they do not believe in institutions. Everything revolves around them." Yet, Trump is not indebted to the Jewish voters, and he did not move the US embassy to Jerusalem. Plus, contrary to previous administrations, he transferred the Palestinian dossier to his office after being in the hand of the State Department. Despite all that, the test to President Trump's seriousness is in guaranteeing the ending of settlement expansion and defining a clear reference for the negotiations. He confirmed that, to this moment, the new American administration is in the mood to listen and does not have any clear plan. In this regard, a Palestinian delegation is expected to conduct talks with the Americans soon.

Netanyahu wants the status quo to remain as is; that is, the two-state solution. This can be clear in the attempts of Judaizing and controlling Jerusalem, annexing Al-Aghwar, considering Area C to be a geographic tank for the expansion of settlements, and keeping Gaza under siege while preserving the state of division.

**Hussein Ebsh** focused on an idea presented by the Trump administration, which is the solving of the Arab-Israeli conflict “from the outside in.” This plan is based on the idea of bringing Israeli, Gulf countries (mainly Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar), Jordanian, and Egyptian interests together concerning the threat of Iran and its expansionist ambitions to contribute to peace between Israel and the Palestinians by encouraging both parties to make concessions. With this, Israel would gain regional legitimacy, if not official recognition, from more Arab countries due to the partnership to stand against Iranian expansion in the region. On the other hand, the Palestinian would get a political cover, diplomatic support, and serious and vital economic assistance which would lead them to make concessions to Israel.

Ebsh then said that there are many obstacles in the way of such a plan, the first of which is “what comes first, the hen or the egg?” He clarified that despite the Gulf countries’ interest in partnering with Israel against Iran, their internal policies and values consider the Palestinian cause to be the mother of all causes, and this in itself prevents them from approving such a plan without seeing guarantees to enhance the rights of the Palestinians and to end occupation in return. As to Israel, it will never present free concessions to Palestinians in return for strategic cooperation with Arab countries, if it gets nothing back.

Ebsh said that Trump is a New Yorker, and there is no New Yorker who does not know of all the different aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict: “He knows more of the issue than we think.” In addition, Trump wishes to be the deal breaker in this issue and reach what previous administrations failed to do; that is, find a solution to the conflict. He also disclosed that most Israelis want to approach Arabs but are afraid of Iran and the nuclear threat; they fear the morning after the end of the nuclear agreement with the international community. On the other hand, Arab countries are also worried about Iran and its danger. He added that the new administration should revive the Arab-Israeli dossier at the American and international levels. (Abou Mazen went to Washington and was warmly welcomed by Trump: he stepped out of the care to receive him, placed the Palestinian flag behind him, and even paid him a visit in his hotel). Yet, we need to note that Trump lacks the competence to lead and act diplomatically, in addition to the fact that experience has taught us that internal disruptions often make presidents resort to foreign affairs. As to Israel, Netanyahu mostly fears the threat of the extreme right wing or, more exactly, he fears Bennett. He is working according to the approach of keep your enemies close. If Netanyahu sees that this solution may not work, he will not adopt it in fear of Bennett’s criticisms. He added: “I believe many right-wing Israelis believe that their long years of survival have decreased the price and prevented them from making too many concessions to the Arabs. They also believe that due to the Iranian danger, the Arabs will recognize them as a state without them having to make any concession. But evidently, they are mistaken: The first thing that Qatar did in its crisis with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates is to accuse them both of having relations with Israel, so, this accusation is still valid at the level of Arab countries.”

As to the obstacles that could prevent the implementation of the plan, he mentioned that the horizons of the plan are linked to how much Gulf countries are comfortable towards Washington’s seriousness in supporting the stand against expansionist Iran and reverse all the gains it has achieved with Tehran so far as a priority in its foreign policy. If Washington commits to these demands and links them to Arab-Israeli cooperation for the sake of stability in the region, then the plan could lead to a new path for the peace process. He concluded saying that

when many challenges and obstacles surface, this will remain the most realistic approach to achieving short-term progress in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

**Roland Freudenstein** started his intervention by introducing Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, which is the main studies center of the moderate center in the EU, and it includes 75 political parties.

He then said that Brexit is more painful than ever, and the face-off between Russia and the West will remain for a long time “and I do not see a settlement any time soon.” Most Trump policies are still unclear, but one thing is: “his leadership skills are weak.” Concerning the factors that produced Brexit and Trump, he spoke of “the economic situations and the social media that hastened the political developments that are still ongoing. The Algorithms used by companies such as Facebook, and that allow you to connect with people who think like you and put aside all others, contribute to extremism. A final factor is the fabricated and misleading news that can spread at record speed.” He considered the crisis of globalization and technological advancement to have produced these phenomena.

Speaking about Europe, he said that a sense of gloom hovers over Brussels, but Macron’s election reignited hope because he embodies a new political principle: The historical division between the left and right-wings in Europe have become a thing of the past and elections are conducted to decide what formula to follow: openness or closure; globalization or isolation. Yet, Europe is still stuck between the old and the new, and what happened in Britain indicates that it is early to talk about the death of the left and right as concepts.

He said that when it comes to the changes in Europe’s foreign policy, Europe is pre-occupied with itself now, and that current discussions revolve around the institutional changes and the exit of Britain from the European Union will weaken it diplomatically. All this means that Europe is busy with issues unrelated to the Middle East nor the Palestinian issue. The largest EU countries such as Spain, Germany, and France will keep their foreign policy under control. The EU has a good policy coordination mechanism, but it is complicated and insufficient; yet, “I believe that Europe will not have a role in achieving peace in the Middle East.”

Concerning the face-off between Russia and the West, he said that it will continue since the Russian system has not witnessed such centralization as the one during Putin who is aiming at eradicating all democratic experiences, especially the ones around Russia, while confirming that there is no transaction between Russia and the West. What does this mean for the Middle East? What are the repercussions of Russia’s return? The Russians are currently making what they consider to be smart moves, for on one hand, they are approaching Netanyahu, and on the other, they are waging the Syrian Regime’s war in Syria.

He concluded by saying that Europe will not contribute to the solution between Israel and Palestine, “in my opinion, this is due to the stakeholders in the region.” However, “I believe that we must leave the old discourse, such as the threats of the Zionist project, behind. Israel is a reality. It was established to stay. Any solution to the conflict with the Palestinians starts with building trust between both parties.”

The following problematics were raised during the Q&A session:

- It is true that reform starts from inside, but the main issue remains in the imbalance of power between us and Israel. And, the role of external factors is important to us. There are moments in history when international relations are rearranged, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union

which contributed to the unification of Germany, or the end of the era of unipolarity and the increasing roles of Europe, China, and Russia, and finally Brexit and the aftermaths of the Syrian war. Before Trump reached the White House, we went to the Paris Conference, to the Security Council, and to Russia as a pre-emptive attempt. But for Europe, we were able in the last ten years to receive from it an acknowledgment of the two-state solution, a position against settlements, and a recognition of the right to self-determination; but, we were not able to extract a position related to the right to return.

- It has been a game to gain time since Oslo, and one of the tricks that were used was the pretext of gaining trust. Europe helped Israel to gain time by using their right to Veto.
- Trump is seeking a major transaction. Will it include us? To what extent does the Palestinian leadership have data on the American tendencies to solve the Palestinian issue?
- Is there a transaction between the United States and Iran? Isn't it possible for the Iranian regime to change for some reason or another? What will happen next?
- Do you believe that Russia will have a role in solving the Arab-Israeli conflict?

On trust building, Roland said: "I cannot tell you what to do, but I believe that it is necessary to go back to the negotiations without any pre-conditions. I do not agree with Hussein Ebsh on that the Israeli right-wing believes they will reach a better solution in ten years' time because today they are worried about their security."

Ebsh said that what promoted the rise of Russia in the region was the absence of the United States, but its rise is "not to be taken seriously and does not constitute any danger." America has withdrawn, but there is no other serious party that can endanger it. I heard much about a large transaction between Iran and the United States, but I believe that it is just an illusion. In case the regime does not change, it cannot change its conduct for ideological reasons."

Shtayyeh warned against Trump's repeating the error of previous US administrations by "sending Jewish figures to dialogue and negotiate with Israel," as it will not work. He added: "There is no official or unofficial Palestinian leadership. The leadership – the Palestinian National Authority supported by the National Council – wants a solution that everyone can benefit from. I believe the chances of reaching a solution during Trump's office are minimal since the surrounding factors are unfavorable for a solution, and I do not think there has been an international decision to end the occupation. What we have is a decision to manage the conflict, and in order to reach a just settlement we need a reliable reference, an honest intermediary, and a specific time frame.

Session six, entitled "**Options and perceptions in a new reality: Where are we heading? The 'Two-state' horizons and what goes beyond that in two discordant readings of the possible ways to save this solution,**" began with moderator Oraib Al Rantawi introducing the speakers: **Adnan Abou Aude**, Chief of the Royal Hashemite Court; **Nassif Hitti**, Former Arab League Ambassador to France, Italy, and the Vatican; and **Hussein Abu El Namle**, Researcher in Israeli Affairs.

**Adnan Abou Aude** began his intervention by saying that Zionism is based on two pillars: First, the land of Palestine, which it provided for itself upon its military victories in 1948 and 1967; and second, the population (i.e. demographics), which it is trying to achieve by making the vast majority of the population of Israel Jews since the Judaic character of the state is an objective of

the Zionist movement since its establishment. He said that the issue of the two-state solution started in 1947 with a United Nations General Assembly resolution on the division of Palestine which gave the Palestinians 46% of the land of Palestine, but the League of Arab States refused it in the 1948 war, and the Palestinians were left with 22% only most of which (i.e. the West Bank) was annexed to Jordan.

He made a presentation on the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1948 and the important turning points and events of the last 50 years of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, which led to the presence of 650,000 settlers (300,000 of which around Jerusalem), 150 settlements (40 of which in Nablus or the heart of the West Bank), and 250 settlement outposts. He then considered 1974 to be a turning point in the political history of the Palestinian cause for several reasons, such as:

- 1- On the 8<sup>th</sup> of June of 1974, the Palestinian National Council decided in its 12<sup>th</sup> conference in Cairo, and within the 10-point program, to establish a national authority on any Palestinian territory that Israel withdraws from. Israel and Western countries considered that the PLO had opened up to possible diplomatic channels and had been given the legitimacy to hold future agreements.
- 2- Seven weeks after the announcing of the ten-point program, Yigal Alon submitted a proposal to his government on annexing the territory surrounding Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley at a width of 10 to 15Km, the slopes of the Jerusalem mountains towards the dead sea, and build settlements on them. Alon also proposed that the government should negotiate a peaceful solution with West Bank leaders.
- 3- In 1974, the Arab Summit held in Rabat took a decision considering the PLO to be the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The decision was made upon the insinuation of Kissinger to the Egyptian leaders. It was a clever hoax to make the West Bank a contested territory between Jordan and the PLO rather than an occupied land.
- 4- Non-withdrawal of Israel from the West Bank.

He said that the two-state solution is agreed upon internationally, but all the attempts to achieve it failed. He added that when the efforts to implement it failed, two new proposals surfaced: the one-state solution and the one-state-two-nations solution. He considered that these proposals did not gain international support and are refused by Israel, which made us wager on the two-state solution despite the failures it had faced.

“In 1981, Yevgeny Primakov, who was then the President of the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies, told me that the Palestinian State will not see the light. Ten years later, in March 1991, the then American Secretary of State James Baker told me that the Palestinian state will not be established and that the maximum we can expect is an entity which is less than a state and more than self-governing. Today, at a time when priorities have changed, we are allowed not to surrender to these two prophecies. Although Arab states and the PLO have failed militarily and diplomatically to achieve the two state solution, and despite the appearance of the one-state solution, there is a third phenomenon which shows that a third pathway, which has not been invested in sufficiently, could be possible. “I mean the BDS Movement which was launched by young Palestinians and Israelis who believe in world citizenship. They use the ethical and human power to morally and legally blockade Israel and to mobilize Jewish and Israeli liberal forces, united with the world liberal forces, demanding the implementation of the two-state solution. The weapon they use is the moral and human dimension and lobbying for international blockade

of Israel for the purpose of keeping the Palestinians on their land and territory.’

**Nassif Hitti** started his intervention by reminding the participants that the conference coincides with the commemoration of 50 years of the 1967 defeat which transformed the Arab-Israeli Struggle and the two-state solution was proposed. “We launched the peace process in Fes then the Beirut summit and the Madrid summit, but we reached a dead-end which forces us to change our modus operandi.” He added that Arab diplomacy does not depend on any power element. We live in the illusion of the international community, and “we only cry on the shoulders of this illusion.”

We are living the aftermath of 1967 where the diplomacy of settling the struggle was transformed to a diplomacy of managing the struggle.

He spoke of four prospects for the future of the Palestinian issue:

- 1- The situation will continue as is; the status quo state. This is less damaging to Israel which is continuing its activities to change the facts on the ground, taking advantage of the political stagnation.
- 2- President Trump will present an initiative to permanently adopt the interim settlement agreement. I think this will be the next American project. This is reflective of our reality: our weakness makes us uninfluential, we need to suffice ourselves with the scraps. The American approach is an “outside-in” initiative that makes the solutions for the issues of the region pass through the Palestinian gateway and launches the reconciliation between Arab countries and Israel, then tries to reconcile with the Palestinians. In this case, I believe there will be one state – Israel – and two municipalities in the West Bank and Gaza, under an umbrella of sovereignty.
- 3- Reviving the option of “Jordan is Palestine” but under different names and approaches that resemble a confederacy between the West Bank (or what’s left of it) and Jordan.
- 4- The realistic and almost impossible solution is the two-state solution. In order to achieve it we need to use reverse engineering, or obligating the concerned parties to implement the roadmap, set a specific timeframe, making certain concessions, and appointing a third party that oversees the whole process and defines the rules of the game.
- 5- The Arab peace initiative presented a regional but comprehensive approach, so, it constitutes the only realistic entry point. As to the conditions of implementation, there is a hot reality that makes Israel want negotiations since the situation has become unaffordable for it. He also spoke of benefitting from this moment when the international community is aware of the importance of original identities.

**Hussein Abu El Namle** by stating that the title of the intervention (Is the two-state solution in the past?) denies the said option, knowing that this is inaccurate because there was a Palestinian and international proposal that was not approved by Israel for reasons that are much deeper and more dangerous than the ones presented in the keynote paper.

He confirmed that the two-state or the one-state solution did not die recently, but they have had several deaths since the Peel Commission proposal to partition Palestine, to the 1947 partition resolution, the gradual project since 1974, and Oslo in 1993. He spoke of the presence of illusions that result from not asking difficult and embarrassing questions concerning the Palestinians and the Israelis. Such as, is the two-state solution a serious solution to the

Palestinian-Israeli struggle?

He added that the disagreement is not concerning the scope of rights that the Palestinians enjoy but the principle of Israel acknowledging these rights. So another question must be asked concerning what will happen to Israel if there are solutions that meet the minimum requirements of these rights. He wondered: "Can the two-state solution see the light if the Zionist project remains adamant to its Torah content which is based on nationalistic and religious fundamentalism and which considers that no one has any rights claims to Palestine and that Israel is the land of the Jews?"

He stressed the importance of not escaping the difficult strategic intellectual questions, such as: Is the Zionist project, represented by Israel, a political project that uses religious ideology or is it an ideological project founded on Judaism and uses politics to achieve its aims? Has Judaism produced and revived its Zionist project (i.e. Israel), or is it vice versa, that the Zionist project and Israel have revived Judaism and given it a political dimension and presence and a vital contemporary content?

He spoke of an intellectual failure in accepting that Israel is becoming more "right-wing" and "racist", as if it never were. What is new in this issue is that it has become more openly ideological. He also referred to the importance of defining whether Israel is an ideological or a democratic state.

He digressed and asked the following question: "In what sense can we suppose that Israel will think one day of ending the dynamism of maximizing its gains and exaggerating the losses of Palestinians through accepting solutions that allow their independence? Israel will not do that and will not do anything that undermines its Torah project over all the geography they consider to be Israel of the Torah."

If we are to talk about a solution, from the perspective of who benefits and who loses from the situation remaining as such, then the solution that suits Israel is preventing the implementation of any solution that changes the nature of the status quo, since every passing minute adds more gains to the Israelis and more losses to the Palestinians.

He concluded by saying that Israel has held to its ideological project when it was relatively weaker, so we can only expect it to hold to it even tighter when it is stronger and more avaricious to snatch the rights of the Palestinians when the Arab world is declining and there is an imbalance of power between the two parties. He referred to a large transformation in the Israeli discourse from a discourse that presents solutions to a discourse denying the existence of the issue by considering "the land of Israel" to be for the Jews, where Palestine and Palestinians do not exist. The new Israeli discourse describes the Palestinians as Arabs who came from outside the borders and settled or occupied their land. This is why it was necessary for them to fabricate narrative that claims that the occupation is an "Arab occupation" of Palestine, the Syrian crescent, Egypt, and North Africa!" He continued: "The rest of the story is known: The Palestinians are mere Arabs who came and occupied the land of Israel. Their rights can be found from where they came; that is, throwing the responsibility on the shoulders of Arab to solve the Palestinian issue wherever they are. This is why there are many scenarios that are no longer a secret to anyone in Jordan / the West Bank, Egypt / Gaza, Lebanon and the Palestinians in it. If they are not repatriated where they are, then the air and sea are open for them to leave!" In answering the question: "Where to now?" He answered: "Nowhere. Just stay where we are, but this is worse because the environment we live in is becoming more so. If we are looking for positive aspects in the two-state solution, then we must search for the solution within us,

according to the requirements of the time.”

The following issues were raised during the Q&A session:

- We are not an official entity, yet we are discussing an issue that could only be realized using state policies. We want a peaceful solution, not war. Don't you think we should have listened to the civil society and intellectuals, and not only to politicians, especially because we know that in 2010 a group of Israeli thinkers declared that the two-state solution is not possible and undesirable?
- Had the decision of disengagement not been taken, would we have seen the realization of the two-state solution? What is the importance of Resolution 2334? And how does it affect the two-state solution?
- King Hussein took the decision of disengagement because he could not liberate the West Bank. He did not surrender until he reached a dead end. Without the element of power, we will have the options that Ambassador Hitti laid forth. This is why we must work to change the power balance.

**Shtayyeh** answered by saying: “It is not just to neglect the military, political, and diplomatic struggle of the Palestinians. The internationalization of the struggle was a real battle with Israel. Now, since the war option is unrealistic and the negotiations option is at a standstill, one option remains: in the absence of external pressure on Israel, we must work on creating one inside Israel.”

President Amine Gemayel concluded by saying that the two days of the conference were “heavy and fruitful,” we were able to delve into the depth of the mother cause, which is the cause closest to the hearts of the Arab world. He thanked President Mahmoud Abbas for his undeclared sponsoring of the conference by delegating Nabil Shaath to represent him. He thanked all the participants, speakers, and moderators. At the end, he said: “Despite the gloomy and pessimistic situation, our mere presence here and our discussion of the Palestinian cause and rights is in itself an act of faith that proves that the cause is still alive and that the will to solve it is also present. It is necessary to have hope, despair is unacceptable. The cause will remain in our consciences and our being no matter how long it takes and no matter the obstacles.”

Shaath said: “There is a difficult road before us. The cause is going through a difficult situation, but our willpower to find new ways to resist, pressure Israel, and unify the Palestinian ranks is as strong as ever. On behalf of Abou Mazen, I thank President Gemayel and *La Maison du Futur* for allowing this opportunity.”