

**For Immediate Release:**

**The Mosaic Institute Presents “Where Do We Go From Here?”: A Diplomatic Assessment of the Prospects for Peace in the Middle East”, Final Event in the *Building Bridges in Canada* Speakers’ Series.**

**Toronto -November 05 2009.** Last evening, the Mosaic Institute convened a distinguished group of former diplomats from Canada, Israel and the Arab world to discuss the prospects for achieving a fair and lasting peace in the Middle East. The event, entitled “Where Do We Go From Here?,” was the fifth and final session in the “Building Bridges in Canada” speakers’ series that the Mosaic Institute and the Canadian Centre for Diversity have been co-hosting since March 2009. The event was held at the University of Toronto’s Munk Centre for International Studies.

In this concluding session of the series, the discussion centred on the need for a concerted international effort to place pressure on governments of the Middle East to arrive at a fair and comprehensive settlement. While the speakers agreed that NGOs and civil society play an integral part in improving the livelihood of those living in war-torn regions, and in encouraging valuable two-way dialogue in the Middle East in particular, they nevertheless cautioned that grassroots efforts alone would never be able to bring about substantive and lasting peace. Peace in the Middle East will require commitment and political will at the highest levels. The panellists challenged members of the Jewish and Arab diaspora communities in Canada and elsewhere to engage with and lobby their governments to take a more active role in urging a solution to the seemingly intractable conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

The panellists leading last evening’s discussion and responding to questions were:

- Michael Bell, Paul Martin Scholar in International Relations at the University of Windsor and Director of the Jerusalem Old City Initiative. Mr. Bell has gained expertise in conflict management and policy formulation through 36 years of distinguished service as a Canadian Foreign Service Officer, including turns as Canada's Ambassador to Jordan, Egypt, and Israel. He is the former Chair of the Donor Committee of the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq and was recently a Senior Scholar on Diplomacy at the University of Toronto's Munk Centre for International Studies. Ambassador Bell is a contributor to the *Globe and Mail* and has also published works in the *Literary Review of Canada*.
- Mokhtar Lamani, Senior Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation in Waterloo, Ontario. Dr. Lamani has had a distinguished career in international diplomacy, having been appointed as Special Representative of the Arab League to Iraq in 2006, and having served as Ambassador of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to the United Nations from 1998-2004, among other senior roles. He has taught political governance at Wilfred Laurier University and has lectured at NYU, Columbia, McGill, the Carnegie Council and the Stimon Centre, among other leading universities and “think tanks.”
- Alon Liel, lecturer in International Relations at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and at Tel Aviv University, and the former Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Dr. Liel served as Foreign Affairs advisor to Ehud Barak, Chairman of the Israeli Labour Party, from 1997 to 1999. He has also represented Israel as Ambassador to South Africa, served as a member of the

Israeli delegation to the United Nations, and participated in the Taba talks with Egypt. Dr. Liel's published works include *Turkey in the Middle East – Oil, Islam and Politics* and *Black Justice – The South African Upheaval*. He is currently the Chairman of the Israel-Syria Peace Society.

The discussion was moderated by award-winning veteran broadcaster Ralph Benmergui. In addition to his well-known work in front of the camera and the microphone, Ralph is also an accomplished documentary film maker whose works include "My Israel," a five-part series for Vision TV honouring the 60th anniversary of the State of Israel, and "God Bless America," a series on the role of religion and politics in America. His deep knowledge of and passion for the Middle East contributed richly to the evening's discussion.

Despite the enduring and historical antagonisms in the region, all of the panellists remained cautiously optimistic about the prospects for peace.

Approximately 100 guests from Canada's Jewish and Arab communities actively participated in the event.

The Mosaic Institute announced at last night's event that it will be convening a series of "Follow-Up Forums" to build on the increased mutual understanding generated by the series, and to identify at least one tangible, collaborative, peacebuilding initiative that the Institute will coordinate as a "Legacy Project" of the "Building Bridges in Canada" speakers' series.

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