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Diverse Crowd Gathers at "Standing Together" Event for Israel

By: Dawn Araujo
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Israeli Shaloch Yair Cohen Addresses the Crowd

On December 8, about 300 people from across the Midwest gathered in the Amberley Room of the Mayerson JCC. An air of festivity prevailed as Jews and Christians alike greeted each other, chatted and munched on an assortment of pastries and blue-sprinkled, Hanukkah-themed cookies—all of them here for a common cause: Israel.

The second "Standing Together: An Evening of Christian-Jewish Support for Israel" was a night of community for those across the Midwest and across religious faiths who are passionate in their defense of Israel.

Cathy Lord and her husband, Walter, both Christians, said they came to experience community and fellowship. "We just moved to Cincinnati from San Diego about a year and half ago," Cathy commented. "We wanted to meet

other people who are interested in Israel."

Gal Adam Spinrad, associate director of the Jewish Community Relations Council, which co-sponsored of the event, noted that interfaith solidarity is important when it comes to support for Israel because the wellbeing of the State depends on support from the global community.

"As far as the U.S. is concerned, the people who vote in this country and the people who effect decisions are from all walks of life," she said. "The Evangelical community, especially the people we know at Friends of Israel, are people who support Israel."

In attendance were representatives from the offices of Sen. Robert Portman, Rep. Jean Schmidt and Hamilton County Commissioner Chris Monzel. Amberley Village Vice Mayor Natalie Wolf also attended the event.

The night began with an invocation by Rabbi Eric Slaton of the Beth Israel Congregation, which highlighted the hope and faith characterizing Israel's 63-year history. Gary Greenberg, president of the JCRC, then touched briefly on the societal importance of supporting Israel.

"By supporting Israel, we save lives," he declared after showcasing the many developments Israel has given the world, including the recent invention of a medical device that helps weak hearts pump blood.

"Despite the tragic fact that Israel has had to live by the sword since its founding, Israel has also done a wonderful job in creating plowshares both for itself and for the world," he added. "Israel is a leader in medicine, in biotechnology, in clean water technology, in electronics, in agri-science. These are all life-saving and life-enhancing technologies."

The Reverends Robert Johnessee and William Sutter, both from the organization Friends of Israel, also a co-sponsor, then gave remarks. They were followed by the keynote speaker, Raslan Abu Rukun, the deputy consul general for Israel to the Mid-Atlantic region, based in Philadelphia.



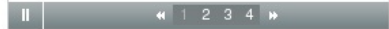
An Arab-Israeli, Abu Rukun served in the Israel Defense Forces and, after graduating with a degree in Middle Eastern studies and political science from Haifa University, has been an Israeli diplomat in Jerusalem and Katmandu, Nepal.

Abu Rukun focused on the international significance of the political hostilities against Israel in the Middle East, noting specifically the challenge of the "Arab Spring"

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Rastan Abu Rukun addresses the crowd

Arab Spring .

"When people ask me why they should support Israel, I say they should support Israel because it is the right thing to do. Israel is the only democratic state in the Middle East," he commented. "Unfortunately the Arab Spring that is happening right now looks like an extreme Islamic Winter and, right now, nobody knows where it's

going."

Abu Rukun went on to describe how Israelis initially felt support and solidarity for the people in countries like Egypt and Tunisia who were calling for democratic rights. However, he said that as the revolutions have moved away from installing peace-loving democracies and toward extreme Islamic regimes, Israel has become more cautious, though the hope is still that democracy will prevail.

It is Iran though, Abu Rukun explained, that poses the greatest threat to Israel.

"A lot of people in the international community say that Iran is trying to get nuclear capability, not for weapons, but for civil use or electricity," he said. "But Iran is the main supporter of terrorism in the Middle East. Iran is supporting groups in Somalia, in Sudan, in Lebanon...They are a threat to the stability of the world."

Abu Rukun said that sometimes, when speaking about the Iranian threat, people do not believe that Iran would ever use nuclear weapons against people—citing the rationale that it would be morally impossible for anyone to consider killing a million people.

"But, our answer," Abu Rukun stressed, "is that the rationale of Ahmadinejad is totally different from your rationale."



The Audience Rises for the Hatkvah, Israelfs National Anthem

"Standing Together" drew a wide range of people in support in of Israel. Abu Rukun also spoke to what he perceives as a Palastinian political tactic to avoid direct talks with Israel. He noted that when a Palastinian delegation came to New York in September, ostensibly to petition the United Nations Security Council for a seat in the U.N., they knew they would not be successful.

"What we think they will do later, they will go to the General Assembly of the U.N., to get, not full membership statehood—it will not change anything on the ground, everybody understands that" Abu Rukun said. "But it will give them more opportunities to attack Israel, to bash Israel, to isolate Israel in the international

community."

The evening ended with comments from Yair Cohen, Israeli emissary of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, and a benediction from the Rev. Tim McKenzie of Heritage Baptist Church. The audience then stood together to sing the Hatikvah.

The night was clearly a great success. Aside from the numbers, which are just a small measure of success, there was a good feeling in the room. The diversity of attendees— the different kinds of Christians and different denominations of Jews — reflected a unified understanding of why all were there: to celebrate and support Israel.



Dawn Araujo is a graduate student at Cincinnati Bible Seminary, working on a master's of arts in religion with a focus on urban and intercultural studies. She has a journalism degree from Ball State University and plans to work as a religion journalist upon graduation. Dawn comes to Cincinnati from Boston, by way of Indianapolis.

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