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PRESS RELEASE

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Mossawa Center hosts roundtable for Arab MKs and international diplomats on the Arab perspective on the recent war in Lebanon

Tel Aviv, Israel September 5, 2006 – The Mossawa Center hosted a lively roundtable discussion on the Arab perspective on the war Lebanon for members of the local international diplomatic community on Tuesday at the Renaissance Hotel in Tel Aviv. MKs Hanna Sweid of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equity and Ibrahim Sarsur of the Islamic Movement of the United Arab List were present to explain their respective positions on the conflict and the state of the Arab community in Israel and field questions from the diplomatic community. The Mossawa Center presented its paper on the discrimination and incitement against Arab community before, during and after the war. All parties emphasized the desire of Arab citizens for peace at the outset and entire duration of the war. The discussion was held to foster international awareness as well as pave the way for active dialogue and solutions to the plight of the Arab community during wartime in Israel.

44% of the civilian casualties in Israel were Arab citizens, yet throughout the war Arab citizens were subject to harsh public criticism, racism and incitement. In many cases, Arab villages lacked bomb shelters as well as air raid sirens to warn about shelling. Following the war, funding for rebuilding damaged regions of the Galilee has not been equally allocated to Arab villages.

Contrary to the accusations of right-wing politicians and much of the coverage of the Israeli media however, the position of the majority of the Arab community of Israel during the recent war in Lebanon was and remains a position of peace. With friends and family on both sides of the border falling victim to the tragedy of the war, peace was the only answer to the conflict for the Arab community of Israel.

MK Sweid emphasized that “the state of Israel should really go should really start comprehensive peace talks with the surrounding Arab states – with Syria regarding the Golan Heights, and with the Palestinians regarding Gaza and the West

Bank.” MK Sweid also criticized Israel’s deterrence policy, stating that Israel cannot use power to achieve peace or to keep the status quo.

MK Sarsur spoke at length about the political injustices the Arab community faces and called for “equality and partnership” between the Israelis and the Arab minority. “They [Israelis] are an integral part of the region and they have to act as such. They must find a way to live in peace with its neighbors and its inhabitants who might be a bridge.”

Due to the recent escalation of violence in the Middle East and the war in Lebanon, the unique status of the Arab community of Israel and its political parties has been at the forefront of political discourse in Israel. The Mossawa Center held this roundtable discussion to provide the diplomatic missions in Israel with an accurate understanding of not only the Arab community’s pro-peace sentiment, but their strength and struggle with the injustices they faced during the conflict as well.

The event was held with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). For further information, contact Tiffany Simon at: 04-855-5901.

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