

**Remarks by Victor J. Goldberg**

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Let me echo Allan Goodman's appreciation to Ibrahim and Hadas for making their community center available as a venue for today's presentation. And to Hilary Olsin-Windecker, Manal Hadad and Cecilia Sibony for their support on behalf of the U.S. Embassy. And of course, let me congratulate Dan Yakir and ACRI, and Hassan Jabareen and Adalah for the truly wonderful things they are doing.

I thought I'd give you a little personal background about the prize itself. When, in 2004, I was completing my 25<sup>th</sup> year as an IIE Trustee, and had decided to step down as Vice Chair after 13 years, I was reflecting on the incredible privilege it had been to be part of this great IIE organization, and I decided I wanted to do something to honor it.

Allan offered to name a room after me, and when I demurred, he said, "Well, think of something that you really care about, and try to come up with something that matches that passion."

Something to do with Israel immediately came to mind. It was very important to me as a young American Jew. I was 15 years old in 1948, lived in Chicago next door to immigrants with numbers on their forearms, and was entranced by the idea of this new nation, a safe place for Jews, *which embodied the cultural and moral values with which I was raised.*

I also wanted to honor the principles on which IIE was founded,.....that exposing young people to other cultures early in their lives was the best way to support the likelihood of peace in the world. In the Middle East, political leadership having largely failed to bring either peace or justice, support of the prize for grassroots cooperation seemed to be the best way to encourage change.

And so, I envisioned this Prize. I joked that we should have called it the Don Quixote IIE Prize for Peace in the Middle East, since there was a serious possibility that we would be unable to find a Jewish Israeli and an Arab Muslim working together for peace....one of whom had had a connection to an international exchange program in which IIE was involved. But we have done so for 8 years running.

The question arose of how to give prominence to the prize. No one had ever heard of me, and IIE itself was not all that well known, since we tend to hide our light in favor of those who sponsor the programs we administer. Therefore Allan and I decided we needed a well-known selection committee. Between us, we leaned on friends and got just that.

Susan Berresford, then head of the Ford Foundation, Harold Tanner, then head of the American Jewish Committee, David Arnold, President of the American University of Cairo, Stuart Eizenstat, Undersecretary of Commerce, Ted Katouf, head of Amideast, Serra Kirdar, an Iraqi scholar then at Oxford, and as chair, Tom Johnson, chair of IIE, whose dedication to peace was tragically enhanced when his son was killed in the twin towers on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Some of those original members remain on the committee but have different day jobs; others have been succeeded by equally prominent people. But they all take their responsibilities very seriously. I don't attend their meetings, but I'm told that sometimes the debates get very vigorous.

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In some years, the winning teams have been composed of a Palestinian and an Israeli. In other years, both winners have been Israeli citizens, and is the case today with Dan and Hassan. If today, the winners had been one Palestinian and one Israeli Jew, I would be speaking about my feelings about the lack of progress toward a two state solution.

But today is about Israeli citizens, and the legal struggle for the civil rights of all of them. It seems to me to be a battle for the soul of the country, and it strongly evokes the civil rights struggles in the United States in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I remember as a boy on a trip to the American South seeing the water fountains and bathrooms with signs designating "white only." I remember the tumultuous years in which African Americans fought to get the legal right to vote; and the continuing battle for de facto equal educational and economic opportunity.

I also remember the active role many American Jews played in those historical efforts. And well we should have! *Having for centuries been the victim of discrimination, it was, and is, only proper that we help others to be freed from it.*

Actually discrimination against Jews in the United States continued to relatively recent years. In 1950, I got into a University which had a limit of 5% Jews. In 1959, with an MBA from a top business school, all kinds of academic honors, and three years as an army officer, I sent out resumes to 100 large U.S. corporations and got only one response, ...from a company that made automobile mufflers.

I got lucky, however, as did a few other Jews who got hired in that period, and when in the early 1970's, American corporations gradually discovered that their world's didn't collapse when people discovered they employed Jews, they began to take advantage of these human assets.

I think that same positive progress can happen here in Israel. But it will require very similar effort. It will require action ....by citizens who are conscious of the disconnect between their moral heritage and the realities of their society,... and who are willing to get out of their comfort zone and use all the tools at their disposal to pressure their government and their society for change. Further, the private business sector in Israel has been a spectacular engine of growth, and I believe acting in its own self interest, it can hasten the absorption of this underutilized population into full and productive citizenship. I hope and pray Israelis are up to the task. It will break my heart if they aren't.

Hassan and Dan, you and your colleagues are heroes. Your courageous actions are the essence of what I hoped the prize could reward, and I am honored to know you.