



The Haifa Declaration





وثيقة حيفا הצהרת חיפה
The Haifa Declaration

A Word from the Executive Committee

Over 50 years after the 1948 Palestinian *Nakba*, a group of Palestinian intellectuals, academics, and activists from different fields and political viewpoints has undertaken an effort to draft a consensual statement of a collective vision that Palestinian citizens in Israel articulate about themselves. The statement, known as “The Haifa Declaration,” is a project begun in 2002 under the auspices of Mada al-Carmel – Arab Center for Applied Social Research, in Haifa. The project sought to create a forum for Palestinian Arab citizens from as broad a social and political base as possible, a forum in which we could go beyond the boundaries of power politics and the limitations imposed on political parties’ discourse to freely discuss our vision of the past, present, and future – specifically, our collective future and status in our homeland, the major challenges facing our society, our relationship with our people, nation, and the state of Israel.

The project brought together individuals with a wide range of viewpoints. The Haifa Declaration is the product of the group’s extensive deliberations and discussions over a number of years, both amongst themselves and, at times, with others outside the group.

The General Assembly, which included all the group members, met as a

plenary about a dozen times. Sometimes, we invited outside speakers, including Knesset members from Arab parties. The plenary established four working groups that focused on:

- internal social issues
- the relationship between the Palestinian citizens of Israel and the State of Israel
- the relationship with our Palestinian people and our Arab nation
- our national identity

The working groups met repeatedly, organized roundtables and workshops, discussed controversial issues and brought their drafts to the General Assembly. The General Assembly discussed the drafts numerous times before they were submitted to a drafting committee that consisted of the project’s Executive Committee members, the four working groups’ facilitators, and one additional member who helped in drafting the language. The General Assembly discussed numerous versions of the draft until it settled upon the final version.

We stated from the outset that the goal of our efforts was not only achieving a document but also making possible a free and open public debate, both amongst ourselves as a community, and between us and the state and the Jewish citizens, on our vision for our place and

status in our homeland. We are proud that the Haifa Declaration project has already achieved many of its goals, and we hope that the process initiated by the launch of the Haifa Declaration project a few years ago and the numerous activities that Mada al-Carmel has organized around it over the years have contributed to the various efforts that emerged to discuss these and related issues.

In addition to the Haifa Declaration, two other related documents have recently been published: the Future Vision, which was developed under the auspices of the Committee of Arab Mayors in Israel, and the Democratic Constitution, which was developed by Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel. We see the publications of all three complementary documents as a strong indicator that the community is at a stage to clearly articulate its collective vision and make its voice heard.

We aspire that the Haifa Declaration, the Future Vision, and the Democratic Constitution serve as foundational texts for institutions and members of the Palestinian minority, in their effort to assert their national identity, national rights, and their right to democracy and equal citizenship. We also aspire that the Declaration can spark a democratic, open, and constructive dialogue within our society and with the Israeli-Jewish society,

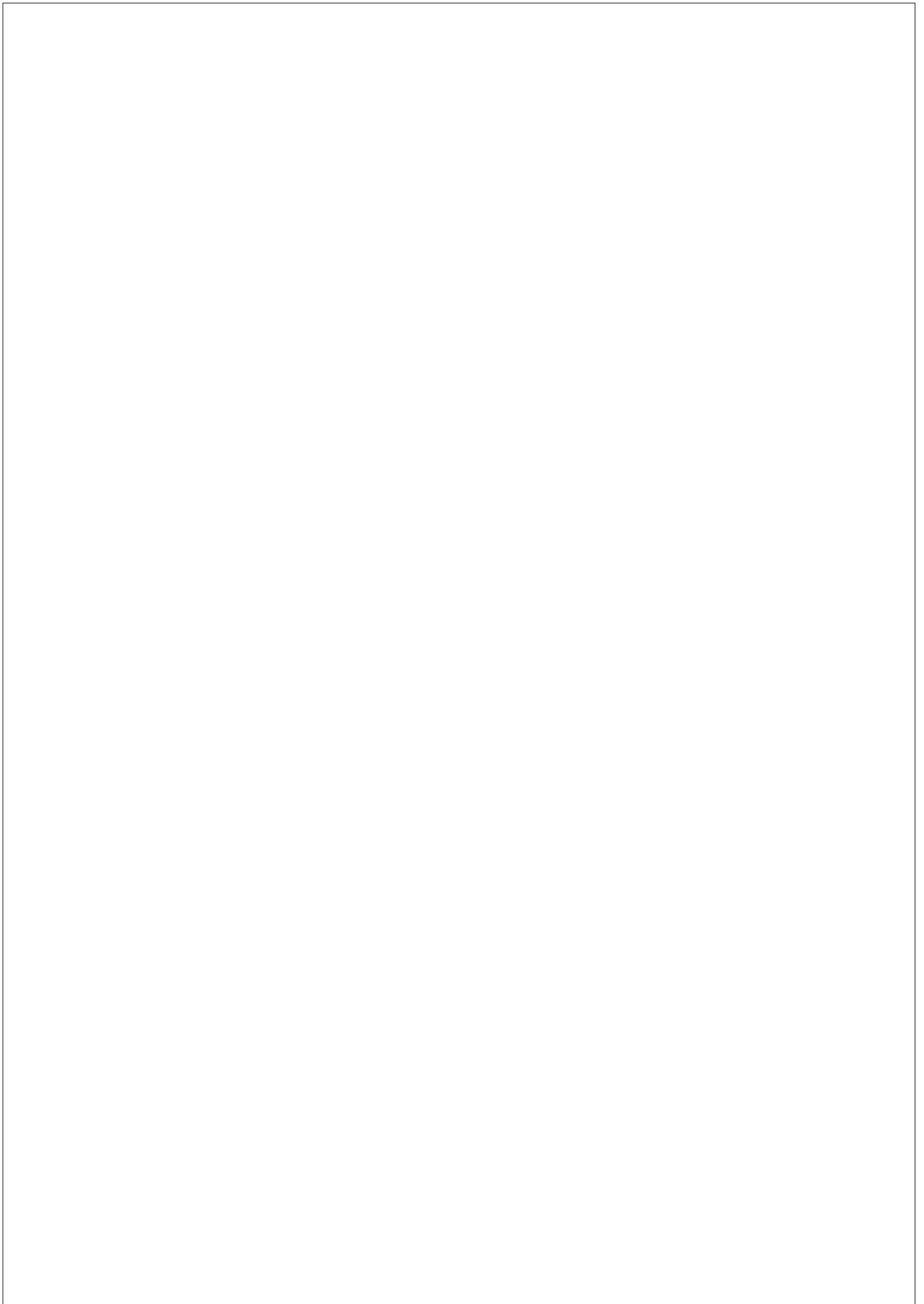
one that might enable us to work together towards building a better future between our peoples. This, we believe, might lay the foundations for creating a society based on justice and equality for all citizens and inhabitants of the state of Israel.

Professor Nadim Rouhana, General Director, Mada al-Carmel, Advocate Hassan Jabareen, and Professor Ramzi Suleiman initiated this project. They comprised the Project's Executive Committee that led the project. Professor Muhammad M. Haj-Yahia and Dr. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian joined the Executive Committee in 2006.

We are grateful to the General Assembly members, the project coordinators, and the facilitators of the various working groups, whose names are listed at the end of the Declaration, for their enormous effort to complete this project successfully. We are also grateful to Mada's staff and to the many additional people who contributed in various ways to the success of this effort. For information about the conferences, workshops, meetings, and related publications, and for a list of additional people who endorse this Declaration, please visit Mada's website at www.mada-research.org.

The Executive Committee:

Professor Nadim N. Rouhana
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Professor Ramzi Suleiman
Professor Muhammad M. Haj-Yahia
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The Haifa Declaration

We, sons and daughters of the Palestinian Arab people who remained in our homeland despite the *Nakba*, who were forcibly made a minority in the State of Israel after its establishment in 1948 on the greater part of the Palestinian homeland; do hereby affirm in this Declaration the foundations of our identity and belonging, and put forth a vision of our collective future, one which gives voice to our concerns and aspirations and lays the foundations for a frank dialogue among ourselves and between ourselves and other peoples. In this Declaration, we also set forth our own reading of our history, as well as our conception of our citizenship and our relationship with the other parts of the Palestinian people, with the Arab nation, and with the State of Israel. We further present our vision for achieving a dignified life in our homeland and building a democratic society founded upon justice, freedom, equality, and mutual respect between the Palestinian Arabs and Jews in Israel. We also put forward our conception of the preconditions for an historic reconciliation between the Palestinian people and the Israeli Jewish people, and of the future to which we aspire as regards the relationship between the two peoples.

Our national identity is grounded in human values and civilization, in the Arabic language and culture, and in a collective memory derived from our Palestinian and Arab history and Arab and Islamic civilization. It is an identity that grows ever more firm through active and continuous interaction with these values. It is continuously nourished by our uninterrupted relationship to our land and homeland, by the experience of our constant and mounting struggle to affirm our right to remain in our land and

homeland and to safeguard them, and by our continued connection to the other sons and daughters of the Palestinian people and the Arab nation.

Despite the setback to our national project and our relative isolation from the rest of our Palestinian people and our Arab nation since the *Nakba*; despite all the attempts made to keep us in ignorance of our Palestinian and Arab history; despite attempts to splinter us into sectarian groups and to truncate our identity into a misshapen “Israeli Arab” one, we have spared no effort to preserve our Palestinian identity and national dignity and to fortify it. In this regard, we reaffirm our attachment to our Palestinian homeland and people, to our Arab nation, with its language, history, and culture, as we reaffirm also our right to remain in our homeland and to safeguard it.

Our close affinities with the rest of the Palestinian people and with the Arab nation are in fact a form of connection to ourselves. They are our natural space, of which we were deprived following the *Nakba*, and this connection is the embodiment of the complete Self. It is a human need and a natural and universal right of individuals and groups, which cannot be circumscribed by the existence of political agreements among states. It is also enshrined in international conventions pertaining to human rights.

We strive to give substance to our Palestinian and Arab affinities at all levels, including contacts between family members, relatives, and friends, as well as free and continuous contacts with cultural and intellectual centers in the Arab world. We aspire to deepen and expand these contacts on the political, economic, and institutional levels.

We view with pride the many luminous milestones traversed in our collective journey, which served to strengthen our identity. We value the role of continual political, civic, and cultural activism, aimed at holding on to our land and homeland and protecting and consolidating all the elements of our national identity. We also look with pride on the resistance to the military regime put up by our people and its national leadership, and the creativity our people has displayed in the realms of thought and culture, which have contributed to the preservation and enrichment of our identity. We greatly admire what they have produced in terms of our illustrious national days, the most prominent of which are Land Day in March 1976 and the Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Day in October 2000, as well as the historical landmarks along our path of self-organization, most significantly the founding of the High Follow-up Committee for the Arab Citizens of Israel, the Land Defense Committee, and the Arab Students' Union and Committees.

We bear our responsibility, as a society, as individuals, and as active organizations, for our social problems. Our society has been, and to a large extent remains, subject to social, family, sectarian, and local structures that curtail individual freedoms. We respect family ties, as well as individual rights to free worship, faith, and creed, provided no creed or loyalty is exploited to impair individual freedoms, dignity, or rights. We reject sectarian zeal and all forms of prejudice, which at times reach the extreme of physical violence and which obstruct the opportunities of wider social solidarity and the construction of a national identity.

Adherence to these social structures together with the prejudices thus engendered has made it easier for Israeli

governments to exploit the divisions and tensions within our society in order to subjugate our people through numerous means. Thus these governments have attempted to strip groups away from our community through a policy of “divide and rule”, which reinforced a discourse of sectarian, tribal, familial, and regional bigotry among us. Furthermore, Israel imposed compulsory military service upon the Druze youth of our people, and sought to enlist other Arab youths by exploiting occasional tensions between sectors of our society, and pursuing enticement policies through the offer of individual benefits. Israel has also appointed and supported Arab leaders loyal to these policies and has striven to create a subordinate Arab society indifferent to its own public good and to impede its political, cultural, and economic progress.

Our society must strengthen its rejection of all these phenomena, and must develop ways to resist them. It must also put forth a political and social agenda that highlights human and national identity, restores respect for the value of political, nationalist action, sets as its goal the building of a credible political authority, and strives to develop the institutions and economy of our society. Rallying around and supporting this political and social agenda will guarantee the rise of an alternative consciousness and a different culture, with the ability to change the prevailing social structures and to establish moral standards to guide collective action, and govern the dealings between the national parties and the civil and community institutions in our society.

Despite the progress achieved in the status of women and the rise in awareness of and popular and feminist support for women’s equality, most women in our society – especially

the economically disadvantaged women – are still subject to multifaceted oppression: class, national, social, and gendered. It is our duty to endeavor to bring an end to the marginalization of women and discrimination against them in the private and public spheres in various fields, the most important of which are labor and education, and to resist attempts to deny them their right to total mastery over their fate. We must also resist all forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation exercised upon many of them, occasionally reaching the point of murder, in the name of what is known as “family honor”. It is our duty to strive to put an end to all forms of discrimination against women and to protect their rights on the basis of the principles of equality, justice, and affirmative action.

Discrimination and oppression in our society are not confined, however, to women, but also affect the elderly, children, and those with special needs. These groups suffer from social marginalization and from the infringement of their status, rights, and dignity, which necessitate the defense of their rights and the rights of all social groups that suffer from discrimination. Therefore, we call for the formulation of a national, progressive, and democratic plan to build a society based on social solidarity among all its members, which respects the freedom of the individual and his or her right to dissent and to differ, and which is based on the principles of justice, equality, and pluralism.

Our presence in our homeland is an extension of a perpetual historical renewal which has accompanied the eras and events that the Arab East has known during its rise and decline, its awakening and its liberation, and its resistance to invasion, occupation, and colonialism. Towards the end of the 19th century, the Zionist movement initiated

its colonial-settler project in Palestine. Subsequently, in concert with world imperialism and with the collusion of the Arab reactionary powers, it succeeded in carrying out its project, which aimed at occupying our homeland and transforming it into a state for the Jews. In 1948, the year of the *Nakba* of the Palestinian people, the Zionist movement committed massacres against our people, turned most of us into refugees, totally erased hundreds of our villages, and drove out most inhabitants out of our cities. Later, the State of Israel prevented the return of the Palestinian refugees to their homeland in defiance of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194, and the UN's successive resolutions in this same regard. Although we were made citizens of the State of Israel, the state nevertheless continued to pursue its uprooting and evacuation operations after its establishment, with the result that many of us were displaced from our towns and villages, becoming refugees in our homeland. Against us, Israel has pursued policies of repression, which at times reached the level of killing, as in the case of the massacre of Kufr Qassem in October 1956. Upon us, it imposed a military regime, which remained in place until 1966. It has prevented the return of the internal refugees (internally displaced persons) to their towns and villages, and to this very day it refuses to recognize dozens of Arab villages in the Naqab, where it follows policies of land dispossession. The State of Israel enacted racist land, immigration, and citizenship laws, and other laws that have allowed for the confiscation of our land and the property of the refugees and internally displaced persons. Israel further sought to distort the identity of our sons and daughters through educational curricula that aim at educating them in accordance with the Zionist narrative and leaving them ignorant of their own national narrative. It has spread an atmosphere of fear through the Arab educational system,

which is supervised by the security services. The state has exercised against us institutional discrimination in various fields of life such as housing, employment, education, development, and allocation of resources.

In 1967, Israel occupied the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in addition to Egyptian and Syrian territories. Throughout the occupation of the Palestinian territories, which has lasted to the present day making it one of the longest periods of occupation since World War II, Israel carried out policies of subjugation and oppression in excess of those of the apartheid regime in South Africa. In the Occupied Territories, Israel has perpetrated war crimes against Palestinians, killed and expelled thousands, assassinated leaders, jailed tens of thousands – many through military and administrative order – inflicted physical and psychological torture, and bulldozed thousands of houses. Israel has also, in violation of International Humanitarian Law, employed a policy of collective punishment, such as military sieges and curfews imposed on cities and towns. It has splintered the Occupied Territories by constructing hundreds of barriers and imposing restrictions on freedom of movement between Palestinian towns, villages, and refugee camps. It has further confiscated land, uprooted trees, destroyed orchards, separated families, enacted racist military laws preventing family unification, and denied residents in Occupied Arab Jerusalem the right to live in their own city. Israel has also exploited private and public Palestinian resources, such as land and water, in order to construct settlements and build roads for Jewish settlers' use. It has erected the racist Separation Wall, which has divided villages and split up families in the West Bank and Arab Jerusalem. These Israeli policies and practices in the Occupied Territories affect the

lives and dignity of every single Palestinian, and gravely violate his or her freedoms and fundamental rights.

Our citizenship and our relationship to the State of Israel are defined, to a great extent, by a formative event, the *Nakba*, which befell the Arab Palestinian people in 1948 as a result of the creation of the State of Israel. This was the event through which we – who remained from among the original inhabitants of our homeland – were made citizens without the genuine constituents of citizenship, especially equality. As we are a homeland minority whose people was driven out of their homeland, and who has suffered historical injustice, the principle of equality – the bedrock of democratic citizenship – must be based on justice and the righting of wrongs, and on the recognition of our narrative and our history in this homeland. This democratic citizenship that we seek is the only arrangement that guarantees individual and collective equality for the Palestinians in Israel.

We believe that the policies that require us to perform “civil service” and the steps that could lead to our involvement in Israeli militarism and the distribution of the spoils of wars are incompatible in our case with the principle of equality, because they disfigure our identity and disregard historical injustices.

We look towards a future in which we can reach historic reconciliation between the Jewish Israeli people and the Arab Palestinian people. This reconciliation requires the State of Israel to recognize the historical injustice that it committed against the Palestinian people through its establishment, to accept responsibility for the *Nakba*, which befell all parts of the Palestinian people, and also for the war

crimes and crimes of occupation that it has committed in the Occupied Territories. Reconciliation also requires recognizing the Right of Return and acting to implement it in accordance with United Nations Resolution 194, ending the Occupation and removing the settlements from all Arab territory occupied since 1967, recognizing the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to an independent and sovereign state, and recognizing the rights of Palestinian citizens in Israel, which derive from being a homeland minority. Furthermore, such an historical reconciliation between the two peoples must be part of a comprehensive change in Israeli policy, whereby Israel abandons its destructive role towards the peoples of the region, especially in the context of a hegemonic U.S. policy which supports certain Arab regimes in oppressing their citizens, stripping them of their resources, obstructing their development, and impeding the democratic process in the Arab world.

This historic reconciliation also requires us, Palestinians and Arabs, to recognize the right of the Israeli Jewish people to self-determination and to life in peace, dignity, and security with the Palestinian and the other peoples of the region.

We are aware of the tragic history of the Jews in Europe, which reached its peak in one of the most horrific human crimes in the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis against the Jews, and we are fully cognizant of the tragedies that the survivors have lived through. We sympathize with the victims of the Holocaust, those who perished and those who survived.

We believe that exploiting this tragedy and its consequences in order to legitimize the right of the Jews to establish a state

at the expense of the Palestinian people serves to belittle universal, human, and moral lessons to be learned from this catastrophic event, which concerns the whole of humanity.

Our vision for the future relations between Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews in this country is to create a democratic state founded on equality between the two national groups. This solution would guarantee the rights of the two groups in a just and equitable manner. This would require a change in the constitutional structure and a change in the definition of the State of Israel from a Jewish state to a democratic state established on national and civil equality between the two national groups, and enshrining the principles of banning discrimination and of equality between all of its citizens and residents. In practice, this means annulling all laws that discriminate directly or indirectly on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, or religion – first and foremost the laws of immigration and citizenship – and enacting laws rooted in the principles of justice and equality. It also means the application of equality between the Arabic and Hebrew languages as two official languages of equal status in the country; ensuring the principle of multiculturalism for all groups; securing the effective participation of the Palestinian minority in government and in decision making; guaranteeing the Palestinian citizens in Israel the right of veto in all matters that concern their status and rights; guaranteeing their right to cultural autonomy, which includes the rights to develop policies for and to administer their own cultural and educational affairs; and distributing resources in accordance with the principles of distributive and corrective justice. It is these principles that can guarantee our right to self-determination as a homeland minority.

We are confident that in such a democratic state, responsibilities of all citizens and residents – Jews, Arabs, and others – would grow as they strive to build a democratic and multicultural society, one which abolishes all forms of discrimination, safeguards the freedoms and rights of individuals, and guarantees social and economic rights – especially the rights to education, health care, and social welfare, and labor rights – for all.

We firmly believe that the fulfillment of all the conditions for a reconciliation between the two peoples, the Jewish Israeli and Arab Palestinian, which requires the recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and the realization of the rights of the Palestinians in Israel as a homeland minority, will create political circumstances that will enable the creation of confidence, cooperation, and mutual respect between two independent and democratic states: the State of Palestine and the State of Israel. We further hope that this will open up new horizons in which agreements and treaties will be concluded between them in the economic, scientific, and cultural fields that guarantee free and reciprocal movement, mobility, residence, and employment for the citizens and residents of the two states.

*May 15, 2007
Haifa*

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