

# ARAB DIASPORA CONFERENCE

# 2020



## CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

### RECLAIMING THE PUBLIC NARRATIVE

VOICES OF THE  
MIDDLE EAST

hosted by \_\_\_\_\_



University of Ottawa



Human Rights Research &  
Education Centre  
(University of Ottawa)



Zajel Institute for Justice &  
Liberty



Joint Chair in Women's  
Studies (University of Ottawa  
& Carleton University)



Pauline Jewett Institute of  
Women's and Gender Studies  
(Carleton University)



Institute of Feminist and  
Gender Studies (University  
of Ottawa)

sponsored by \_\_\_\_\_



Open Society Foundations



Egyptian Institute for  
Studies



Democracy for the  
Arab World Now

22-24 February  
University of Ottawa

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE CONFERENCE

The **Arab Diaspora Conference** maintains the spirit and hope of the people of the Middle East for democracy, dignity and human rights. It aims to empower individuals from the Arab Speaking Diaspora who were willingly or forcibly exiled because they exercised their rights to freedom of expression, as well as those who remain in their lands and do not have the space to exercise them. Most important, the conference has the objective to grow the seed of a network of talented individuals collaborating and contributing together towards positive social change through research and dialogue on their respective worlds.

The Conference provides grounds for participants to network and get constructive feedback on their initiatives and projects. Panelists and speakers will present around areas related to the social, political and economic changes in Arab countries and their impact on diaspora communities abroad. Through this combined effort we will also together carry out research on, and develop the professional methods for addressing the understudied topics such as social justice, social movements and the socio-political and economic developments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), including the under-represented voices of the diaspora.





# BUILDING ON THE ARAB DIASPORA WORKSHOP 2018

This gathering builds on and solidifies work done at the initial closed workshop in 2018 at the University of Ottawa. The 2020 gathering is public and seeks to actively include, engage with and inform policymakers, advocates for human rights and democracy, members of the Arab diaspora, and the broader Canadian public. This will be accomplished through **public speaking and writing.**

## PURPOSE OF THE GATHERING

A primary purpose of the gathering is to **produce a research publication** that summarizes the analysis and perspectives of this unique group of participants on the social, political and economic changes in the Arab world, and the impact of the Arab diaspora activism.

A second purpose of the gathering is centered on the idea of working towards creating a new authentic shared narrative around the future of the region. Since 2011, the MENA region has undergone violent change while morphing into new configurations that often serve to harden and strengthen particular alliances of violence and repressive control. There is also at this stage no acceptable shared narrative on the future of the region, even though change is inevitable. As such, the conference aims to take a realistic approach to the socio-political realities and find ways



to move forward by creating a space for dialogue where participants can articulate alternative scenarios for the future. This includes discussing what role the diaspora and exiled activists can and should play in that future change.

Third, the conference aims to help empower and enable participants from Arab diaspora communities in North America, to undertake new initiatives and continue to make contributions in their areas of expertise. It also provides grounds for sub-groups of participants to assemble in order to create future initiatives outside of the conference itself. Participating organizations/ institutions will also be asked to support creative new initiatives and projects stemming from the gathering. The conference, in-effect, acts as a new platform for networking Arab diaspora activists from all over the region and with supporting experts, organizations and potential mentors from North America.

## SPEAKERS

The lead speakers at the conference are the core group of human rights and democracy defenders participating in the conference, who were displaced from their countries of origin across the MENA region following the 2011 Uprisings, and settled mainly in Canada and the United States. They are individuals who made significant contributions in their countries of origin in a variety of fields, such as politics, environmental activism, human rights, and artistic and creative expression. They will be joined by experts, analysts and academics of these topics and the MENA region in joint panels, workshops and skills clinics.

The participants were selected to ensure diverse political, religious/ non-religious, ethnic, gender identity backgrounds from across the Middle East and North African countries. The platform's rule of engagement is **total tolerance for the other**, whatever his/her orientation or point of view, short of views that are themselves responsible for serious human rights abuses, such as hate speech.

During the workshop in 2018, the defenders' identities were kept quiet in the developmental stage of the initiative. This time most will be presenting themselves publicly in the next stage of their work.

# SHARED RESULTS

The conference represents an opportunity for the defenders and participants to gather together to think, share ideas, provide mutual support and envision a new future. This includes producing together a research publication that summarizes and analyses the participants' perspectives on social, political and economic changes in the Arab world, and the impact they have on Arab diaspora communities (particularly through the lens of their own respective diaspora communities). The gathering also serves as a stepping stone toward future activities and new structures meant to provide support for the defenders.

# PROGRAM SCHEDULE

The gathering will take place at the University of Ottawa over 3 days **February 22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>**. It will start with one-and-a-half days of closed sessions for the democracy defenders, consisting of: a reception, workshops and clinics (from February 22<sup>nd</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>). This will be followed by an important open day of panels and public discussions (on February 24<sup>th</sup>).

The anticipated outcomes include

1. Research publications
2. Policy discussions
3. Mentoring and skills-development
4. Support for new initiatives
5. The establishment of new networks
6. Plans for follow-up activities



# PUBLIC PROGRAM

## WORKSHOPS & CLINICS

### Monday February 24

This will be a public event involving the defenders and all other participants. It will consist of panel discussions, including a lunch with a keynote panel. Government policymakers will be invited to participate for mutual dialogue and guidance.

08:00 - 08:45	Registration & Breakfast
08:45 - 09:00	Opening Remarks
09:00 - 10:30	<b>Panel 1</b> - An Assessment of the Political Situation in MENA
11:00 - 12:30	<b>Panel 2</b> - Forming the Narrative on the Human Rights Situation in MENA and the Role of the Diaspora
13:45 - 14:00	Afternoon Remarks
14:00 - 15:30	<b>Panel 3</b> - Understanding the Role of the International Actors and International Policies Towards Human Rights and Democracy Defenders
16:00 - 17:30	<b>Panel 4</b> - The Impact of Diaspora Advocacy Efforts on International Actors' Decisions
17:30 - 17:45	Closing Remarks

# CLOSED PROGRAM

## PANELS & SPEAKERS



### Saturday February 22

The MENA human rights and democracy defenders are welcomed to Ottawa for an evening opening reception and networking dinner.

### Sunday February 23

Democracy defenders will participate in skills development workshops and clinics consisting of:

08:00 - 08:45	Registration & Breakfast
08:45 - 9:00	Opening Remarks
09:00 - 11:30	<b>Workshop 1</b> - Adaptive Leadership KHALED ELSHARKAWI, EHAB ELGAMMAL
12:30 - 15:00	<b>Workshop 2</b> - Public Narrative NAJWA AL SILWADI
15:30 - 16:15	<b>Clinic 1</b> - Human Rights and Democracy Advocacy   AHMAD ATTIA & SARAH ATTIA - INCISIVE STRATEGY
16:15 - 17:00	<b>Clinic 2</b> - Seeking Academic Funding, Opportunities and Publishing Guidance   FAYYAZ BAQIR & REHANA HASHMI - SCHOLARS AT RISK
17:00 - 17:45	<b>Clinic 3</b> - Social Entrepreneurship and Mobilization   EMILY WILLS & DIANA ELRICHANI - COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION IN CRISIS
17:45 - 18:00	Closing Remarks

# DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PANELS, CLINICS AND WORKSHOPS

## PANELS

### **Panel 1:** An Assessment of the Political Situation in MENA

Sifting through the myriad events that have taken place over the past decade in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), this panel highlights the key moments that bring us into the present. With observers who are known worldwide for their expertise in MENA and international current affairs, all fluent in one or more languages of the region, the panel considers how we arrived at the current situation in the MENA region. It focuses on the challenges, opportunities and rich contributions to date by researchers and human rights defenders from and in the region, and the degree to which the international community has sought to recognise those contributions.

**Facilitator:** Jeremy Wildeman - Human Rights Research and Education Centre

**Speakers:** Dalia Fahmy - Long Island University // Ruby Dagher - University of Ottawa // Esam Omeish - Democracy for Arab World Now

Dalia Fahmy is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Long Island University, Senior Fellow at the Center for Global Policy in Washington DC, and Visiting Scholar at the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights.

### **Panel 2:** Forming the Narrative on the Human Rights Situation in MENA

This panel features two of the world's foremost analysts of human rights in the MENA region, alongside a global expert on international human rights and international conflict resolution, and a leading MENA campaigner for civil liberties, participatory politics, separation of powers and judicial independence. Privy to the most horrific public violations of human rights in the past decade, and part of global movements to address and prevent such crimes, this panel illuminates ways we speak about human rights to engage the public, direct groundbreaking research, and influence state and international policy toward the protection of human rights and human rights defenders.

**Facilitator:** Chuck Thiessen - Coventry University



**Speakers:** Sarah Leah Whitson - Quincy Institute // John Packer - University of Ottawa // Jackie Hansen - Amnesty International // Mohamed Soltan - Freedom Initiative

**Panel 3:** Understanding the Role of Canadian and International Actors' Policies Towards Human Rights and Democracy Defenders

Shifting focus from the Middle East and North Africa to Canada and the international community's involvement in Middle East politics, key policymakers, lawmakers, researchers and a human rights defender (and former political prisoner) share insights into their experiences and efforts to sustain human rights and democracy defenders in the MENA region. What trends support these defenders, and how can these be harnessed? What pitfalls have they faced, and how can they be avoided in future? How can cooperation and mutual understanding be the guiding principles in this work? The panel will address these and other questions, grounded in their own years of international and domestic diplomacy and advocacy.

**Facilitator:** Khaled Al-Qazzaz - Zajel Institute for Justice and Liberty

**Speakers:** Michelle Dunne - Carnegie Endowment // Peggy Mason - Rideau Institute // Ghuna Bdiwi - Osgoode Law School

**Panel 4:** The Impact of Advocacy Efforts on the International Community's Decision-Making Processes on MENA

State and international decision-making is affected by public opinion, pressure groups from the corporate and non-profit sectors, the media, higher education's knowledge production frameworks, and legal parameters, among other factors. This panel addresses the various directions in which international decision-making related to the Middle East and North Africa has been taken, and looks at the questions of why and how. From the perspectives of democratic MENA governments, international advocacy groups for justice and peace, and the Canadian government's steps toward a feminist foreign policy, this panel sheds light on how international decision-making processes take place and the consequences of those processes.

**Facilitator:** Muzna Duraid - The White Helmets Canada

**Speakers:** Nihad Awad - Democracy for Arab World Now // Nadia Abu-Zahra - University of Ottawa // Abdallah Aloudah - Georgetown University

# WORKSHOPS

The workshops are being offered as a way for defenders to learn and think together how to approach their advocacy in new and impactful ways. They are led by moderators with deep knowledge of campaigning and advocacy work, in theory and practice, to effect progressive change.

## **Workshop 1:** Adaptive Leadership

True leadership is collective, horizontal, and relational. This workshop helps build skills in working non-hierarchically and in healthy ways. It addresses forms of leadership that do not rely on centralised power but rather distribute power and empower at all times. This is not excluding but especially in times of crisis, being able to respond flexibly, work collaboratively, and share the burden and privilege of leadership, where all talents can be consciously fostered. In this workshop, human rights and democracy defenders are supported and encouraged in their egalitarian and respectful practices of maintaining and sustaining healthy and positive relations, for the times of the future.

**Facilitators:** Khaled Elsharkawi and Ehab El Gamel

## **Workshop 2:** Public Narrative

Every social movement and human rights and democracy defender has a story. We start somewhere, we have our ups and downs, and we hold tight to a vision of a new and better future. How are those stories told? This workshop helps human rights and democracy defenders and their allies and supporters to map together the narrative that conveys in universal language the imperatives, the hardships, the accomplishments, and the dreams that people share. For building a movement, for seeking support, and for enhancing and spreading mutual understanding, these narratives are the foundation of every individual and social movement. They bring us closer to human rights and democracy, and bring all of humanity together rather than sharp and violent divisions.

**Facilitator:** Najwa Silwadi



# CLINICS

A series of clinics are being offered to the defenders for skills development. Up to three clinics are being held at one time and the defenders will be able to choose what skill-development they wish to address. The clinics the conference has scheduled are as follows.

## **Clinic 1** - Human Rights and Democracy Advocacy

From the perspective of one of the world's most prominent human rights advocacy networks, Amnesty International, this clinic provides insights into campaign design, management, and potential outcomes. Skills will be furthered in building a narrative, drawing and attracting campaign participants, and networking among multiple actors and organisations. Challenges around safety,

**Moderator:** Ahmad Attia & Sarah Attia - Incisive Strategy

## **Clinic 2** - Seeking Academic Funding, Opportunities and Publishing Guidance

This clinic provides defenders an overview of the framework for establishing and managing their own registered organisations in Canada in order to pursue advocacy work. That includes the legalities of establishing a registered entity; the differences of registering it in different legal

jurisdictions/provinces of Canada; the advantages and disadvantages of registration as a not-for-profit versus a charity; and a discussion if it is worth registering at all. It further includes a discussion around organisational management, fundraising, staff and volunteer management, all as part of a discussion as to how the organisation should be



developed to carry-out mobilisation for advocacy work from Canada for the MENA region.

**Moderators:** Fayyaz Baqir & Rehana Hashmi - Scholars at Risk

### **Clinic 3** - Social Entrepreneurship and Mobilization

This clinic provides defenders an overview of the framework for establishing and managing their own registered organisations in Canada in order to pursue advocacy work. That includes the legalities of establishing a registered entity; the differences of registering it in different legal jurisdictions/provinces of Canada; the advantages and disadvantages of registration as a not-for-profit versus a charity; and a discussion if it is worth registering at all. It further includes a discussion around organisational management, fundraising, staff and volunteer management, all as part of a discussion as to how the organisation should be developed to carry-out mobilisation for advocacy work from Canada for the MENA region.

**Moderator:** Emily Wills & Diana ElRichani - Community Mobilization in Crisis

# CANADA'S CONNECTION TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIC ADVOCACY

Canada has a long history of advocating for democracy, good governance, international law and human rights around the world. These have at times been an essential part of Canadian foreign policy, and policy that Canadians consistently support. Indeed, the Prime Minister recently charged Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs with advancing Canada's national interest by promoting democracy, human rights and international law, particularly through support for the rules-based international order and multilateral institutions. It is also no coincidence that many of the defenders forced into exile ended up in Canada. So, Canada seems like a natural home for this initiative.

## JOIN US IN SUPPORTING THE DEFENDERS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIC REFORM

In a deeply interconnected global community, this gathering is important not just for the MENA region, but the better world these defenders are striving for. What has happened in MENA in the past 20 years has had for instance a very noticeable and negative impact on states and societies around the world, from the rise of the alt-right and authoritarian figures, to economic collapse and migration crises. Stability, peace and prosperity can only really be brought to the region through respect for international law, human rights and good governance. This can only be accomplished by providing support for the liberal democratic reform people are striving for.





**SPEAKER BIOS  
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23**



**Najwa Al Silwadi** - Najwa Al- Silwady-Eidda, is currently a Ph.D candidate in Social Work at York University. She has a rich practice experience, teaching and academic service as organizer and human rights advocate in Palestine. In 1999, she was the founding Director of the Community Action Center (CAC), a non-profit rights- based organization affiliated with Al-

Quds University in the Old City of Jerusalem and served the organization until beginning her doctoral studies at York in 2013. During her tenure with CAC, she facilitated various organic forms of community organizing, such as: community legal clinic, a painting and photo exhibit about Palestinian women's everyday struggles; various performances, including women-based theater; and films. Through her doctoral studies, she has developed finely tuned understanding of and ability to articulate anti-colonial, feminist discourse. Her methodology is consistent with this discourse and her justice orientation; her research methods support in-depth inquiry into everyday activism and organizing experiences of Palestinian women in Jerusalem. She is studying how women engage in grassroots activism and organize in order to address their basic needs, to struggle against human rights abuses, and to counter the multiple sites of oppression in which they are situated. She is examining women's first-hand knowledge of the need for anti-colonial, feminist understanding of community organizing with Palestinian women in East Jerusalem. Najwa's research promises to contribute to our empirical knowledge of the agency and activism of Palestinian women and inform our understanding of how women globally organise and resist in oppressive contexts, in particular under settler colonialism conditions .

**Khaled Elsharkawi** is an accomplished project manager for technology projects internationally, covering a diversity of industries. He holds a Master of Public Administration from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government where he focused on developing a broad range of leadership and analytical skills to initiate and implement change. He also holds a MBA, a Master of Business Information Technology, is a certified Project Management Professional and is a certified trainer and coach in Breakthrough Communications. He has used his education and experience to improve processes in both the private and public sectors and for communities

in need, where his accomplishments in the corporate and public sector projects are paralleled by his commitment to serve communities and volunteer for the greater good. His involvement with the not-for-profit sector includes volunteering with CARE, Greenpeace, Rotary and local organizations. As a democracy advocate, Khaled's thesis on technology-based direct democracy empowered his leadership to steer an international campaign, "Right2Vote", to successfully enable Egyptians abroad to vote.

**Ehab Elgammal** - Ehab has more than 15 years of experience in Engineering, Management Consulting and Banking. Ehab leveraged his Engineering background to the business world via an MBA, where he honed his analytical data-driven approach to provide creative and timely solutions to business problems. His latest venture as an entrepreneur focused on empowering individuals at the base of the pyramid within the sharing-economy.

He is the founder of The Change Incubator working with change makers as they build capacity to navigate complexity and transform the future.

**Ahmad Attia** - Ahmad Attia has served the community through youth programs, mentorship, and wider community engagement as a member of MAC. He is a businessman and entrepreneur who has dedicated his life, professionally and through his volunteerism, to advancing community and social causes. Ahmed was recently appointed to serve as a member of the Peel Police Services board. He is also a board member of the Muslim Council of Peel. With over 15 years of experience, Ahmad currently serves as CEO of both Incisive Strategy and RisQ Consulting where he has demonstrated deep expertise in crisis management, public affairs and risk management. He also gained recognition and respect as a community advocate and human rights activist in Canada and internationally.



**Sara Attia** - Sara Attia is a graduate of the University of Toronto, faculty of Engineering and holds a BSc and MASC in chemical engineering. Sarah spent over 10 years working on providing quality education to students in Egypt as a principle, teacher , and founder of an international school in Cairo, Egypt. Once



back in Canada, Sarah returned to her interest in curriculum development, character education, and community contribution. She is currently developing character education programs for MAC Islamic private schools. Sarah has always had a passion for working with young people in the Muslim community and currently serves as the Director of Youth at the Muslim Association of Canada. The campaign Sarah led in 2015, to free Khaled, served as a building block to QED. QED became Sarah's way to give back to the community that stood by her during her ordeal.



**Fayyaz Baqir** - Fayyaz Baqir is a Development Practitioner. At present he is a visiting professor at University of Ottawa. During the past 3 decades he has been engaged in managing grant programmes for supporting Local Agenda 21. He has advised, researched, taught and written on innovative practices for achieving global development goals through local action. Special

focus of his work has been on poverty alleviation, participatory development and social entrepreneurship.

As part of his work he has worked as Programme Monitoring Officer of Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), National Coordinator of UNDP's small grants programme, Chief Executive Officer of Trust for Voluntary Organizations (TVO), Senior Civil Society Advisor of UN system in Pakistan and served on the Board of Advisors of Ministry of Environment and the Committee for Social Safety Network Policy review of the Government of Pakistan.

He has researched, taught and lectured on innovative participatory development practices at Georgetown University, Harvard University, McGill University, Gothenburg University, Tilburg University, Wellesley College, Pacific University, University of Idaho, Punjab University, National Defence University and Fatima Jinnah Women University.

He serves on the Boards of numerous NGOs in Pakistan and led the process for developing country strategies for Plan International, Water Aid, World Vision and Rural Development Policy Institute in Pakistan. He received award for setting up the most vibrant small grants programme in Pakistan and

knowledge sharing award from UNDP's poverty alleviation practice network for 2 consecutive years.

**Rehana Hashmi** - Rehana Hashmi is a Feminist and human rights defender from Global south. Hashmi's activism has centered on the defense of human rights, especially for women. She started her career as a development specialist in the Hindukush mountain communities; organizing women of diverse sects to come together to improve their livelihoods and engage in decision making side by side with men. Hashmi also created two national networks to support women taking control of their rights. She trained over 25,000 elected women leaders to support their political engagement and formed the largest health worker's network in the private sector to provide services in reproductive health to reach 2 million women. She has worked tirelessly to help victims of domestic violence and women and girls breaking free of religious fundamentalism and forced marriages. She has been actively supporting women human right defenders in exile through Sisters Trust Canada.

## MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24

### PANEL 1



**Dalia Fahmy** - Dr. Dalia Fahmy is Associate Professor of Political Science at Long Island University, a Senior Non-Resident Fellow at the Center for Global Policy in Washington DC, and a Visiting Scholar at the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights & UNESCO Chair at Rutgers University.



**Ruby Dagher** - Ruby Dagher is an international development professional, researcher, consultant and instructor. She has worked in the private sector, the public sector, and academia. She recently completed her PhD in Public Policy (at Carleton University) where she examined the legitimacy of states in post-conflict countries, and particularly the importance

of performance legitimacy acquired through the delivery of basic goods and services. Through her dissertation, Ruby accomplished three aims. First, she developed a theoretical framework based on the theory of performance legitimacy where she distinguishes two extreme post-conflict legitimacy paths. Second, she offered a new methodology to identify and measure the performance legitimacy of states versus that of leaders who hold positions in post-conflict states. Third, she identified the main factors that lead to the two extreme legitimacy paths. Her research focused on four case studies: Lebanon, Afghanistan, Senegal, and South Sudan. Ruby has worked as a program analyst at the Canadian International Development Agency (now Global Affairs Canada), a financial analyst in the financial industry, a post-conflict workshop facilitator, and an evaluator of programs, projects and loans. Her research interests are focused on post-conflict development, the Middle East, fragile states, post-conflict legitimacy, decentralization and state legitimacy, foreign aid policy and donor programming, and the role of civil society in non-Western cultures.



**Esam Omeish** - Dr. Esam Omeish is a Libyan American Surgeon from the Washington DC Metropolitan area. He also helped establish and presided over major Libyan American organizations including Libyan Emergency Task Force, Libyan Council of North America, American Libyan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Center for Libyan American Strategic Studies, Libyan American Public

Affairs Council, and most recently the Libyan American Alliance, supporting democracy and the rule of Law in Libya after Feb 17 revolution. He is a

graduate of Georgetown University with double degrees in Biology and Political Science and a Medical doctorate in 1993.

He is a former candidate for the Virginia State Assembly in the House of Delegates and former member of a statewide commission on Immigration appointed by then Governor of Virginia Tim Kaine. He serves on several boards and national organizations. He has represented American Muslims and Libyan Americans on numerous occasions in the White House, meeting both Presidents Clinton and Obama, in National rallies and political events, and in many media outlets including CNN, MSNBC, FOX, Al-Jazeera, Libyan TV, C-Span, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, National Public Radio, and others.



**Facilitator: Jeremy Wildeman** - Researcher of international relations, critical development studies and human security, Middle East politics and Canadian foreign policy. He has conducted a number of major research studies on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and is addressing the critical research gap on Canada and the Middle East. He has extensive experience as

a practitioner coordinating support in conflict and post-conflict regions of the Balkans and West Asia.

## PANEL 2



**Sarah Leah Whitson** - Sarah Leah Whitson is the incoming Managing Director for Research and Policy at the Quincy Institute (February 2020). Currently, she serves as executive director of Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa Division from 2004 – 2019, overseeing the work of the division in 19 countries, with staff located in 10 countries. She has led dozens of

advocacy and investigative missions throughout the region, focusing on issues of armed conflict, accountability, legal reform, migrant workers, and

human rights. She has published widely on human rights and foreign policy in the Middle East in international and regional media, including The New York Times, Foreign Policy, The Los Angeles Times, and CNN. She appears regularly on Al-Jazeera, BBC, NPR, and CNN. Before joining Human Rights Watch, Whitson worked in New York for Goldman, Sachs & Co. and Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton. She graduated from the University of California, Berkeley and Harvard Law School. Whitson is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and is on the boards of the Artistic Freedom Initiative and Democracy for the Arab World Now. She speaks Armenian and Arabic.



**John Packer** - John Packer is Associate Professor of Law and Director of the Human Rights Research and Education Centre (HRREC) at the University of Ottawa. He was appointed the Inaugural Neuberger-Jesin Professor of International Conflict Resolution in April 2018. Mr. Packer is also an experienced practitioner bringing to the University of Ottawa some 20 years

working for inter-governmental organizations, including in Geneva for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Labour Organisation, and for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights investigating serious human rights violations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma/Myanmar, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detention, forced disappearances, the use of forensic sciences, the use of civil defense forces, and the independence of judges and lawyers throughout the world.



**Mohamed Soltan** - Mohamed Soltan is an Egyptian-American human rights advocate who was a political prisoner in Egypt from August, 2013 to May, 2015. Mohamed was shot, imprisoned, tortured, and sentenced to life in prison on trumped-up and politically motivated charges.

In protest of his unjust detainment by the Egyptian authorities, Mohamed entered into an open-ended hunger-strike

on January 26, 2014. The hunger-strike was supported by a world-wide campaign effort that led to his freedom. The U.S. government intervened at the highest levels and successfully facilitated his release and return to the United States on May 31, 2015. His hunger-strike lasted 489 days.

Since his release, Mohamed has dedicated his life to advocate for freedom, democracy and social justice. UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Labour Organization, and for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights investigating serious human rights violations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma/Myanmar, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detention, forced disappearances, the use of forensic sciences, the use of civil defense forces, and the independence of judges and lawyers throughout the world.



**Facilitator: Chuck Thiessen** - Chuck Thiessen is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University. Dr Thiessen's research has focused on the ethics of international intervention in conflict and war zones, international interventions to prevent violent extremism, and international conflict resolution. His has conducted research in Afghanistan,

Kyrgyzstan, Israel/Palestine, Burkina Faso and Mauritania.

## PANEL 3



**Michele Dunne** - Michele Dunne is the director and a senior fellow in Carnegie's Middle East Program, where her research focuses on political and economic change in Arab countries, particularly Egypt, as well as U.S. policy in the Middle East. She was the founding director of the Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East at the Atlantic Council

from 2011 to 2013 and was a senior associate and editor of the Arab Reform Bulletin at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace from 2006 to 2011



**Peggy Mason** - Peggy Mason's career highlights diplomatic and specialist expertise in the field of international peace and security, with a particular emphasis on the United Nations, where she served as Canada's Ambassador for Disarmament from 1989 to 1995.

Since 1996 Ms. Mason has been involved in many aspects of UN peacekeeping

training, including the development of ground breaking UN principles on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former fighters, the reform of UN arms embargoes and the dramatic evolution of UN peacekeeping in the 21st century. Until 2014, she regularly brought the UN political/diplomatic perspective to a range of UN, NATO and EU training exercises to help prepare military commanders for complex multidisciplinary peace and crisis stabilization operations.

For 10 years Peggy Mason was a Senior Fellow at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA) at Carleton University, where she lectured, participated in training for Iraqi and Kuwaiti diplomats and chaired the Advisory Board of the Canadian Centre for Treaty Compliance (CCTC). She has long been active in a range of Canadian non-governmental organizations engaged in foreign policy, peacebuilding and global governance issues. A graduate and gold medallist of the University of Ottawa Faculty of Common Law, Peggy Mason was inducted into its Honour Society in September 2003. In October of 2019 Peggy Mason was elected Vice-President of the prestigious Canadian Pugwash Group.



**Ghuna Bdiwi** - Syrian lawyer, and currently finishing her PhD at Osgoode Hall Law School – York University. She has been selected by the United Nations Special Envoy to Syria to set on the Syrian Constitutional committee that is tasked to draft the Syrian constitution. Her work concentrates on legal matters related to human rights, criminal accountability, and investigations of war

crimes in Syria. During her professional and academic journey, she received many prestigious awards. She is the recipient of the 2015 International Human Rights Award by the International Center for Human Rights – Canada, the award acknowledged her advocacy work in defending human rights in Syria. Additionally, she received the 2016 John Peters Humphrey Fellowship in International Human Rights from the Canadian Council on International Law, and the 2015 Fellowship from the Nathanson Center on Transnational Human Rights, Crime and Security. She is a fellow with the Canadian Centre for Responsibility to Protect- University of Toronto, and the Centre for Refugees Studies – York University. She has taught many courses in international human rights in Canada and abroad.



**Facilitator: Khaled Elkazaz** - Khaled Al-Qazzaz is the co-founder and board member of Al-Qazzaz Foundation for Education and Development (QED). He is an education and technology consultant. He holds a Masters of Applied Sciences in Mechanical and Industrial Engineering from the University of Toronto (UofT), and pursued a Doctorate of Education in Educational Administration

at Walden University. Khaled is passionate about social change and human rights. In 2005, Khaled moved to Egypt and established a K-12 international school, fulfilling his vision of positive social change through education. In 2012, Khaled served in the first democratically elected government of Egypt, where his focus was on foreign relations, human rights and women's rights. With the military coup in 2013, Khaled, was subject to 18 months of forced disappearance and solitary confinement under severe inhumane



conditions, without charges. After a successful international campaign led by his wife, Sarah, Khaled was freed and the family came back to Canada in August 2016. Two months after, Khaled and Sarah founded and led QED as a way to pay forward the tremendous support they received from Canadians during their ordeal. In 2018 Khaled co-founded Zajel Institute to empower members of the Arab Diaspora who had to leave their homes whether by compulsion or choice

## PANEL 4



**Nihad Awad** - Nihad Awad is the Executive Director and co-founder of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States.

In 1994, Mr. Awad co-founded CAIR in Washington, D.C., which has grown to 34 offices nationwide. Mr. Awad served on the Civil Rights Advisory Panel to the White

House Commission on Aviation Safety and Security, was part of a select group of American Muslim leaders invited by President Bush to join him at a press conference condemning the 9/11 attacks and acts of anti-Muslim intolerance that followed, and he led a delegation to Iraq to seek the release of American journalist Jill Carroll, who was later released unharmed. In 2011 he led a delegation to Iran to lobby for the release of 2 American hikers who had been imprisoned

Mr. Awad has testified before both houses of the U.S. Congress on issues concerning the Muslim community. He is widely recognized as one of the world's most influential Muslim leaders, being cited annually in the Arabian Business "Power 100" and "The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims" list. He has received numerous awards and recognitions, such as the 2015 New Civil Rights Leader from the Los Angeles Times, and Harvard's "Call of Service" Award

He is an authoritative voice for Muslim issues and is frequently interviewed on national and international media such as CNN, BBC World Service, PBS, C-SPAN, NPR, The New York Times, The Washington Post, Voice of America and Al-Jazeera

In addition to his position at CAIR, he is a passionate community organizer who actively works with local and national interfaith leaders and organizations in the interest of promoting positive relations among people of diverse faith communities



**Nadia Abu-Zahra** - Nadia Abu-Zahra is the Joint Chair in Women's Studies at Carleton University and the University of Ottawa. She holds a DPhil in Geography from the University of Oxford, along with an MA from the University of Toronto in Geography, Environment and Health, and a BA from the University of Toronto in International Development and Economics. She is an

Associate Professor in the School of International Development and Global Studies at the University of Ottawa, and a member of the Human Rights Research and Education Centre. She co-facilitates "Community Mobilization in Crisis", a project that co-creates open educational resources with community mobilizers around the world in multiple languages, and supports the use of the resources transnationally to build community mobilizations.

Dr. Abu-Zahra has written on a variety of topics, including gender justice in colonial and conflict situations, and the implications of geographic (im)mobility for education and health. She has a longstanding interest in pedagogy, works closely with university services and research groups in teaching and active, experiential, and community-engaged learning, and was a finalist for the Ottawa Network for Education's Capital Educators' Award.

Her research focuses on the everyday consequences and spaces for agency in situations of crisis and, most recently, on the role of higher education institutions in transforming power relations and opening spaces for healthy and accountable relations. She was honoured to be among the first members of the Reconciliation Committee of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, and was an elected Director on the Federation's Board from 2011 to 2015. In 2017, she was awarded the Faculty of Social Sciences Award for Activities in the Media and the Community.



**Abdallah Aloudah** - Abdullah Alaoudh is a Senior Fellow at the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, part-time adjunct professor at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University, and a fellow at Yaqeen Islamic Institute. He was Research Scholar in Law

and an Islamic Law & Civilization Research Fellow at Yale Law School (2017-2018). He earned his LL.M. and S.J.D. from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, where his dissertation focused on the role of religious institutions in post-revolutionary Arab countries and the transition to democracy. Alaoudh also received his bachelor's degree in Islamic law from Qassim University.



**Facilitator: Muzna Dureid** - a Canada liaison officer for The White Helmets (the winner of an alternative Nobel prize for peace in 2016). She is the founder and coordinator of Women Refugees, not Captives, a campaign that aims to end the practice of forced child marriages in Syrian refugee camps. she's a co-founder and board member of Syrian women's political movement first political

movement to engage Syrian women on politics and peace talks. Dureid is the founder of Indigenous – Refugees movement is a safe space for women and series workshops for Youth on lessons learned between both groups which aim to build stronger bonds in Canada by learning the truth and resilience. She is a winner of Canadian Excellence in global Women and Children's Health award for the young category of 2019. She is the recipient of The Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers annual award for outstanding Advocacy on behalf of the human rights of Refugees.

