

Latin America and Israel

The Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy hosted the Foreign Minister of El Salvador and the ambassadors of Latin American countries at a conference on "Peace and Democracy in El Salvador"

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The Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy last week hosted a symposium as part of the Herzliya Forum for Diplomacy, with the participation of the Foreign Minister of El Salvador, **Marisol Argueta de Barillas**, the ambassadors to Israel of 17 Latin American countries, and former Foreign Minister and faculty member of the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy, **Prof. Shlomo Ben-Ami**.



Ambassadors to Israel of THE Latin American countries

The hall was decked out with the flags of Latin America, and was filled to capacity with students attending the symposium, which dealt with the subject of "Latin America and Israel - Political and Economic Developments". The Foreign Minister of El Salvador thanked IDC Herzliya for the unique opportunity of

talking about the democracy in her country: "El Salvador has a poor image in the world with regard to the strength of its democracy, since most people still see it as a war-torn country". She related to the civil war that took place in El Salvador during the 1980s, only ending after the end of the Cold War: "This year we celebrated 16 years since the end of our civil war which, alas, succeeded in bringing economic and social progress in El Salvador to a halt". According to the Foreign Minister, "Amos Oz said that to achieve a peace agreement is a real option in life because it allows choice".



The Foreign Minister of El Salvador, Marisol Argueta de Barillas

The greatest achievement of El Salvador, the Foreign Minister said, was the peace agreement signed in 1992, which gave the country the political and



economic stability that allowed human rights to flourish.



Prof. Alex Mintz, Dean of the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy

Another important element pointed out by the Foreign Minister was the clemency and forgiveness between the parties: "Our country's lack of stability was not due to foreign elements, but internal elements. For the agreement to succeed, we had to understand that living together in harmony is vital to us. To make progress, we had to make a mental change." The Foreign Minister said that the mental change required intensive work by the government to persuade the people, who until a few years ago had wanted to kill each other, that only it was only forgiveness, absolution and cooperation that would enable the country to move forward to democratic, economic and political stability. "In less than two decades", she said with no little pride, "we have changed from a country embroiled in a hopeless war to a country with freedom, democracy and a stable economy."

In the Israeli context, the Foreign Minister said that regional integration is vital to the success of any political process, and therefore she encourages peace initiatives such as the process that began in Annapolis: "**Moshe Dayan** said that to make peace, you have to

talk not with friends but with enemies". There is an essential need for dialogue, the Foreign Minister summed up, saying that she hopes that Israel will achieve a regional peace agreement with its neighbors.



Prof. Shlomo Ben-Ami, a former Foreign Minister and today a member of the faculty of the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy

Prof. Uriel Reichman, president of IDC Herzliya, said that the aim of IDC is to educate the future generations in outstanding leadership and national security: "National security involves not only creating military strength, but also creating strong foreign relations that can give us political strength." Prof. Reichman emphasized that Israel has to extend a hand to the countries of South America, and create friendship with these countries. Examples of the warm relations between the countries can be found in the numbers of Israeli travelers visiting South America, and in the fact that this year there was excessive demand for Spanish studies at IDC, which had to turn away some of the applicants. Another example of the importance of creating good relations with the countries of Latin America can be found in the unhesitating signature of the continent on 29 of November: "We need to encourage friendship between our younger generations and the young people of other Latin countries, since



these are the generations that will lead the world in the future."

Prof. Alex Mintz, Dean of the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy, spoke about the Iranian challenge. According to him, this is a tangible threat that should not be taken lightly. Furthermore, the danger of the spread of nuclear bombs to non-governmental entities should give the decision-makers sleepless nights: "In addition to these dangers, it must be remembered that Hamas and Hezbollah have not stopped acting against Israel". There are also political opportunities that the state of Israel should not ignore: "The geopolitical region has changed. The Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia, are more worried about the Iranian nuclear bomb and Islamic radicalism than Israel is." In other words, Saudi Arabia is more interesting to Wall Street than Tel Aviv. Prof. Mintz emphasized the Arab initiative as being particularly groundbreaking: "The Arab initiative contains a new conceptual step in the political process. No more bilateral negotiations in which Israel gives up a great deal of land for peace with one country, but instead, two-sided negotiations in which Israel receives a fitting return, in the form of peace and normalization with all the Arab countries."

Prof. Mintz said that there are many people at the School of Government who are experts in the field of diplomacy and conflict resolution, such as Dr Boaz Ganor and Prof. Aharon Barak, who study the subject in order to meet challenges that face the country. Prof. Mintz turned to the Latin American ambassadors seated in the hall and asked them to act against Iran with economic sanctions, and to support the peace process.

Prof. Shlomo Ben-Ami, a former Foreign Minister and today a member of the faculty of the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy, said: "They say that peace is not just the end of war, but the beginning of full normalization. In the situation in our region today, I am also ready to settle for just the end of the conflict, without normalization, at least in the immediate future." According to him, there is a difference between the successful political process that took place in El Salvador, and the political process in our area, where it appears that the parties have exhausted all possibilities of achieving a final agreement.

Prof. Ben-Ami said that one of the main factors for the success of the process in El Salvador was the regional support and mediation: "The intensive intervention of the countries of Central America, headed by Costa Rica, whose president was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, succeeded in creating the conditions for signing the peace agreement". Prof. Ben Ami said that the chances of regional involvement between Israel and the Palestinians was very low, since Israel tends to look to the west, while the Arab world prefers to keep away from its influence. In addition, while Israel maintains a tense relationship with the United Nations and the Security Council, these two bodies did intervene in a clear and desirable manner in El Salvador. Professor Ben-Ami also said that whereas in El Salvador, there was a conscious change and forgiveness between the warring parties, the chances of this happening in our region were slim because of the special sensitivity of the conflict. At the same time, the way to peace doesn't necessarily have to be through forgiveness: "In order to achieve peace,



it is not necessary to love one another, just to live in peace".

Prof. Ben-Ami said that one of the lessons that he learned from the peace process in which he was involved in 2000 was that the problem is not a technical one of returning territories and refugees, but is more fundamental: "Our conflict is sensitive and unique, since it also involves history that does not belong only to the Palestinian people, but also to all the other Arab nations. We cannot sign a stable agreement without involving all the global players: the USA, the United Nations, and in particular, the Arab League."

"Perhaps with **Barack Obama** as President of the United States", Prof. Ben-Ami summed up, "we will be able to achieve a stable peace with all the Arab nations".

Later in the evening, a discussion was held with the participation of the ambassadors of the Latin American countries, in which serious allegations were made against the Israeli media and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Among other things, it was claimed that the Israeli media does not cover important issues in Latin America, but only deals with matters that are in some way connected with Israel or the Jewish community. The ambassador of Chile, Ms Irene Bronfman, noted that "Israelis only look at themselves, and are not interested in anything else."

In addition, the ambassadors of Costa Rica and Chile complained that they were not invited to events by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and were not able to meet with Israel's Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni, or senior members of the ministry. The ambassador of Costa Rica, Ms Naomi Baruch, claimed that "they only turn to us when they want

to influence us to vote in favor of Israel in the UN committees". She also added that "there is no balance between the number of visits by senior Latin American figures to Israel and the number of reciprocal visits to Latin America by senior Israelis. We have a lot to offer Israel, but we are ignored. We are part of a developing region, of increasing importance in the international arena, and we need to expand the cooperation between us."

The deputy director general of the Latin American desk at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dorit Shavit, who was present at the symposium, related to these allegations and said: "We are making an effort to change the situation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is working on increasing cooperation, initiating meetings, and also making many visits to the countries of Latin America."