



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

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U.S. – ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE SUPPORTS ARAB AMERICAN DAY

Annual Event, Hosted by the League of Arab States and the Council of Arab Ambassadors, Draws Nearly 600 Business Leaders, Diplomats, and Arab American Luminaries

Washington, DC – The National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC) recently supported the fourth annual Arab American Day, held under the auspices of the League of Arab States and the Council of Arab Ambassadors in Washington, DC. Held at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, the event drew nearly 600 participants, including numerous business leaders, Arab diplomats, and such Arab-American luminaries as Ralph Nader, the world's best known consumer safety advocate. Arab American Day was the first public event organized under the leadership of the Arab League's new Chief Representative to the United States, H.E. Salah Ahmed Hamed Sarhan, who began his tenure in Washington, DC in mid-November.



H.E. Salah Ahmed Hamed Sarhan,
Chief Representative of the Arab League
to the United States.

“It was a great privilege for our Chamber to support this important event, as lead sponsor, once again,” said David Hamod, President & CEO of NUSACC. “We were especially pleased that this year’s gathering focused on young business leaders – entrepreneurs – who are playing a critical role in generating economic growth and productive jobs throughout the Arab world.”

Ambassador Sarhan’s Remarks

Ambassador Sarhan began his welcome remarks by paying homage to the victims and families of the recent attack in San Bernardino, California. He said, “No kind or amount of grievance can justify these horrific crimes against innocent people.” He also pointed out that in the aftermath of this tragedy, the Arab American community is facing



David Hamod, President & CEO of the National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce.

a familiar challenge. “Members of the Arab community, Muslims and Christians alike, were targeted by commentators and seekers of political office, with comments which made [community members] feel increased levels of anxiety, even fear.”

He continued, “Some of this commentary supports racial profiling of Arabs and Muslims in

America, conflating Islam and terrorism Let me state the obvious: Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance, and those who commit these shocking crimes in the name of Islam are nothing more than evil criminals. Muslims and non-Muslims in the Arab world coexisted as one community for over 1,400 years. Islam, as all other religions, condemns these barbaric and savage attacks.”

Ambassador Sarhan highlighted the creation of Arab American Day as a way of honoring the contributions of Americans of Arab descent. “I am a newcomer to your great country,” he said, “but from what I have learned, Arab Americans have every reason to be proud of how they have served their new country in every field and endeavor. You are a tremendous asset to your country, America, as well as the countries from which you descended.”

In the spirit of celebrating youth, innovation, and entrepreneurship, he concluded, “I want to thank all those young and promising volunteers who put today’s Forum together for the first time, bringing together 30 speakers and experts with the aim to further discussions on challenges and opportunities between our two worlds.”

Preparations for this year’s Forum and Gala were overseen by Ambassador Sarhan’s Deputy, Mr. Sameh Alfonse, who serves as Minister Counselor and Deputy Chief of Mission at the Arab League office in Washington, DC.

The Council of Arab Ambassadors

H.E. Antoine Chedid, Lebanon’s Ambassador to the United States, offered remarks on behalf of the Council of Arab Ambassadors. After serving as Lebanon’s top diplomat in the United States for more than eight years, during which he traveled extensively across America, Ambassador Chedid is preparing to return home. He was recently named “[Ambassador of the Year](#)” by the National U.S. – Arab Chamber of Commerce.



H.E. Antoine Chedid, Lebanese Ambassador to the United States.



Ralph Nader, the world's best known consumer safety advocate, gave a very spirited speech about injustices in America, as well as warm remarks about his upbringing as a proud American of Arab descent.

experience with you how this can bring out the best in all of us. Our goal is to inspire the Arabs, the Arab-Americans, and the general public with Arab success stories across a variety of sectors and to provide space for Arab and Arab-Americans entrepreneurs to share their resources, stories and challenges."

"This Arab - American celebration tonight will be the cornerstone for many, many more to come," Ambassador Chedid concluded. "It is much needed at these particularly difficult times to bridge our differences and to focus on the many positive aspects of our relationship in order to unite forces to fight our common enemies: Intolerance and terrorism."

"The Arab presence in the United States is as old as any other ethnic group," he suggested, when people from "different Arab countries came to these great United States of America hoping to live the American dream . . . America's promise of freedom attracted those early immigrants from the Arab world; they came with empty pockets, but rich in spirit. They decided to build their new towers in America and you, the new generation of Arab-Americans or Americans of Arab descent, should continue to do the same."

In this same inclusive spirit, he said, Arab American Day "creates a space free from religious and political influence that welcomes and encourages Arab-Americans and Americans to meet, socialize, and share the Arab world's unique culture and heritage We want Arab American Day to build bridges between diverse communities and cultures."

He continued, "Our Council of Arab Ambassadors in Washington and the Office of the League of Arab States feel proud to celebrate tonight the power of business and to



Some of the VIPs attending the Arab American Day event included (from left to right): Sameh Alfonse, Minister-Counselor and Deputy Chief Representative, Arab League; Andrew Gelfuso, VP, Ronald Reagan Building & International Trade Center; Ambassador Salah Sarhan, Chief Representative of the Arab League; Lebanese Ambassador Antoine Chedid; David Thorne, Senior Advisor to Secretary of State John Kerry; Activist Ralph Nader; and David Hamod, President & CEO of NUSACC.

Entrepreneurship Forum

The Entrepreneurship Forum brought together key stakeholders to discuss ways to improve Arab innovation and the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Panels included such topics as:

- Trends in Entrepreneurship in the Middle East and North Africa
- Behind the Scenes of Failure, Success, & Opportunity
- The Role of the Private and Public Sectors in Facilitating Entrepreneurship
- What's a Good Idea? Moving from Ideation to Creation
- A Look Forward: A Roadmap for Action



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The Forum featured speakers and panelists, from the MENA region and around the United States, including senior officials from the U.S. Government: Hon. David H. Thorne, Senior Advisor to the U.S. Secretary of State; Mr. Thomas Lersten, Director of Global Entrepreneurship at the U.S. State Department; Mr. Thomas Debass, Deputy Special Representative for Global Partnerships at the U.S. State Department; Mr. Bert Kaufman, Senior Adviser to the Secretary of State's Office for Business Liaison and Co-Director of the Presidential Ambassadors for Global Entrepreneurship initiative; Mr. Joshua Mandell, Senior Adviser for Innovation and Competitiveness at the U.S. Department of Commerce; and Ms. Sarah Heck, Director of Global Engagement at the National Security Council.

For more information about panel discussions that took place during the Entrepreneurship Forum, please click [here](#) for a related story in the December 17 issue of *The Washington Diplomat*.



All Photos by Samia AbdelWahed.

H.E. Salah Ahmed Hamed Sarhan (center), Chief Representative of the Arab League to the United States, flanked by H.E. Antoine Chedid (left), Lebanese Ambassador to the United States, and David Hamod (right), NUSACC President & CEO.

The National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce, widely regarded as the voice of American business in the Arab world, is in touch with business communities across the United States and serves as the U.S. point of contact for the national chambers of commerce in the 22 Arab nations. On a daily basis, NUSACC works closely with leaders throughout the Arab world, as well as high-level decision makers in the U.S. business community, public policy research centers, multilateral institutions, nongovernmental organizations, media, and the U.S. Government.

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