

## Speaker's Bureau Series

# Of Physical and Regulatory Walls



Mr. Munir Nuseibah is a lecturer and Coordinator of the Human Rights Clinic at the Faculty of Law at Al-Quds University.

The clinic was launched in September 2006 in order to give the law students at Al-Quds University a chance to study the Palestinian Question in international law, while at the same time being trained in practical human rights advocacy skills by some of the top human rights lawyers in Palestine.

During his visit to Ottawa in August, the National Council on Canada-Arab Relations facilitated meetings with the International Development Research Centre

(IDRC), the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (DFAIT) as well as community groups and organizations.

Mr. Nuseibah spoke about the legal status of Palestinian residents in Jerusalem, the effects of both the physical separation "wall," built by Israel, as well as the "regulatory wall" (i.e. the regulations and laws Israel has adopted to minimize the number of Palestinians in Jerusalem, such as family reunification laws). He also suggested that the international community does not need to wait until a political solution is in place to press Israel to adhere to international law and address human rights violations.

NCCAR is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to building bridges of understanding and cooperation between Canada and the Arab world. If you would like more information about our work please contact us at:



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*NCCAR is twenty-two years old this year. Thanks to successive board directors, members and staff, NCCAR has become a strong and respected Canadian voice. A word from NCCAR President Bahija Réghaï*

## Opening the door to better relations

Relations with the Arab world are being challenged daily, as the international community and human rights seem impotent in solving the crises and on-going suffering of peoples in the Arab world. Our work is therefore more vital than ever, especially as mounting concerns are raised about the direction the world is taking and the way it is being led.

At NCCAR, we decided to increase our efforts in addressing the lack of knowledge and perception of all things Arab, through cultural and educational activities. Accordingly, during this past quar-

ter, NCCAR had the pleasure of hosting Dr. Adel Iskandar, visiting scholar at Georgetown University, who is an expert on Middle East media. We also hosted Mr. Munir Nuseibah from AlQuds University in Jerusalem. Both scholars gave outstanding presentations to officials at DFAIT.

During the Summer, a downtime in Ottawa, NCCAR continued to engage Canadian officials and network with NGOs with similar and/or common interests. We also met His Majesty King Abdullah *Cont'd p.4*



## Women on the Rise

NCCAR hosted Dr. Rima Khalaf Hunadia when she visited Ottawa in September. The main objective of the visit was to provide an overview on the latest report, "Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World," issued by the UNDP regarding Arab Human Development. The report aims to spread more understanding of international development issues and policies related to the Middle East in general and more specifically on policies concerning Arab women. *Cont'd p.5*



## For the Love of People

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*NCCAR Young Professionals International participant Grace Wu shares her internship experience in Egypt working with asylum seekers*

*Since 1999, NCCAR has sent dozens of Canadians of all backgrounds to take part in six-month internships in the Arab world.*

*During their time abroad, the interns worked at organizations such as the Arab League, the UNDP, Daily Star, Jordan Times, Cairo Times, Egypt Today and numerous other publications and institutions.*

*The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada provided most of the funding for the Young Professionals International program implemented by the National Council on Canada-Arab Relations.*

*However, earlier this year, the program was cut. Grace was among the last cohort of participants. Here is her story:*

I went to Cairo in 2006 with two goals. First, since I was going to be interning as a Legal Advisor for Africa Middle East Refugee Assistance (AMERA), a non-governmental Legal Aid organization that advocates for refugees in obtaining refugee status with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, I wanted to gain more understanding of the refugee issues

occurring in the Middle East and North Africa region. Second, I wanted to delve into a culture and region of the world I had only ever read about in my politics classes and seen through the eyes of western media.

On my very first day, a group of Egyptian friends whisked me away to the ancient Khan el Khalili where I learned about bargaining, Egyptian humour, and the real meaning of “Maalesh.” I loved it all; the liveliness, the vibrancy, the joyousness.

Although working with refugees and hearing their testimonies of persecution and the excessive hardships they face even after escaping persecution was always painful and infuriating, I have learned a great deal from them and feel privileged to have served them.

Near the end of my internship, a taxi driver said to me, after discovering that I worked in refugee rights, “I love people who love people!” To me, this encapsulates my Cairo experience: it welcomed me with open arms, at times suffocated me, but in the end, taught me to love its people.

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Speaker's Bureau Series

## Al-Jazeera: Phenomenon of the Arab World

By Heba Awad

Dr. Adel Iskandar, Middle East media scholar, media reform activist and the co-author of the seminal book *Al-Jazeera* gave an analytical talk on the Arab satellite station Al-Jazeera entitled “*Al-Jazeera Phenomenon of the Arab World*,” at Carleton University on July 6<sup>th</sup>. The event was funded and hosted by NCCAR.

Growing out of a failed BBC Arabic news channel venture in the Arab region, Al-Jazeera is a Qatar-based pan-Arab Satellite Television station that was launched in 1996, becoming the first 24 hour Arab news channel in the Middle East region, after the MBC. “It is not surprising that very soon after its founding, the station was described as the CNN of the Arab World,” says Iskandar.

Soon after, Al-Jazeera acquired a controversial reputation. Some hailed it as a thorn in the side of every dictator in the Arab region, the U.S. government, and Israel, while others called it a sensation-ally graphic media outlet.

“Because of its distance from regimes in the region,” explains Iskandar, “it is capable of projecting information that would otherwise be deemed as politically inappropriate or taboo.”

In fact, Al-Jazeera’s critique of Arab political regimes, especially monarchical regimes in the region, has received criticisms. “About 500 complaints from the 22 Arab governments in the region have been made to Al-Jazeera protesting its coverage of sensitive material deemed politically inappropriate,” says Iskandar.

Exclusively funded by its founder, Qatar’s emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Al-Jazeera enjoys the unique position of a global satellite channel free of the direct control of any government in the Middle East.

“Prior to Al-Jazeera, investigative journalism was rarely televised due to the complicity of national broadcasters with local regimes,” Iskandar explains. “Al-Jazeera, however, operates like an ad hoc political party to many of the existing governments.” Further, its relationship with the government of Qatar is defined by Sheikh Hamad’s ending of media censorship in the state of Qatar, which was effected by his abolition of the Ministry of Information, mainly responsible for censorship.

Still, one question on the minds of many audience members attending Mr. Iskandar’s talk was what specific role the Arab satellite channel plays in changing the current political climate in the Middle East. Asked by an audience member whether Al-Jazeera can be seen as the mobilizing force of Arab democratic governments, Iskandar replied that “Al-Jazeera has done what I think is the first step in accomplishing a more participatory approach to politics which is open discourse and free press.”

However, continues Iskandar, “News is news and politics is politics. Al-Jazeera as a news broadcaster has activated and mobilized audiences, but it can’t do much beyond that.” Despite the inevitable limitations of journalism generally and broadcasting news stations like Al-Jazeera, specifically, in the words of Dr. Iskandar, Al-Jazeera has nonetheless become a social movement in and of itself, reproducing “Pan Arabism.”

# Ontario Community Project Launched

In July 2007, the National Council on Canada-Arab Relations received funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to create, by June 2008, a network of organizations to serve the Arab-Canadian communities in Ontario.

The network seeks to improve awareness amongst Arab-Canadians about services available to them, and organizations that provide these services, and to increase Arab-Canadian participation in these groups.

The Ontario Arab Communities Project is a Non-Political initiative that focuses on the capacity building of Arab-Canadian Organizations within the Ontario Community. The project will also enable Arab-Canadian community organizations build links, strengthen their

bases, facilitate the flow of information amongst them and enhance their capabilities for better representation and greater visibility within Ontario.

Another goal of this project is to help Arab-Canadian communities build and strengthen bridges amongst their constitutive elements, regardless of their religious, political or social affiliation.

It will also seek to attract and recruit volunteers within the different community groups across the province.

NCCAR will be reaching out to organizations across the province to take part in this initiative. If your group would like to take part, please phone: 613-238-3795 and/or email: [nccar@nccar.ca](mailto:nccar@nccar.ca)

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## Speaker's Bureau



NCCAR's Speaker's Bureau regularly hosts international experts to speak with Canadians about foreign policy issues pertaining to the Arab world.

Below are the speakers who took part in the summer series:

Dr. Riyad Mansour,  
UN Palestinian Permanent  
Observer  
Ottawa, June 2007

Dr. Adel Iskandar,  
"Al-Jazeera: Phenomenon of  
the Arab World"  
Ottawa, July 2007

Munir Nuseibah,  
Lecturer at Al-Quds University  
Ottawa, August 2007

Dr. Rima Khalaf Hunaidi  
Chairperson of the Advisory  
Board of the Arab Human Development Report (AHDR)  
"Towards the Rise of Women  
in the Arab World"  
Ottawa, September 2007



Every year, NCCAR selects Arab-Canadian students to participate in six-week internships with MPs in their Parliamentary offices. This is one participant's experience.

# Canadian Politics 101

By Christine Bro

My work on Parliament Hill has undoubtedly been an enriching experience that I benefited from immensely. It has introduced me to the fast-paced environment of the formal Canadian political process, and provided me with tangible professional skills.

I was constantly met with new challenges, which I embraced wholeheartedly as an opportunity to learn and grow. My work in Alexa McDonough's office, who was the NDP's Foreign Affairs and International Development critic, was particularly interesting for me since my field of study focuses on Middle East politics. The work I undertook inside and outside this office has refined my analytical and research skills significantly and expanded my knowledge of foreign affair issues as well as Canadian domestic politics.

Sadly enough, I have also been introduced to the reality of realpolitik, a game in which politicians are interested in scoring political points rather than putting into practice the ideal principles that I subscribe to. Question Period at times seemed like a comical show, where the wittiest and smartest comment won rather than those that focused on substance.

Working for an opposition member has given me the chance to see what goes on when a party is not in power, which is both encouraging and frustrating. Realistically speaking, the opposition parties do not have real hope of pushing forward their agenda in a majority government, no matter how genuine it may be, since the government effectively controls what does or does not happen.

On a more uplifting note, without having opposition parties that maintain effective pressure on the ruling party, Canada would not have, nor have been able to maintain, the great social services we enjoy today, such as universal healthcare, just to name one. The fact that a minority Conservative government is in power has given smaller parties like the NDP more clout and leverage to hold the government accountable.

Finally, I have seen first hand the positive impact that one politician can have in bringing about positive and effective change on a small scale and for individuals.

*Cont'd on p.5*

# Professor Abdullah Obeid

By Heba Awad

We live in a world where fostering an understanding between different cultures is crucial and Dr. Abdallah Obeid has dedicated most of his life to doing just that.

Born and raised in Lebanon, Dr. Obeid fled the violent clashes of the Lebanese Civil war with his new wife and came to Canada seeking refuge in 1976.

Initially, Dr. and Mrs. Obeid had hopes of returning to their home country but by the time the war ended in 1990, the Obeids, had become too attached to their new life and chose to remain in Canada.

During the early years of his life in Canada, Dr. Obeid noticed that despite Canada's warm acceptance of different ethnic groups, Canadians understood very little about Arabic culture.

"They don't know about Arabic civilization," said Dr. Obeid. "As Arabs, we have much to be proud of. We need to educate others about our people's history and to keep our culture alive."

Dr. Obeid, a founding member of the Arab Canadian University Graduates Association (ACUGA) and a member of the Lebanese Canadian Chamber of Commerce, has done precisely that. By founding an Arabic studies program at the Uni-



versity of Ottawa in 1982, he set out to educate Canadians about the history, culture and lives of one of the most populous ethnic groups.

"We started Arabic studies at the University of Ottawa in '82 with 25 students, and now we have over 650 students in Arabic studies and that number is growing," he said.

With its modestly growing success Dr. Obeid was able to create a Minor in Arabic studies last year, branching out with classes that cover not only the language, but culture, history, building of the civilization and even a course dedicated to Arab philosophers.

One of the main issues the established professor is set on tackling is Huntington's infamous theory of the "Clash of Civilizations".

"Civilizations can't grow in vacuums as Huntington would have us believe," he said. "They learn from each other, compete, contribute and evolve with each other. I tell my students to completely ignore that theory."

Dr. Obeid himself had little trouble transitioning into his new environment. Living by his motto: "When in Rome, do as the Romans" he set out to find a comfortable balance between his Arab values and Canadian culture.

Professor Obeid hopes to create a Major in the program next year, working his way up to his goal of forming the first Arabic degree at Ottawa University.

key policy-forming positions, and at the same time, showcase and help politicians better understand Arab-Canadian diversity.

We have an exciting program of activities for the remainder of this year including a concert by a major Arab musician in early October, and various other cultural events. These events will help promote better appreciation of the Arab world and its rich cultural diversity, and consequently better understanding of issues that are important to many Canadians, including Canadians of Arab background.

I would like to thank you for your continued support without which we would not be able to undertake and carry successfully our much needed activities.

## Canadian Politics

Cont'd from P.1

Working on Parliament Hill, however, is not only about learning the intricacies of the Canadian political process. I have discovered that one's internship experience essentially comes down to what the individual makes of it.

What made my internship with Ms. McDonough particularly valuable was that I was able to treat it not just as work, but as a learning experience. My time here has taught me as much about myself as it did the Canadian political process; significantly contributing to both my intellectual and political maturation as well as my personal refinement. To make my experience more fruitful, I tried to attend as many events around



Lina Khatib (Left), Christine Bro (Centre), and Elham Ismail (Right) were NCCAR's 2007 Parliamentary Interns

the Hill that I was permitted to and I did not miss any occasion to meet new people and discover the hidden charm of Ottawa.

I will conclude by saying that my experience did not make me a cynic, but

rather inspired me to work harder and get involved on all levels, whether in the government or through grassroots organizing, and for this, I truly appreciated and thoroughly enjoyed each moment of my internship experience.

## Women on the Rise

Cont'd from P.1

In her talk, Dr. Hunadi covered issues such as the worsening human rights violations in Arab countries, levels of well being, use of human capabilities, the Arab Women's Movement: Struggles and Experiences, the Societal Context of the State of Women and others.

Dr. Hunaidi, the chairperson of the Advisory Board of the Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) and the principal architect of the series, also chairs the UN Global Democracy Fund Advisory Board, and is a Trustee of the American University of Beirut.

Between September 2000 and February 2006, she served as Assistant Secretary-General and Director, Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS), at the United Nations Development Programme

(UNDP).

Under her leadership, the Regional Bureau launched the AHDR series, the first issue of which, entitled "Creating Opportunities for Future Generations", appeared in July 2002 and received the 2003 Prince Claus Award in "recognition of exceptional achievements in the field of culture and development".

The second report, on "Building A Knowledge Society", came out in October 2003 and the third, "Towards Freedom in the Arab World", was published in April 2005. The latter received the prestigious King Hussein Leadership Prize, which annually recognizes individuals, groups and institutions that have "demonstrated exceptional leadership in their efforts to advocate for and promote sustainable development, equity, human rights, tolerance and cross-cultural understanding, and peace".

In 2005, the League of Arab States honoured her with "the Most Distinguished Arab Woman in the Field of International Organizations" award. Dr. Hunaidi has pioneered important regional initiatives on Arab education, knowledge acquisition and economic growth. Before joining UNDP, she was Deputy Prime Minister of Jordan where, as head of the ministerial economic team, she promoted the drive for economic reform in Jordan while simultaneously working on a package for building human capabilities, alleviating human poverty and strengthening social safety nets. She was Minister of Planning and Minister of Industry and Trade; and a Senator in the Upper House of the Jordanian Parliament. Dr. Hunaidi has a degree in Economics from the American University of Beirut, and holds an MA in Economics and a Doctorate in Systems Science from Portland State University.



NCCAR President Bahija Réghaï

## Opening Doors

Cont'd from p.1

of Jordan and attended the address he gave during his visit to Canada, in the presence of Prime Minister Harper.

We have been able to continue, through community fundraising, our Parliamentary Internship program that places young Canadians of Arab background with members of Parliament for six weeks. These educational programs for youth are important as they enable students to familiarize themselves with the political scene and help them later gain employment into