And We Still Rise: Transforming U.S. Policy Towards a Just Middle East

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In its recognition of the inherent value of the voices of women within peacemaking dialogue and the grassroots movements that inspire social and political change, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) hosted a summit in an effort to highlight the voices and work of women peacemakers within Israel and Palestine. Entitled And Still We Rise: Transforming U.S. Policy Towards a Just Middle East, the summit was held June 17-19, 2018 in Washington, D.C., and featured multi-faith women whose civic participation and efforts to mobilize the women within their communities sit at the intersection of culture and religion. From facilitating dialogue groups, to creating podcasts, to opening yoga studios to address the trauma within their communities, these women participants have demonstrated a tireless effort to explore new perspectives on women’s rights within the Middle East and create new spaces within these perspectives to actively engage in creative peacemaking.

This paper will analyze the summit gathering and the contributions of the women who participated. The summit served as a platform of recognition of the strength of these individual contributions, as well as the power of combining their voices in a collective movement. While there have been summits conducted on peacemaking within the context of Israel and Palestine and the Middle East in the past, they have focused on highlighting the voices of mostly male leaders within the region. This summit served as a means of engaging the female leaders and highlighting their unique voices. Participants were American Israelis from the Messianic Jewish community, women representing the minority of Palestinian citizens of Israel, Palestinian Christians, and American authors representing leadership roles within the space of international development and research regarding this particular region. It is important for the unique contributions of women in peacebuilding to be considered and better understood in light of the many sectors within civil society where contributions by women peacebuilders are making a difference.

During And Still We Rise, participants engaged in four days of discussion to share personal stories, learned from one another’s insight and experience, identified personal and community assets and resources, and encouraged and challenged one another in the work for justice in Israel and Palestine. The summit served as a safe space for open discussion that provided participants the space to wrestle with the challenges they face and to commit to advocacy for human and civil rights for the Palestinian people and explore the tools available to effectively advocate on behalf of peace and security for Israelis, Palestinians, and all people in the Middle East. This paper will identify the different components of time with the Middle East delegates and how the exercises, integration of spiritual activities, embodiment, and networking the participants engaged in served as effective contributions to expanding the efficacy of the impact of the peacebuilding efforts of participants and their broader communities.