



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

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U.S. – ARAB CHAMBER SUPPORTS FIFTH ANNUAL ARAB AMERICAN DAY, WHICH FOCUSES ON THE ROLE OF ARAB WOMEN

***300 Business Leaders and Diplomats Attend Event That
Celebrates Americans of Arab Descent***

***In Keynote Remarks, NUSACC Co-Chairman Observes that “All
Arab Americans are Part of the Rich Tapestry that
Constitutes our Great Nation”***

Washington, DC – For the fifth year in a row, the National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC) supported Arab American Day, held under the auspices of the League of Arab States and the Council of Arab Ambassadors in Washington, DC. The December 5 conference and reception at the U.S. Institute of Peace drew nearly 300 participants, including numerous business leaders, Arab diplomats, and prominent Arab Americans.

NUSACC served as the Lead Sponsor for this year’s event. Noted H.E. Salah Sarhan, Arab League Ambassador to the United States, “I want to thank the National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce, not only for being the lead sponsor for this evening’s event, but for its partnership throughout the year. The Arab League appreciates the hard work that the Chamber does on a daily basis to promote even better commercial ties between our member states and the United States. I also want to thank the Chairman of NUSACC’s Board of Directors, Mr. Don De Marino, for joining us tonight, and for his service.”



H.E. Salah Sarhan, Arab League Ambassador to the United States (Photo credit: Samia Abdel Wahed)

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In his keynote remarks, NUSACC Co-Chairman [Don De Marino](#) noted, “Arab American Day is a time to celebrate the positive influence that Americans of Arab descent have had on our country and to praise the strength that comes from diversity.” He continued, “All Arab Americans are part of the rich tapestry that constitutes our great nation. NUSACC is proud to once again be the Lead Sponsor of this celebration.”

De Marino observed that “NUSACC is America’s longest serving organization dedicated to promoting U.S.-Arab business, and we pride ourselves on our ability to serve as a commercial bridge between the United States and the Arab world. Our Chamber is deeply committed to its core mission of strengthening U.S.-Arab relationships through mutually beneficial trade and investment.”



Don De Marino, NUSACC Co-Chairman
(Photo credit: Samia Abdel Wahed)

De Marino expressed the Chamber’s appreciation to the Arab League for its partnership, and he praised the League’s Chief Representative in Washington, H.E. Ambassador Salah Sarhan, for his leadership and support. Ambassador Sarhan is an Honorary Member of the Chamber’s Board of Directors.

“It was a great privilege for our Chamber to support this important event once again,” said [David Hamod](#), President & CEO of NUSACC. “The Chamber deeply appreciates our longstanding relationship with the League of Arab States, and we are honored to be the only business entity in the United States that is officially recognized and sanctioned by the Arab League.” Hamod concluded, “NUSACC is especially pleased that two of the three corporate sponsors of the event – Etihad and Black & Veatch – are Platinum Plus members of our Chamber.”

Remarks by Arab League Ambassador

H.E. Salah Sarhan, Arab League Ambassador to the United States, noted, “The Arab American community is a source of pride and a wealth of talent. It is the engine that keeps this dynamic Arab American relationship moving forward.” Recognizing the resilience of Arab women, he said, “I want to take this opportunity to salute, recognize, and express gratitude to Arab women and girls who remain steadfast in the fight against the systematic violence they face daily as a result of conflict.” Sarhan emphasized the Arab League’s strong commitment to eliminating violence against women, stating, “The Arab League considers the issue of violence against women and girls in the Arab world as a major obstacle in achieving gender equality.”



Ambassador Kristie Kenney, Counselor,
U.S. Department of State
(Photo credit: Samia Abdel Wahed)

This event, Sarhan also noted, served to enhance the historic link between the Arab League and the U.S. Government. He congratulated President-elect Donald Trump and expressed his hope for the success of the incoming administration. “We look forward to the continued global leadership of the United States and to enhancing the long and solid Arab-American relations.”

Remarks by U.S. Department of State

Ambassador Kristie Kenney, Counselor, expressed her deep appreciation for the diversity that makes America strong, citing “those who have come from other places to lend their voice, culture, and experience.” Kenney observed that, from her perspective as a U.S.

diplomat, the influence of the Arab American community has helped the U.S. to build ties with countries of the Middle East. “Diplomacy,” Kenney noted, “isn’t just the business for diplomats, it’s the business of people-to-people.”

Remarks by Omani Ambassador, Representing the Council of Arab Ambassadors

As the first female Arab ambassador to the United States, H.E. Hunaina Al-Mughairy spoke of the opportunities that her position has provided to “dispel many misconceptions and stereotypes about women in the Arab world.” While the status of women varies from one country to another, she suggested, “there is room to be optimistic.”

Progress and development always comes through education, emphasized Al-Mughairy, and literacy among Arab women is on the rise. School enrollment rates have doubled in recent decades, and female attendance of college is now the norm, she suggested. Al-Mughairy noted the importance of recognizing the serious challenges for women, while also embracing positive change. “There is no way back,” she said. “There will be more ground gained by Arab women. Although we are still climbing a hill laden with stumbling blocks, we are inching closer to the top.”

Al-Mughairy received NUSACC’s Ambassador of the Year Award in 2011 for her substantial contributions to promoting trade between the United States and Oman. Read [here](#) for more information about the award and Al-Mughairy’s accomplishments.



H.E. Hunaina Al-Mughairy, Omani
Ambassador to the United States

The Arab Woman: Theme of the Fifth Annual Arab American Day

The League of Arab States adopted a regional action plan on women, peace, and security in partnership with UN Women in October 2015, highlighting the need to empower Arab female leaders in order to strengthen institutions and help communities address conflict peacefully. On December 5, 2016, to mark the Fifth Annual Arab American Day, the League of Arab States and the U.S. Institute of Peace hosted a discussion with Arab women leaders, academics, and policymakers on how education and economic opportunities can engage women and men in supporting women's voices, equality and success.

Panelists, including leaders of the United Nations, government and civil society, discussed opportunities for the League of Arab States to invest in supporting women's empowerment for the region's peace and prosperity. They shared success stories of Arab women leaders breaking barriers, assessed Arab and global initiatives focusing on women, and made recommendations for greater inclusivity.

Remarks by Ilhan Omar

Newly elected to Minnesota's House of Representatives, Ms. Ilhan Omar shared her experiences as the first Somali American Muslim woman elected to high office. Omar spoke of her journey to the Minnesota legislature as a Somali-American, a Muslim, a female, a refugee, and an immigrant. Her message was one of hope in the midst of difficult times: "People like me have overcome incredible obstacles and we will continue overcoming," she said.



The Honorable Ilhan Omar

During her campaign, Omar said, she was pressured to abandon numerous aspects of her identity. Despite this pressure, she maintained that "people respond to authenticity," and she committed herself to setting a path that others could follow without betraying their backgrounds or their identities. Omar encouraged members of the audience to have confidence to speak up and to get involved in order to enable women to rise and to protect the rights of other marginalized groups.

Panel 1: Empowering Women and Building Resilience

Focusing on empowering women and building resilience, the first panel discussed ongoing, impressive contributions being made by female leaders of the Arab world. The Middle East has come a long way when it comes to female participation

in government, panelists agreed, and several countries now have 30 percent of their parliamentary seats filled by women. However, the prevailing view of the panel is that much work remains to be done.

A recurring theme among the panelists was that Arab women do not consider themselves to be victims and do not want to be treated as such. It was suggested that because the Middle East and North Africa have seen so much conflict and poverty, women personally understand the problems and know the solutions firsthand. Serving as a female political leader can be challenging and even dangerous, one panelist commented, yet these women are willing to “put a target on their back” in order to create change. Panelists suggested that instead of being overlooked amidst oppression, these brave women want to stand up and be counted as the empowerment of Arab women continues moving forward.



Panelists discuss empowering women

Panel 2: The Up and Coming Arab Woman

The second panel addressed numerous ways in which recent events have shaped opportunities and difficulties facing the modern Arab women. Panelists agreed that women’s issues should not be viewed as women’s issues alone; rather, they are society’s issues. Panelists expressed hope that problems surrounding gender equality will progress to the extent that all of society becomes involved in solving what are today considered to be “women’s issues.”

There was consensus that social and economic empowerment of women has been shown to strengthen social stability and resilience. Panelists agreed that from the national level to the grassroots level, Arab women continue to overcome challenges in their countries and communities while, at the same time, empowering one another.

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To learn more about NUSACC, please click [here](#).

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