



**My familiarity with Israel is not new, as I have traveled there many times and explored many areas of this beautiful country that makes me feel whole.** I was lucky enough to travel to Israel with [IPF Atid](#) during my last visit and spend a week with a group of highly diverse and intelligent Jewish and non-Jewish leaders with two common goals in mind: advocating for a two-state solution and securing Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. I knew that to advocate for a Palestinian state to exist next to the Jewish State, I had to hear every narrative and story on the spectrum. I knew that I had to leave my biases at home and just listen. I left for Israel hoping to come back with a better understanding of every person's story.

IPF Atid crafted a mission that could not have been any better. We started the journey by meeting retired generals and commanders to discuss security. We examined maps and the practicality of a two-state solution. Two days into the trip, we traveled to Hebron to meet with Breaking the Silence and Yishai Fleisher, Hebron's Jewish spokesperson. Breaking the Silence told the group about the actions settlers take against the Arab residents of the city, and Yishai Fleisher told us about [our] rights to this city. It was eye-opening. It helped me see that every person has a story and also that not many believe in two states, especially in a place like Hebron. The following day we met with a leading Palestinian cultural leader in East Jerusalem. He said, while he does not endorse violence, it is not his place to tell young teenagers not to pick up knives and attempt to stab the IDF soldiers.

The day before we met with a woman in Bethlehem who showed us around the city and a refugee camp. When asked why she doesn't advocate for these teenagers to get out of the camp and move on from the past, she responded, "It is not my place to tell them what to do." This was the problem. As Jews, we communicate and right the wrong. Your problems are mine; my problems are yours, and their [Israel] problems are ours. I learned that it isn't the same for

Palestinians. Some Palestinians live in the past instead of working to select leaders that would bring them a change and peace with Israel. If people want change, they must demand change from within. 1) They must recognize that the right of return is not possible. 2) They must eliminate the refugee camps. The Palestinian leadership must stand up and take control away from corruption and misrepresentation. I know that many Israelis would work towards a two-state vision if there were proper representation from the Palestinians.

The Palestinian and Israeli people must get to know each other even when there is no viable leadership at the table, because an agreement, no matter how great, won't matter if the people on the ground do not abide by it. The people must understand one another despite the fact that there is a disconnect between the Palestinian public and their leaders. That is why I am so thankful for organizations like [MEET](#), where they bring Israeli and Palestinian youth together for three consecutive summers to learn entrepreneurial skills, and [Zimam](#), where they train the future leaders of Palestine. For me, Israel is the representation of Jewish people, and I want Israel to stay Jewish and democratic.

I departed Israel with a knowledge that there are people who work with the young generation of Palestinians to bring coexistence; I learned that many Israelis haven't lost hope for a two-state solution. I will continue supporting the work of Israel Policy Forum because I believe in their mission. I will continue advocating for a two-state solution because I believe that is the only way to have a secured Jewish and democratic state. I also hope that Palestinians leave the past for a future where they accept Israel's right to exist.

**- Sheridan Bahar, 2019 IPF Atid Delegate (Washington, DC)**