

I have been fortunate enough to grow up around a community that is diverse with religious and ethnic backgrounds, including Jewish, Muslim and Arab people. This upbringing has exposed me to the surrounding opinions of the conflict in the Middle East. With the onset of increased racial oppression towards Muslim and Arab people, and the continued resentment between the Jewish and Arab people, I have realized that many of us lack a legitimate understanding of the conflicts in the Middle East. We have become entitled, believing that the information presented in the media or our understandings through our heritage suffices to be considered experts on the topic. As a result, we have become narrow minded. Americans today still thinks the next hijabi that walks by will try to kill them, Arab people distrust any Jew that comes into their life, and Jewish people believe that they have always acted in defense when it comes to the Palestine-Israel conflict.

As a board member on the Muslim Student Association and an active member in the different inter-faith activities that occur on campus, I hope to remedy the ignorance presented by today's society. The knowledge I can provide through the Ibrahim Leadership and Dialogue Program can serve as a valuable asset in the conversations I partake in about the Middle East. Through the relay of my experiences, I can contextualize topics at hand about the Middle East and provide insight on the perceptions maintained overseas or even why some of us may have the understandings that we do. I can also credibly educate those who have little understanding of what is the Middle East or how Islam is actually practiced throughout the world as opposed to what the media wants people to think the way it is practiced.

I further hope to elicit conversations between the Jewish and Muslim people on campus about the Palestine and Israel conflict. It was not until I came to University of Pennsylvania that I encountered clubs such as "Birth Right" or "Students for Justice in Palestine" that furiously advocated the rights of the Israelis or Palestinians when it came to the Palestine-Israel conflict. Many consider the topic taboo in regular conversation, including myself. Through the opportunity of experiencing both Israel and Palestine, I hope that I will no longer feel uncomfortable bringing up the Palestine-Israel conflict amongst both parties and having meaningful dialogue rather than hateful debates.

I hope that I can speak for the Jewish sentiments to the Arab people while also advocate for the Palestinian rights to the Jew, presenting the validity of both arguments. Finally, I wish to extend my experience and apply what I would have gathered from the program to the future I plan to create for myself and others through my career. My experiences will lend themselves as tools to foster a better understanding of Muslims globally and not concentrated to the Middle East. Understanding the roots of Abrahamic faiths will help me make sense of how faith shapes cultures and be able to accurately convey this information to others. I see this as a small step in creating a global understanding and awareness of roots of cultural conflict and hopefully a larger step in effectively developing practical solutions.

As a member of the Ibrahim Leadership and Dialogue program, I am confident that my interaction with the religious, social entrepreneurial, and conflict transformative aspects of the Middle East will make me both a leader and a vector that will alter attitudes of hate and racial misunderstanding to that of compassion of empathy. I look forward to embracing a life long education that will foster my advocacy for Arab rights in the United States and globally for peace and progress in the Middle East.

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