

MAS, KIEP and the GCC Institute Held a Joint Seminar Titled

“Middle East Political and Economic Challenges and Potentials for Broader Korean-Palestinian Cooperation”

Monday, 15 June 2015. In cooperation with the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (KIEP) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Institute and in coordination with the Representative Office of the Republic of Korea in Palestine, MAS hosted a seminar titled “Middle East Political and Economic Challenges and Potentials for Broader Korean-Palestinian Cooperation”. The seminar was co-sponsored by KIEP and the GCC Institute. Kim Heungchong, Vice President of KIEP, and Pak Woong Chul, Mission Head to the Representative Office of Korea in Palestine, attended and moderated the two sessions of the seminar – on economic cooperation between Korea and Palestine and on Middle East and Palestinian politics.

MAS’s Director of Research Dr. Samir Abdullah and KIEP Vice President Mr. Kim Heungchong delivered the welcoming and congratulatory remarks. Following the opening remarks, His Excellency Dr. Mohammad Mustafa, Economic Adviser to President Mahmoud Abbas, delivered the keynote speech titled “The Palestinian Economy: Towards a New Approach”. The speech introduced a new economic strategy for Palestine that would secure greater opportunities for investment, particularly in the industrialization of food production and sustainable energy practices. The speech focused on four aspects: the importance of promoting economic transformation and its central role in accelerating national independence; the imperative of a new approach to promoting economic transformations and ending economic dependence on Israel; increasing investments in the energy and food industry sectors as a potential starting point; and the necessity to invest in human capital.

Following Dr. Mustafa’s presentation, the first session – on economic cooperation between Korea and Palestine – was opened and moderated by Mr. Kim Heungchong, Vice President of KIEP. To begin with, Dr. Samir Abdullah presented a paper titled “Palestinian Economy: Current Challenges and Future Prospects”. The presentation effectively outlined the impossibility of sustainability under the expired Interim Agreement (Oslo Accords) and the subsequent economic deterioration. The paper summarized the major political factors resulting from the occupation and highlighted their grave impact on the current economic situation. The outcome is a weak private sector with no access to newly developed capital or natural resources and a public sector that cannot create jobs or pay wages without exposing itself to the banking sector. Following the presentation, discussant Dr. Jang Ji-Hyang, Director of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Center at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, posed the question how the PNA could improve the status-quo and invest in available resources, particularly human resources, taking the Israeli occupation of Palestine as a given.

Dr. Naser Abdelkarim, Visiting Professor at the Arab American University in Jenin, delivered the second presentation titled “Opportunities and Constraints for Economic Cooperation between Palestine and South Korea”. After outlining several shared traits between the two nations, Dr. Abdelkarim continued by highlighting the bias in South Korean economic activity that unfalteringly favors Israel. Although the presentation demonstrated several potential welfare gains that may arise from an improved economic relationship between Palestine and Korea (e.g., peace dividends from tourism for Palestine and significant export opportunities for South Korea), discussant Mr. Young-Woo Kim once again reiterated the constraints of movement under occupation and the high political and security risks that raise business unpredictability. Mr. Young-Woo Kim, Country Director of the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) Palestine Office, stated that the only opportunities for economic cooperation are in information technologies and tourism – the latter of which may prove difficult due to a lack of general interest in the region.

Dr. Kwon Hyung Lee, Head of the Middle East and Africa Team at KIEP, delivered the final presentation of the first session titled “The Role of Industrial Policy in Korean Economic Development”. Using the automobile sector in South Korea as a prime example and success story, Dr. Kwon Hyung Lee concluded with several general statements and lessons ranging from an emphasis on exports in promoting industrial restructuring and economies of scale to a no one-size-fits-all industrial policy solution. The key point was that no industrial policy should be linked to success or failure without analysis of the concrete contexts or the industrial structure in which the industrial policy is exercised. The discussant of this paper, Mr. Bassim Khoury, Chairman and CEO of Pharmicare PLC, commended the South Koreans for their successes and emphasized the need for political and economic policies to support Palestine. In his presentation titled “Industrial Policy in Palestine: A “Missing” Catalyst!”, Mr. Khoury stated that Palestinians should focus their efforts on formulating an industrial policy for Palestine through a public-private-partnership and dialogue.

The second session titled “Politics of Palestine and the Middle East”, which was moderated by His Excellency Mr. Woong Chul Pak, Head of Mission at the Representative Office of the Republic of Korea in Palestine, was opened by Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi’s, Head of the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), presentation on “The Crisis of Identity and Violence among the Youth in the Middle East”. Dr. Mahdi brought to light many important points and suggested that the absence of formal direction and leadership in resistance movements directly inhibits the drive for meaningful resistance, reducing it to violence and weekly routine. The Dean of Community Health School Dr. Khaled Saifi responded critically, pointing to the structure of Islam as a defining cause that has led to the emergence of radicalism and violence in the region.

The remainder of the second session included presentations from Dr. Ghassan Al Khatib, Vice President for Advancement and Communications at Birzeit University, titled “The Need for Bigger Role of the International Community”, and M/Prof. Mijung Hong, Assistant Professor at

Dankook University, titled “Understanding the Regional Politics of Saudi Arabia: The Rivalry between Egypt and Saudi Arabia from 1958-1967 as well as commentaries by discussant Dr. Young Chol Choe, Associate Professor at the Seoul Jangsin University, and Ms. Lubaba Sabri, Lecturer at Bethlehem University. Though both presenters succeeded in outlining the complexity of the situation in the Middle East and in Palestine, the two presentations drew opposite conclusions – one focusing on the need for greater intervention and the other concentrating on the difficulty of intervention.

While Dr. Al Khatib appealed to the international community for increased support and pressure in upholding international law in Palestine, Prof. Mijung Hong exemplified the challenges of intervention in her paper on the regional politics of Saudi Arabia. Though the paper did not directly address Palestine, it thoroughly exposed an unfortunate reality that puts self-preservation and politics above moral decision-making and involvement.

The seminar, which lasted for six hours, was largely successful in bringing two peoples from different cultures together to discuss matters of international importance. Following presentations and responses by discussants, members of the audience were given the opportunity to have their voices heard and become part of the discussion that lasted well after the final presentation. The seminar was attended by a number of academics, official figures, and representatives of the private and civil sectors and foreign organizations in Palestine.

To read Dr. Mustafa’s full paper follow this [link](#).

To read the seminar full booklet follow this [link](#).