



B'NAI B'RITH WORLD CENTER - JERUSALEM

We will do our part in the defense of this country", Naddaf said. He also criticized the current political leadership of his community for adopting a Palestinian Arab narrative, saying that the Christian minority longs for a courageous leadership it can trust: "We plan to integrate Christians into Israeli society and state institutions – to serve the country and to do our part. This country protects us, and it deserves to have our contribution to its defense and prosperity".

Father Naddaf thanked the Prime Minister for his recent decision to found a new joint forum, where the government and the Christian community will cooperate to promote the enlistment of Christians in the IDF and national service and their integration into general Israeli society. The new forum will act towards the inclusion of Christians in the Equal Burden Law that will establish a more uniform code for military and national service while providing physical protection for those who support enlistment or enlist themselves from threats and violence.

Another avid supporter of the integration of Israeli Christian citizens in the country's life, merchant marine Captain **Bishara Shlayan**, spoke of his intentions to found a party that would represent the Christian minority in Israel. According to him, the Arab parties are leading the Christian public against the state of Israel, and he intends to change that, in spite of being under constant pressure and having received threats. He added that Israel is the only country providing security for the Christians of the Middle East, but it is not enough, especially in light of the harassment suffered by those who side with the new approach of support for the State of Israel. In his words, the Christian world must provide more support for the Christians of Israel, because Nazareth is losing its Christian identity and symbols.

IDF First Lieutenant (ret.) **Shadi Khalloul**, spokesman for the Israeli Christian Recruitment Forum, mentioned that many Christian religious figures quietly support the integration of Christians, believing that Christians should be integrated into the societies they live in, although they are fearful to state so openly. Israeli Christians, he said, could be the most effective spokesmen for the state of Israel. Khalloul has also called on Israeli Interior Ministry to add the Aramaic nationality as an option in the Israeli population registry. Currently, local Christians are left with no option other than to indicate "Arab" as their nationality – something which is anathema to many local Christians whose ancestry predates the Arab conquest of the Land of Israel.

Deputy Minister **MK Ofir Akunis**, who also spoke at the symposium, noted that the issues raised by the Christian representatives call for solutions and that the newly founded forum will do its best to integrate the Christian minority into Israeli society. He called on the Christian leaders not to be intimidated and to continue with their courageous efforts to bring the Christian community around to open support for the State of Israel. Other speakers in the symposium were **Dr. Dror Eydar**, a columnist for Israel Hayom, **Dr. Gabi Zeldin**, an expert in the science of religions and **Mr. Malcolm Lowe**, an analyst of religions.

Liaison Committee co-chairs Alan Schneider, Director, B'nai B'rith World Center and Rev. Dr. Petra Heldt, Director, The Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel - stated that they were proud to provide a platform for the new, positive voices of the Israeli Christian public, and intend to pursue further cooperation in order to increase support among the Israeli Christian public for the State of Israel.

The "Liaison Committee" is an informal Jewish-Christian initiative aimed at fostering better mutual respect and understanding between local Jews and Christians, and is as a platform for raising and resolving issues that impact on both communities. It was reconstituted by the B'nai B'rith World Center in Jerusalem and the Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel in 2010.

News of the symposium was carried on Israel Radio (Hebrew and English), in the largest Hebrew print daily [Israel Hayom](#) and in its on-line English newsletter, in [jns.org](#), [Fait Religieux](#) religious news service and The [Algemeiner](#).