

What is *Session: Middle East*?

Session: Middle East is a forum designed to address the Arab-Israeli conflict using methods that are the first of their kind in the nation. It is the desire of this conference to create an optimal experiential forum well suited for the undertaking of novel approaches to solve this region's centuries-old conflict. In seeking to attain this goal, the youth who will soon lead the world must work not to convert the opposing viewpoint to their own beliefs; rather, they must strive to understand all views so as to arrive at a different, more complete assessment of the regional crisis. Sufficient understanding of differing views requires an experiential approach where one is put in the position of the "other", bearing their tragedies and their losses, while keeping in mind their cultural and religious backgrounds. This unique experiential approach gives students the opportunity to take classroom theory and determine its applications to practical political dilemmas, similar to how any applied science tests the validity of a theory to a specific real-world problem. This is coupled with a more informed perspective of the "other", effectively changing how classroom theory is approached in a more realistic diplomatic world.

In order to make *Session: Middle East* an effective experimental design and go beyond classroom theory, the forum incorporates the beneficial aspects of previously successful negotiations in the region, while bringing the participant to a psychological understanding of what it truly means to be the "other" they see. In order to genuinely do this, people with pro-Arab views are asked to represent Israeli delegates and vice versa or they are asked to work together to accurately represent a third party mediator. Human beings can only understand the "other" by being the "other," upholding their traditions, experiencing their culture, and bearing their tragedies. The idea of such role reversal is not just to better evaluate why these past aforementioned conferences were successful but also to better analyze in-depth why other conferences such as Camp David II in 2000 were unsuccessful.

In particular, the unique experiential approach of *Session: Middle East* is inspired by two previously successful negotiations in the region: The 1978 Egyptian-Israeli negotiations at Camp David and the 1991 Arab-Israeli negotiations at Madrid. These two historic events employed two important negotiation strategies that led to small yet significant breakthroughs in the region's struggle for peace. First, to address the Israeli desire of negotiating with each Arab nation individually, Camp David ultimately focused on negotiations between Egypt and Israel. Later, to address the Arab desire of addressing universal grievances together as a group, the Madrid Conference incorporated a layered approach to negotiations where all the conflicting parties would meet together and then meet separately. *Session: Middle East* follows the success of the 1991 Madrid Conference and adopts this layered approach to negotiations.

Second, the Madrid Conference incorporated experts in the sciences to address multilateral issues such as environment and economics. Besides encouraging students to be the "other", scientists and journalists play an unprecedented role in *Session: Middle East*. As shown in the Arab Human Development Reports of 2002 and 2003, written by Arab scholars, these two careers are especially important in the fight for literacy and the technological development needed for the Middle East, especially the Arab world, to become effective contributors to globalization. Journalists and scientists must have a strong understanding of the region's cultural backgrounds and diversity so as to ensure information dissemination and technology is well received and appropriately used. This forum gives students desiring to pursue these two careers the vital hands-on experience in developing their careers for not just active roles in the Middle East, but in any region with sensitive and subtle cultural differences.