

Arab leaders call for greater understanding across region

Author:

Jumana Khamis

ID:

1579721758044123000

Wed, 2020-01-22 22:36

DUBAI: Countries need to respect the sovereignty and boundaries of their neighbors, while empowering Arab youth, if the region's political and economic situation is to be improved, Omar Al-Razzaz, Prime Minister of Jordan and Minister of Defense said at the second day of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland.

Speaking Wednesday on a panel 'examining the geopolitical outlook of the Middle East and North Africa,' Razzaz said Arab states needed to reflect on the region's history in the last decade, and "draw lessons" to ensure the upcoming decade is one of prosperity.

"We must re-examine the model where we are constantly undermining countries' sovereignties and boundaries and we must be very careful with the sorts of interventions we take part in regionally and globally," he said.

Describing the Middle East as a "youth-orientated region," with an average age of 35, he called on Arab states to shift their focus to investing in today's young.

"We need to engage youth and hear their voices both politically and economically," he said, adding that the region needed to deal with the refugee situation.

Razzaz emphasized the importance of extending support to host countries of those displaced, describing the migrant crisis as a "global" – not just Jordanian – issue, adding that they accounted for 20 percent of Jordan's population.

"When we don't support countries that host refugees... what is the message in principle that we are sending to others that are opening their arms to refugees?" he asked.

With well over a million displaced people residing in Jordan, the government's annual spending on refugees has reached \$2.4 billion, said Razzaz, adding that aid covered only 42 percent of the cost.

According to the United Nations Higher commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Jordan ranks among the highest impacted by the Syria crisis, hosting the second biggest share of refugees per capita in the world.

"This part of the world has decided they don't want to deal with refugees from the region, and that is their right... but we must get over the donor

fatigue issues,” said Razzaz.

He said no hate crimes had been committed against the 85 percent of Syrian refugees living in Jordan’s cities.

“We [Jordan] are proud of that because we are all trying to bear the burden together despite of challenges,” he added.

On his country’s progress, Razzaz said Jordan had presented a model that “shows political and economic resilience,” noting that exports had grown by 9 percent and tourism by 10 percent in 2019.

But he said Jordan continued to face “tremendous challenges.”

“We have high unemployment rates and we have youth who want jobs and want to be productive,” he said, adding that they made their calls through peaceful protest.

“It is their right to go to the streets and ask for more jobs, and it’s our responsibility to make it happen,” he said.

Sharing his view on the region’s geopolitics, Yousuf Bin Alawi Bin Abdullah, Oman’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, who has held the same position for 48 years, said Arab governments should focus on building a positive future for the Middle East, one that involves the new generation.

He referred to conflicts in the region – including the Israeli- Palestinian situation – as “man-made” problems based on “tactics” that work to protect individual interests.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[WEF 2020](#)

[Davos 2020](#)

[Omar Al-Razzaz](#)

[Yousuf Bin Alawi Bin Abdullah](#)

Jordan WEF event to focus on 'new platforms of cooperation' AS IT HAPPENED:
Davos 2020 Day Two – Middle East geopolitics and more

[Manila to join inquiry into Filipino maid's death in Kuwait](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-01-22 22:00

MANILA: Kuwait will allow the Philippines to join an investigation into the death of a Filipino maid allegedly killed by her employer last December. Details of the decision were announced by Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister, Khaled Al-Jarallah, in a meeting with Philippines presidential adviser Abdullah Mama-o and envoy Noordin Lomondot last week.

The officials also discussed the Philippines' decision to stop its citizens working in Kuwait until an inquiry into the death of Jeanelyn Villavende has been completed and Kuwait honors a labor agreement signed by the two countries in 2018.

Mama-o praised the Kuwaiti government for its handling of the Villavende case, including the arrest of her employers.

Kuwaiti authorities have not released the names of her employers who have been jailed since the incident. Kuwait's Foreign Ministry is expected to release details of a police investigation and autopsy reports soon.

The Philippines and Kuwait also agreed to hold a joint meeting on a 2018 agreement on the employment of domestic workers.

Assistant Secretary Eduardo Mecez, a Department of Foreign Affairs official, told Arab News that Kuwait had "voiced its dismay over the Philippine government's decision to impose a ban on the deployment of workers (to their country)."

Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for Consular Affairs Samie Al-Hamad said that the "appalling crime" is uncommon and "against our Islamic values.

"The legal action taken against the culprits reflects Kuwait's keenness to apply the law, and guarantee the safety and protection of all those living on its soil," Al-Hamad said.

Kuwait is a "favorable destination" for people of different nationalities, including 250,000 Filipino workers, he added.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Kuwait](#)

[Filipino maids](#)

[overseas Filipino workers \(OFW\)](#)

Philippine, Kuwaiti officials meet amid labor ban
Manila calls for 'swift justice' over death of Filipino worker

[Iraq activist shot dead as anti-government protesters block roads](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-01-22 21:29

BASRA: An anti-government activist was killed in Iraq's south by unidentified gunmen, amid a resurgence of rallies and road closures by protesters pressing authorities to implement long-awaited reforms.

The youth-dominated movement is desperately trying to maintain momentum in

the face of spiralling US-Iran tensions and a rival anti-American rally planned for Friday.

But as they escalate their demonstrations, they have also faced a new wave of violence.

Late Tuesday night, a female activist was killed by unidentified assailants as she was returning home from protests in the oil-rich port city of Basra.

"Civil society activist Janat Madhi, 49, was shot on Tuesday night around 11:00pm (2000 GMT) by armed men in an SUV," a police source said, adding that five people including at least one other activist were wounded.

A source at the city's forensics lab confirmed to AFP that Madhi suffered gunshot wounds.

Activists have for months complained of an intensifying campaign of kidnappings and killings that they say is meant to scare them into halting protests.

They are also worried about tensions with a competing rally this Friday organized by populist cleric Moqtada Sadr that will call for the 5,200 US troops deployed in Iraq to leave.

To simultaneously head off that protest and ramp up pressure on authorities, demonstrators this week launched sit-ins in new areas and shut roads with burning tires.

Their main demands include early elections under a new voting law, an independent premier and accountability for corruption and killings of protesters.

More than 460 protesters have been killed since the rallies first erupted in October, fueled by anger over graft and a lack of jobs that ballooned into demands for systemic reform.

On Monday, three protesters were killed in clashes with security forces in Baghdad and another demonstrator died on Tuesday after a tear gas canister punctured his skull.

Rights groups accuse security forces of improperly using military-grade gas canisters – up to 10 times heavier than those designed for use against civilians – by firing them directly at crowds rather than into the air.

Demonstrators are outraged that only a handful of security force personnel have been charged with excessive violence and no perpetrators of hit-and-run attacks have been pursued, whereas protesters have been swiftly arrested for shutting down streets.

Blocking roads has been a key tactic this week, with protesters cutting streets and national highways around the capital on Wednesday.

Under a winter drizzle, they erected metal barricades to block the Mohammad Al-Qasim thoroughfare which cuts through eastern Baghdad.

Protesters wore plastic ponchos to protect against the rain, balaclavas so they could not be identified by security forces and brightly-colored party hats to lighten the mood.

Roads were cut and government offices closed across the Shiite-majority south too, including the holy city of Najaf and the cities of Al-Hillah and Diwaniyah.

In the protest flashpoint of Nasiriyah, burning tires and a sit-in blocked highways leading into the city for the third straight day.

"We'll keep shutting roads and getting protesters into the street to keep these important demonstrations going," said Aqil Al-Zamili, a 50-year-old activist there.

The key demand, Zamili said, was “the end of this ruling class – which in our view has wreaked havoc on Iraq by formalising sectarian power-sharing.” The road closures have left hundreds of tankers carrying oil products north toward central Baghdad stranded outside the capital. They also forced a shutdown at the main oil field northwest of Nasiriyah, the capital of Dhi Qar province, a source at the state-owned provincial oil company told AFP.

“Production... was halted for the third consecutive day because transport routes leading to the field are cut,” the Dhi Qar Oil Company source said. The source said the field produces up to 100,000 barrels per day. Oil-rich Iraq is OPEC’s second-biggest crude producer, logging around 3.4 million bpd of exports.

But public services are failing, unemployment is high and one in five people live in poverty, according to the World Bank. The current government, in power since late 2018, had pledged to address those issues but it barely served a year before the sweeping protests prompted its head, Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi, to step down. He submitted his resignation letter to parliament in December but has continued to run the government in a caretaker role. Political factions have failed to agree a successor and protesters have demanded a new premier untainted by prior involvement in the country’s politics.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iraq](#)

[Iraq protests](#)

Trump agrees US-Iraq 'security partnership' Three Iraqi protesters killed and dozens wounded as anti-government unrest resumes

British MPs urge UK government to recognize Palestine

Author:

Tue, 2020-01-21 23:14

LONDON: A group of British MPs has called for the UK to recognize the state of Palestine ahead of a visit by Prince Charles to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

In a letter to The Times, the MPs, along with figures from think tanks and pressure groups, said the move was long overdue and would help fulfill Britain's "promise of equal rights for peoples in two states."

The call comes as the heir to the British throne travels on Thursday to Israel and the occupied West Bank.

During the visit, he will meet Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Bethlehem and Israeli President Reuven Rivlin in Jerusalem.

Prince Charles will also attend the World Holocaust Forum to mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp.

The letter said since 2014, no meaningful progress has been made in the peace process, and Israel's actions are pushing a two-state solution beyond reach.

"Illegal Israeli settlements, described by the Foreign Office as undermining peace efforts, are expanding," the letter said.

Among the signatories are Emily Thornberry, a candidate for the Labour Party leadership, and Crispin Blunt, chairman of the Conservative Middle East Council.

Husam Zomlot, the Palestinian envoy to the UK, welcomed the move but said full recognition from the British government should have happened many years ago.

"Recognition doesn't contradict peacemaking and negotiations," Zomlot told Arab News, referring to the main argument used by the UK against taking such a step.

"It reinforces the vision (of a Palestinian state) and a negotiated two-state solution. It should happen now because of the threat of annexation (of Palestinian territory) and the killing of the two-state solution."

FASTFACT

Prince Charles will also attend the World Holocaust Forum to mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Alistair Carmichael, a Liberal Democrat MP who signed the letter, told Arab News that the policies of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government toward Palestine "makes the achievement of a two-state solution more and more remote with every week that passes."

He said: "The UK has historic and political obligations toward Israelis and Palestinians. There's now no longer any good reason not to recognize the state of Palestine."

A spokesman for Labour MP Fabian Hamilton, who also signed the letter, told Arab News: "The fact that this has cross-party support shows the growing desire across Parliament for the recognition of a Palestinian state and a two-state solution."

Chris Doyle, director of the Council for Arab-British Understanding, said the international community needs to finally stand up for the solution that it has had on the table for decades.

Doyle, an Arab News columnist, said the letter is an "indication that many people in British politics think we should be doing this, we should be standing up for the Palestinian right to self-determination, the legal rights, at a time when the state of Israel is doing everything to stop this, to take more land from the Palestinians."

The letter was timed to coincide with a meeting of European foreign ministers on Monday, who discussed the Middle East peace process.

The Palestinian Authority, which runs parts of the West Bank, has been increasing calls for European countries to recognize the state of Palestine as the US has shifted to a more pro-Israel stance, including recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017.

Writing in The Guardian on Monday, Saeb Erekat, secretary-general of the Palestine Liberation Organization, said Europe could strengthen its role in the peace process if it recognized Palestine.

"European recognition of this state is not only a European responsibility but a concrete way to move towards a just and lasting peace," he said.

Only nine out of the 28 EU countries have so far recognized Palestine as a state, compared to 138 out of the 193 UN member states.

In 2011, the UK's then-Foreign Minister William Hague said the British government "reserves the right" to recognize Palestine "at a time of our own choosing, and when it can best serve the cause of peace."

In 2012, the UN General Assembly voted to upgrade Palestine's status to that of "nonmember observer state."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Palestine](#)

[UK](#)

Palestinian impatience threatens Gaza cease-fire
 Hamas allows rival Fatah to mark anniversary in Gaza rally

[Jailed academic rejects offer to spy for Iran](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-01-21 22:12

LONDON: An academic currently imprisoned in Iran on charges of espionage has reportedly refused an offer to become a spy for Tehran in return for her freedom.

Kylie Moore-Gilbert, a UK-Australian dual national, made the revelation in a series of letters handed to The Times that were smuggled out of Evin prison, located in the north of the capital, where she is serving 10 years.

In the letters, addressed separately to a Mr. Vasiri, believed to be a deputy prosecutor in the Iranian judiciary, and a Mr. Ghaderi and Mr. Hosseini, who are thought to be officers in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Moore-Gilbert stated in basic Farsi that she had “never been a spy, and I have no intention to work for a spying organization in any country.”

She added: “Please accept this letter as an official and definitive rejection of your offer to me to work with the intelligence branch of the IRGC.”

Moore-Gilbert, a lecturer in Islamic studies at the University of Melbourne in Australia, was arrested in 2018 after attending a conference in Tehran.

She was tried and convicted in secret, and her letters implied that she had been kept in solitary confinement in a wing of Evin prison under the IRGC’s control.

It is reportedly the same wing being used to detain UK-Iranian Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, also incarcerated for espionage, and away from the all-female cellblock that Moore-Gilbert was meant to have been housed in.

The letters catalog a series of other mistreatments and inhumane conditions, suggesting she had been permitted no contact with her family, and that, having been denied access to vital medication, her health was deteriorating.

She also suggested that she had been subjected to sleep deprivation methods, with lights in her cell kept on 24 hours per day, and that she was often blindfolded when transported.

“It is clear that IRGC Intelligence is playing an awful game with me. I am an innocent victim,” she wrote.

Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne met with her Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif in India last week, where the case was discussed.

Iran’s Foreign Ministry later issued a statement claiming that the country would not “submit to political games and propaganda” over the issue.

This comes at a time when international pressure has ratcheted up on the regime in Tehran following the downing of a Ukrainian passenger plane over the capital on Jan. 8.

Mass demonstrations nationwide followed the news that the plane had been shot down by Iranian forces.

Olympian defects to Germany

Meanwhile, Iran’s only female Olympic medalist, Kimia Alizadeh, announced that she would not return to the country, citing her refusal to continue to be used as a “propaganda tool.”

She wrote of her decision on Instagram: “I wore whatever they told me and repeated whatever they ordered. Every sentence they ordered I repeated. None of us matter for them, we are just tools.”

It was revealed on Jan. 20 that the taekwondo martial artist, who had been living and training in Eindhoven in the Netherlands, had elected to move to Hamburg in Germany, for whom she will now compete.

Alizadeh's defection is just one in a series of high-profile acts of defiance by Iranians outraged by the actions of the regime.

At least two journalists working for Iranian state-owned TV channels are known to have resigned their positions in protest.

One, news anchor Gelare Jabbari, posted on Instagram: "It was very hard for me to believe that our people have been killed. Forgive me that I got to know this late. And forgive me for the 13 years I told you lies."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iran](#)

Canada, Iran at odds over who should analyze downed plane's black boxesUS calls Iran's \$3m reward to kill Trump 'ridiculous'