



Photo courtesy of Mary Gallagher

Ori Nir, national spokesman for Americans for Peace Now, addresses the audience at the South Mountain Peace Action community forum on Israeli-Palestinian peace prospects last month. To the left is Hussein Ibish, senior fellow of the American Task Force for Palestine; to the right, Debbie Schlossberg, a representative for a pro-peace lobbying group, and Paul Surovell, chairman of South Mountain Peace Action.

## Forum discusses Middle East prospects

A community forum on Israeli-Palestinian Peace was attended by more than 100 residents at Maplewood Memorial Library last month. The forum was sponsored by South Mountain Peace Action of Maplewood and South Orange.

A statement from Congressman Donald Payne commending the organization for hosting the event, and for supporting the Israeli-Palestinian peace process on the grass-roots level, was read by Chairman Paul Surovell.

The subtitle of the forum was "The Obama-Clinton Program for a Two-State Solution and How We Can Support It." Surovell said that the events of recent weeks confirmed that the Obama administration had a definite and positive program for Israeli-Palestinian peace that was worthy of support.

The first speaker was Ori Nir, the national spokesman for Americans for Peace Now, the U.S. sister organization of the Israeli peace movement, Peace Now.

Nir said he was encouraged by the Obama administration's active involvement in the peace process.

At the same time, Nir noted pessimism among Israelis and Palestinians.

He said peace could be achieved and that strong majorities of people from both nationalities still support a "two-state solution."

Nir was followed by speaker Hussein Ibish, senior fellow of the American Task Force for Palestine, a group that supports moderate Palestinians and a two-state solution. Ibish said "convergence" was taking place between diplomatic efforts to achieve a "two-state solution" to improve security and economic development in the West Bank.

He encouraged people to urge their state representatives to support greater economic assistance for Palestinian economic development, and to even consider investing themselves.

The final speaker was Debbie Schlossberg, the central New Jersey representative of J Street, a pro-Israel, pro-peace lobbying organization.

She said that J Street members are "passionate moderates" who are informed by progressive values and Jewish values. She said that "in

order to achieve a safe, secure Israel that is democratic and is a Jewish homeland, "there must absolutely be a two-state solution."

During question and answer period, attendees were largely supportive of a "two-state solution," but some were skeptical.

Bill Gold of Maplewood said a "two-state solution" was impossible.

"The Palestinians haven't given up the hope of getting all of Israel back," said Gold, who visited Israel and the West Bank last year. "Every store you go into, there's a picture of Palestine with the entire Israel being in Palestine."

Bennet Zurofsky of Maplewood suggested that perhaps rather than working for a "two-state solution," the goal should be to turn Israel into a democratic secular state that would encompass both nationalities.

To obtain a transcript of the meeting, which should be available shortly, visit [BeAboutPeace.com](http://BeAboutPeace.com), or by calling Paul Surovell at 973-763-9493.