

Latino Alumni of AJC Project Interchange Seminars in Israel to Discuss Experiences, Impact at Reunion

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Washington DC – The first-ever reunion of U.S. Latino leaders who traveled to Israel with AJC (American Jewish Committee) will take place on June 10 and 11, in Washington, D.C. Over the past 30 years more than 300 Latino leaders have participated in the hallmark AJC Project Interchange (PI) educational seminars program in Israel, and, AJC's Latino and Latin American Institute (LLAI) has been a co-sponsor since its founding in 2005.

"Latinos and Jews have so much in common, it is imperative that we share our experience as Diaspora communities to further deepen understanding about our common histories, values and priorities," said Dina Siegel Vann, director of AJC's Latino and Latin American Institute. Siegel Vann, a native of Mexico City, has traveled with a number of the U.S. Latino delegations to Israel. "Gaining a deeper appreciation for Israel, its dynamism and complexities, achievements and challenges, is critical to advancing Latino-Jewish relations in the U.S."

In one reunion session Latinos in the media industry who visited Israel with PI and LLAJ will discuss how their experiences affected their opinions and perceptions. Panelists include Armando Guzman, Vice President, TV Azteca and Azteca America; Felix Sanchez, chairman and co-founder, National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts, Luis Miranda, Managing Director, MDC Strategies; and, **Lourdes Ubieta**, talk-show host, Actualidad Radio Network.

In another session, PI Alumni who will discuss Israel's resonance on Latino-Jewish relations include: Marty Castro, President and CEO, Castro Synergies; Alejandra Castillo, Director, Minority Business Development Agency, U.S. Department of Commerce; George Muñoz, President and Co-founder, Muñoz Investment Banking Group; Juan Andrade, President, United States Hispanic Leadership Institute; Ramona Romero, General Counsel, U.S. Department of Agriculture; and, Christy Haubegger, Founder, Latina Magazine.

The two-day reunion program also will include a reception on Capitol Hill with the Latino-Jewish Congressional Caucus.

"The enduring impact of Project Interchange seminars is what brings this group of prestigious Latino civic and governmental leaders together, with Israel as one of their common bonds," said Robin Levenston, executive director of AJC's Project Interchange.

"I learned more in one week with Project Interchange than I did in 25 years of reading and learning about Israel on my own," said Cid Wilson, Commissioner, National Museum of the American Latino.

While Latino leaders in politics, media, business and education have visited Israel with AJC since 1983, a comprehensive AJC survey, released in 2012, of U.S. Latino attitudes towards Jews reaffirmed the importance the global advocacy organization's outreach to the fastest growing community in the U.S.

The survey showed that only 18 percent are highly familiar with Jews, while 31 percent are not familiar with them at all. On questions regarding Israel and foreign affairs, the "don't know" responses were highest. This was not surprising, said Siegel Vann, since Latinos tend to focus on domestic issues, especially immigration, rather than foreign policy.

The survey found limited Latino familiarity with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sixty percent did not know who is responsible for the conflict, 15 percent said it was the Palestinians' fault, 12 percent blamed both parties, 9 percent said

it was Israel's fault, and 3 percent responded that neither was at fault.

"Latinos engaging U.S. foreign policy issues will develop further as the community becomes more involved politically," said Siegel Vann. "Our trips to Israel are a way to sensitize them in foreign policy."

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