

Conference Chair Prof. Tomer Broude reflects on the event

How does Canada address the significant challenges of balancing liberal values and national interests with the highly diverse composition of its society? Like Canada, Israeli society consists of a wide range of religious, national, ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups and minorities; what can Israel learn from Canada and its success in promoting inclusiveness and diversity? The ethos of multiculturalism, considered in the last decades as holding great promise, has lost some of its allure, and is facing new pressures due to global events, economic crisis, migration and refugee flows. These pressures also raise concerns about long term effects for certain community members (such as women and children), inter-group relations and national identity.

In May, 2016, scholars and researchers from Canada, Israel and around the world convened at the Hebrew University to present studies and discuss these issues, from multidisciplinary perspectives, at the 15th International Jerusalem Conference in Canadian Studies. Sponsored by the Halbert Centre for Canadian Studies and the Israel Association for Canadian Studies (IACS), and supported By the Hebrew University Faculty of Law Aharon Barak Center for Interdisciplinary Legal Studies and the Hebrew University's new Center for the Study of Multiculturalism and Research, the conference provided a an open forum for debating a broad range of manifestations of multicultural issues in Canada, from city planning and entrepreneurial opportunities for migrants through religious diversity and policing to language rights and indigenous histories.

IACS President Daniel Ben-Natan chaired the well-attended conference opening ceremonies, which featured a keynote speech from by the Right Honorable Lloyd Axworthy, Past President of the University of Winnipeg, and former Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs on "Converging Pathways in Canada: Redefining Rights and Identity", and greetings from Professor Asher Cohen, Rector of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the Honorable Vivian Bercovici, Canadian Ambassador to Israel. The opening night also provided an opportunity to express gratitude for the indispensable contribution to Canadian studies in Israel, made by Ms. Daphna Oren, the Halbert Centre's Secretary since its establishment, upon her retirement.

The rich academic program was based on a very large number of responses to an open call for papers, reviewed academically by the conference committee chaired by Prof. Tomer Broude of the Faculty of Law and Department of International Relations. In addition to 15 panel sessions, the intensive three-day conference included plenary keynotes lectures from Profs. Alain G. Gagnon, Benson Honig, Smaro Kamboureli, Priscilla Settee. Additional highlights included a plenary roundtable on the multicultural role of universities, highlighting the challenges of diversity in higher education in Canada and Israel; the roundtable was opened by comments from Prof. Menachem Ben-Sasson, President of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, followed by comments and discussion moderated by Adv. Michal Barak, Executive Director of the Center for the Study of Multiculturalism and Diversity; participants included Prof. Stephen Toope, Prof. Shauna van Praagh, Dr. Norman Metanis, and Ms. Leah Shakdiel and Ms. Naomi Perl. The conference ended on a high note with a special screening of the very recent Israeli documentary film "The Lesson" (HaShiur) (from 2012), which documents multicultural tensions in Israel, primarily between Arabs and Jews, followed by a discussion with co-producer, Ms. Sigal Landesberg, moderated by the organizing committee's member and longstanding IACS member, Prof. Danielle Schaub. The conference received very warm appreciation from speakers and attendees.