



Governor’s Commission on Middle Eastern American Affairs Strategic Planning Session (SPS) Meeting

Virtual ZOOM
Thursday, May 23, 2024
6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

Attendance: Yes

Ammar Abdulhamid, Member
Tharwat Abouraya, Chair
Dr. Majd AlGhatrif, Member
Dr. Amal K. Ali, Member
Shivaani Arya, Member
Athar Bayoumi, Member
Anthony Browder, Member
Alissa Deaver, Member
Ali Esfahani, Member
Dr. Bagher Fardanesh, Member
Rabbi Dr. Susan Grossman, Member

Dr. Ayesha A Gulistan, Member
Mohammad Khalil, Member
Mona Kishore, Member
Francis J. Ricciardone, Member
Rafi Rone, Member
Dr. Aharona (Roni) Rosenthal, Member
Dr. Ahmed Saleh, Member
Tarek Saleh, Member
Dr. Laura H. Salganik, Member
Ala’a Wafa, Member

GOCI Staff:

Dr. Antwan Brown, Administrative Director for the Governor’s Commission on Middle Eastern American Affairs
Adriana Lee – Director of Immigrant Affairs for the Governor’s Office of Community Initiatives
Cheryl Madigan - Fiscal Administrator-Ethnic Project Coordinator for the Governor’s Office of Community Initiatives

I. Call to Order and Opening Remarks:

Tharwat Abouraya, Chair – Meeting called to order at 6:03 p.m. He stated the following: When we are born in Iran, you most likely will be a Shia Muslim, in Saudi. Arabia, you most likely will be a Sunni Muslim, in Europe, you most likely will be Christian, in Tel Aviv, most likely will be Jewish, in India, most likely will be Hindu, and in China, you are most likely a Buddhist. There are significant minorities who practice other religions in these countries. There are more than 4,000 religions in our world and in every religion, there is a sect that claims to be the truth, while others are false. He encourages not to be fanatic about your religion, sects, or ideas. Don't think that your sects, are the only ones going to Paradise. Build your relationships on universal values of humanity, goodwill, justice, peace, mercy, affection, love, kindness, sensitivity, and empathy.

II. Commission Roll Call:

Tharwat Abouraya, Chair – confirmed the roll call that was done when each entered the meeting.

III. Adoption of Agenda:

Motion	1st	2nd	Vote
To adopt the agenda.	Francis Ricciardone	Anthony Browder	17Y-0N-0A

IV. GOCI Remarks:

Dr. Antwan Brown, Administrative Director, welcomed everyone to this second commission meeting. He briefly discussed the maryland.gov email accounts that were created for the commissioners. He noted that the State Ethics representative was unable to attend this meeting.

Cheryl Madigan informed that each commissioner would need to reach out to Ronald Munday from the Department of Information Technology (DOIT) in order to activate their GOCI email account. She informed everyone that a State Ethics representative will be at the next commission meeting.

V. Presenter Alex Kronemer from Unity Production Foundation:

Chair Abouraya introduced Mr. Kronemer as the founder of Unity Production Foundation, an acclaimed educational filmmaker, a former US. Department of State Diplomat and co-founder of the Peace Institute.

Alex Kronemer informed us that he's been working in the world of film, trying to create conversations around difficult topics for more than 20 years. They make and use these films for leverage, dialogues, interactive discussions, educational panels, bringing sometimes even warring parties together. These films have been used around the world in conflict zones around America. They have made around tens of thousands of showings of different events around discussion and dialogue to bridge the gaps around the film. His message to everyone is, how does one engage in difficult conversations. These films are used to show people how they can come together, watch together, and now have a common basis for a conversation. Mr. Kronemer shared a joke between a Rabbi and a Pope. He provided their website address, <https://www.upf.tv/>. Commissioner Fardanesh spoke and provided the name of the book he has written, Cross Cultural Communications with Success. Commissioner Grossman asked if they are a non-profit organization and Mr. Kronemer confirmed that they are non-profit. Also, Commissioner Grossman and Commission Wafa asked about training for elementary, middle and high school levels. Mr. Kronemer said there are guides for middle school and high school, which this information can be found on their website.

VI. Sub Committees Reports/Discussion:

Motion	1 st	2 nd	Vote
To fold the Interfaith Partnership standing committee into the Humanity Bridges standing committee	Rabbi Susan Grossman	Anthony Browder	17Y-0N-1A

- ❖ Higher Education & International Relations - Francis Ricciardone didn't provide a written report, but I'm including the closed caption from the meeting.
- ❖ Humanity Bridges – Anthony Browder spoke about the upcoming event of the King Tut Exhibition.
- ❖ Interfaith Partnership – Rabbi Susan Grossman and Ala'a Wafa no report provided. This committee is now merged with the Humanity Bridges standing committee.

VII. Working Groups Report/Discussion:

- ❖ Partnership Development – Ammar Abdulhamid was not in attendance to provide a report. Chair Abouraya did state the Commissioner Abdulhamid provided him information that they have two parts they are working on. The first one is contacting 30 previous partnerships to see if they can win back their partnership with them. He has already contacted two, which are the Annapolis Symphony Orchestra and the International Arts Group. The second one is to create new partnerships.
- ❖ Strategy Planning – Vice Chair Mona Kishore provided a presentation of the strategic plans for the next three years that the working group created with input from the commission. She also emailed everyone the documentation. Administrator Director Antwan Brown asked the commission to submit documentation to him before the end of the fiscal year. He also stated that this document should become a standing document. Commissioner Grossman would like to know if each committee needs to create their own strategy plan. Chair Abouraya commented that the committee members need to discuss with their chair and vice chair of the committee.

Motion	1 st	2 nd	Vote
To approve the Strategy Plan	Francis Ricciardone	Anthony Browder	16Y-0N-0A

VIII. General Discussion:

Chair Abouraya mentioned minute taking and AI reports. I informed him that Director Keith Colston and myself will be discussing his request and will get back with him and the commission. Commissioner Ali would like to know if there is a specific criterion in selecting a partner? Chair Abouraya said they should be a part of the Middle Eastern American community. Commission Ali requested the list of partnerships. Commissioner Gulistan would like the partnership list too. Suggested splitting the commissioners by region. AD-Brown mentioned that GOCI has already separated all commissioners by regions. Commissioner Salganik thinks the Jewish Federation in Howard county could help out the Turkish community.

IX. Closing Remarks and Motion for Adjournment:

For tonight’s closing remarks, Chair Tharwat Abouraya provided this quote from Teddy Roosevelt: “We see across the dangers of the great future, and we rejoice as a giant refreshed, the great victories are yet to be won, the greatest deeds yet to be done.” He stated that we are a Commission caring about one another and caring enough to be of service to our Middle Eastern communities. He thank everyone for their participation and attention and wished them to stay well.

Motion	1 st	2 nd	Vote
To adjourn the meeting at 7:40 p.m.	Francis Ricciardone	Mona Kishore	16Y-0N-0A

Action/Initiative	Status	Responsible Commissioner	Due by
Approve 4/26/24 Minutes	on-going	T. Abouraya	6/20/24
Approve 5/23/24 Minutes			