Baha'i group targets racism in discussion

BY LINDSAY YOUNG
Staff Reporter

"Some Americans are racist – are you?"

That was the slogan on signs inviting people to address issues regarding racism and multiculturalism at a discussion sponsored by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Baha'i Association.

Five panelists answered questions in the basement of the Culture Center Thursday night.

Chad Dumas, president of the Baha'i Association, said the group wanted to educate the campus on these issues.

"One way to break down those (cultural) barriers is to educate about those barriers," Dumas, a junior music education major, said.

The first question asked panelists to address any misconceptions about their race or culture.

Oscar Baeza, junior psychology major and panelist, said immigrants are not taking jobs from anyone in the United States. He said immigrants are taking jobs no one else is taking – and sometimes not being paid minimum wage for them.

"The United States has sold itself as a land of opportunity and people are buying into that," Baeza said.

Panelists addressed offensive behavior or attitudes that should be avoided by people trying to establish multicultural relationships.

Eddie Brown, a junior business major and panelist, urged audience members not to label an entire culture based on one person of that culture.

"That one person does not represent the whole culture by any means," Brown said.

Baeza said people need to listen before asking questions when trying to establish a multicultural relationship.

He said sometimes people try to use what they have already learned about that culture prior to meeting that person to establish a basis for the friendship.

Viet Hoang, senior finance major and panelist, said getting involved was one way to meet different people.

"Don't limit yourself to your own cultural group," Brown said.

Also, inside a group of people there are different cultures, Baeza said.

"Each (Native American) tribal nation has its own traditions they follow," D.C. McCauley, a pre-mortuary major and panelist, said.

Misty Thomas, a freshman family science major and audience member, said stereotypes are made of all people, not just different races.

"You have stereotypes of lunch ladies," Thomas said.

Baeza encouraged students to open themselves to people of other cultures and races.

"You have got to have an open mind but I also feel you have to have an open heart and open arms," Baeza said.

"Stand up to any form of prejudice you see," Brown said to the audience.

Arafat agrees to peace talks

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) — Yasser Arafat's Cabinet agreed Thursday to attend peace talks with Israel in Washington next week, despite doubts about Israel's intention to hand over more West Bank land, officials said.

Palestinian Cabinet ministers, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said they decided after a six-hour debate to attend the talks, scheduled to start Monday.

"We have agreed with the U.S. administration on a specific agenda," chief negotiator Saeb Erekat said. "We hope this will be the agenda."

He said it included a halt to Jewish settlements, an Israeli troop pullout, final status talks and security issues.

Israeli newspapers reported Thursday that Israel will offer the Palestinians a temporary cutback in Jewish settlement construction if they shelve demands to gain control over more West Bank land.

Foreign Minister David Levy, who will represent Israel, will make the offer at the meeting with Palestinian negotiator Mahmoud Abbas, the daily Haaretz and Maariv newspapers reported.

The Palestinians rejected such an idea, saying they would insist that Israel carry out its U.S.-backed promise to pull back troops in the West Bank in three stages by mid-1998.

"What is temporary?" Arafat adviser Nabil Abourdeneh asked. "For us the most important thing is the (troop) redeployment."

Arafat himself said he doubted the meeting would yield results. "We don't want meetings for the sake of meetings. No more, no less. It is a waste of time," he said.

Meanwhile, the Arabic language daily Fasel Al Makal, published in Israel, said Thursday that Israel and the Palestinians have set up a secret channel to discuss a permanent peace agreement dealing with such issues as final borders, Jewish settlements, Palestinian refugees and Jerusalem.

It said Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agreed last month to authorize Palestinian Parliament Speaker Ahmed Qureia and Netanyahu's attorney, Yitzhak Molcho, to hold informal meetings on the issues.

The newspaper said Qureia and Molcho have met four times so far.

Netanyahu's spokesman, Shai Bazak, was not available for comment.

Israel radio said the prime minister's office confirmed Qureia and Molcho were meeting, but not to discuss permanent status issues.

In public, the Palestinians have been reluctant to accept an Israeli offer to go straight to final status talks, fearing it is a ploy by Israel to get out of its promise to hand over West Bank land as part of the interim peace agreement.

Israel's Cabinet decided after two suicide bombings by Islamic militants in Jerusalem last summer that it would not hand over any land until Arafat cracked down on terror groups.

An Israeli official who spoke on condition of anonymity said Levy would negotiate the extent of a "timeout" in settlement construction called for by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. However, he said there were no plans to offer a cutback in the overall program to build more settlements.

The Palestinians have demanded a complete halt in settlement construction.

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