

RTRS-INTERVIEW Lawyer questions Israel PM's fairness  
By Khaled Yacoub Oweis

Beirut, July 6 (Reuters) – A leading Lebanese lawyer criticized Israeli Prime minister Ehud Barak on Tuesday for failing to end an era of Arab exclusion which had prevented a solution being found end the Arab-Israeli conflict.

It is morally shocking he refused to appoint an Arab Israeli minister, continuing to deprive the 20 percent of Israel who are non-Jews from representation, “ Chibli Mallat, a lawyer and professor of law at Université Saint Joseph in Beirut, told Reuters. “Appointing an Arab minister would indicate the passing of the era when every Arab advance is regarded as a Jewish retreat and vice versa...,” said Mallat, who directed the center of Middle East at London’s School of Oriental and African Studies.

Barak, a 57 year-old former army chief, was sworn in on Tuesday as Israeli prime minister. He has pledged to give priority to Middle East peace.

Mallat said: “The Middle East needs an integrational framework, paving the way for integrating the Palestinians of the West Bank into an historic Palestine – a prelude to (U.S. President Bill) Clinton’s vision of Jews and Palestinians living and working anywhere in the region.”

Referring to continuing discrimination against Arabs within Israel, the lawyer pointed to an article by the columnist Gideon Levy in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz which showed just 15 Arabs among the 1,059 members of the boards of directors of Israeli state companies.

The electricity facility has only six Arab employees out of 21,000 and national air carrier El Al is “completely free of Arabs, “ Levy wrote.

Barak raised hopes of change to this among Arab thinkers by saying he wanted Israeli Arabs to feel part of Israel.

But his cabinet, named this week, did not include any of the Arab Israelis who were instrumental in securing his landslide victory over Benjamin Netanyahu by voting 90 percent for [in Barak’s favour].

“Exclusion of Arabs is a political dead end. Dead ends have proved to lead to violence in the Middle East, “ Mallat said.

“Israel is reproducing what we see all too clearly in the Palestinian Authority which is obsessed with the creation of a Palestinian state. We need Palestinian and Israeli leadership that moves from a Bantustan state on the West Bank to seeing beyond the immediate future.”

END

