

IRANIAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES CENTER PRESENTS

MIDDLE EASTERN & NORTH AFRICAN

MENA AMERICAN POLICY SUMMIT

SEPTEMBER 22ND & 23RD, 2026



**LOCATION:
SACRAMENTO STATE
UNIVERSITY UNION
BALLROOM**



**SACRAMENTO
STATE**

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

WELCOME TO THE MIDDLE EASTERN AND NORTH AFRICAN (MENA) AMERICAN POLICY SUMMIT!

Across two days of conversation, the knowledge, experiences, and priorities of MENA American communities take center stage. Scholars, advocates, attorneys, public servants, professionals, and community members will share their expertise, examine the policy questions that affect our communities, and bring greater visibility to the breadth of work already underway in California and across the country.

We gather at a pivotal moment. The adoption of a new federal “Middle Eastern or North African” category, and parallel efforts to improve the collection of data about MENA American communities in California, represent major advances toward data equity. As these changes take effect, they will provide a clearer and more accurate picture of the diversity within our communities, the contributions we make, how we are faring, and where inequities or unmet needs require greater attention.

Better data is not simply a matter of recognition. It provides a stronger foundation for research, policymaking, advocacy, public investment, and services that respond to the realities of our communities. It also creates new opportunities for MENA Americans to define our own priorities and contribute more fully to the decisions that affect us. The conversations at this Summit help move that effort forward by connecting evidence with experience and bringing a wide range of voices into dialogue.

This gathering would not be possible without the generosity of our sponsors and partners, the contributions of our speakers and moderators, and the support of the many colleagues and community members who helped bring it to life.

I am especially grateful to Dr. Jaime Jackson, Vice Chair of the Summit Planning Committee, whose leadership, partnership, and vision have been central to bringing this Summit to life. I also want to recognize IMESC Administrative Associate Erika Cessna, whose dedication and careful coordination have been indispensable throughout the planning process, and the student assistants working with the Planning Committee, Jacinta Brown and Namrata, for the energy, thoughtfulness, and hard work they have contributed to the Summit.

Thank you for joining us. I hope these two days generate new ideas, strengthen relationships, and lay the groundwork for continued engagement long after the Summit concludes.

Please consider helping IMESC continue elevating MENA American voices and offering programs like this by supporting the Center with your tax-deductible philanthropic gift. Your contributions help sustain our research, educational programming, public events, student support, and community engagement.

Sahar Razavi, PhD
Director, Iranian and Middle Eastern Studies Center



PROGRAM

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MIDDLE EASTERN AND NORTH AFRICAN (MENA) AMERICAN POLICY SUMMIT

SUMMIT DAY ONE

Tuesday, September 22, 2026

Sacramento State University

University Union Ballroom

8:15AM - 9:15AM

Check-in | University Union Lobby

Coffee available in the adjacent Lobby Suite

9:15AM - 10:00AM

Welcome message and land acknowledgement by Summit
Planning Committee

Video message from President Luke Wood

Opening Remarks featuring Deputy State Controller
Hasib Emran

Keynote Address by **Rhonda Itaoui, PhD** | Expert in Social
Impact, Equity, and Inclusion

10:15AM - 11:00AM | EDUCATION

Hanadi Shatara, PhD | Associate Professor of Education |
California State University, Sacramento

Ahmed Naguib, PhD | Director of Research and Evaluation |
Umoja Community Education Foundation

Abiya Ahmed | Board Member | Muslim Campus Life

Moderator: Gina Waneis | Director | Middle Eastern Student
Center | University of California, Riverside

11:15AM - 12:00PM | HOUSING

Usama Khalil | CEO | Refugee Enrichment & Development Association (REDA) Center

Neptoune Nilofar Amin | Refugee Program Manager | Opening Doors Inc.

S. Michael Gaddis, PhD | Scholar | QDAC Solutions & Emory University

Moderator: Amy Motlagh, PhD | Professor of Comparative Literature and Middle Eastern/South Asian Studies | Bitá Daryabari Presidential Chair in Persian Language and Literature | UC Davis

12:15PM - 1:30PM | LUNCH & KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Introductory remarks by Interim Provost Mary Maguire

Keynote Address by **James Zogby, PhD**
Founder and President, Arab American Institute
Managing Director, Zogby Research Services

**Lunch is provided and will include a halal buffet from Crest Cafe.*

1:45PM - 2:30PM | HEALTHCARE

Gulshan Yusufzai | Executive Director | Muslim American Society-Social Services Foundation

Omar Al-Tamimi | Senior Legislative Advocate | California Pan-Ethnic Health Network

Amani Younis, ScD | Faculty, Department of Public Health | California State University, Sacramento

Khoban Kochai | Director | Office of Health Equity by Design for Inclusive Excellence | UC Davis Health

Moderator: Umer Waris, MD | Ampla Health | Founder of Arifa Medicine

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Are you interested in a career in public service?

The nationally recognized Capital Fellows Programs offer a prestigious opportunity to engage in a year-long program that places fellows in full-time positions within California's legislative, executive, or judicial branch offices.

Applications for the Capital Fellows Programs are now open! Deadline to apply: Tuesday, November 10, 2026 at 11:59 pm (PST).

For more information, see:

<https://www.csus.edu/center/center-california-studies/capital-fellows/>



2:45PM - 3:30PM | CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & ADVOCACY

Tawfiq Morrar | Attorney | Morrar Law Office

Clarissa Laguardia | Executive Director | California Center for Civic Engagement

Oussama Mokeddem | Legislative & Government Affairs Director | Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)

Yassar Dahbour | President & Founder | Palestine American League (PAL)

Moderator: Doonya Mahmoud | Legislative Aide for Assemblymember Matthew Haney (D-17)

Congratulations!

*on a successful Middle Eastern and North African
American Policy Summit*



Cultural Academic
Resource Centers



SOUTHWEST ASIAN
AND NORTH AFRICAN
STUDENT RESOURCE CENTER

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3:45PM - 4:30PM | BUSINESS & EMPLOYMENT

Usama Khalil | CEO | Refugee Enrichment and Development Association (REDA)

Shakeb Kundiwala | President | Sacramento Metro Muslim Chamber of Commerce

Hamid Yazdan Panah | Co-Executive Director | Immigrant Defense Advocates

Moderator: Tawfiq Morrar | Attorney | Morrar Law Office

4:30PM - 5:00PM

Closing Remarks

Leonor Ehling | Director, Center for California Studies

Amna Salameh | Summit Planning Committee

Sahar Razavi, PhD | Chair, Summit Planning Committee

SUMMIT DAY TWO

Wednesday, September 23, 2026

Sacramento State University

University Union Ballroom



TOWN HALL WITH SACRAMENTO CITY COUNCILMEMBER AND CA-07 CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATE MAI VANG

4:00PM-5:30PM

4:00PM - 4:30PM

Check-in and Mingle

4:30PM-4:50PM

Moderated Q&A with Councilmember Vang

4:50PM-5:30PM

Audience questions and discussion

*This town hall is intended to bring our students closer to the elected officials making decisions for our communities and is not a candidate endorsement by IMESC or Sacramento State.

SPEAKER BIOS

Hanadi Shatara, PhD | Associate Professor of Education | California State University, Sacramento

Dr. Hanadi Shatara (she/her) is an Associate Professor at California State University, Sacramento. She received her doctorate in Social Studies Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her research focuses on critical global education, critical world history, teacher positionalities, the representations of Southwest Asia and North Africa, Palestinian and Arab American teachers, teachers of Color, the teaching of Palestine, and teacher education. Her work is published in *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *Teachers College Record*, *Educational Studies*, *The Critical Social Educator*, *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, *Social Studies Research and Practice*, and *Curriculum Inquiry*. Dr. Shatara was also a middle school social studies teacher for seven years in Philadelphia, PA, where she became a National Board Certified Teacher.

Ahmed Naguib, PhD | Director of Research and Evaluation | Umoja Community Education Foundation

Dr. Ahmed Ayman Fawzy Naguib serves as Director of Research and Evaluation at the Umoja Community Education Foundation, where he leads statewide data systems, evaluation, and research that support culturally relevant pedagogy and education across California's community colleges. His work sits at the intersection of institutional data and equity policy — building the measurement infrastructure that lets systems see who they are actually serving, and act on it.

Before Umoja, he spent seven years at College Track in college access and completion leadership roles, served as a Regional Implementation Specialist with the California College Guidance Initiative, and taught college counseling at UC Berkeley Extension. He chaired the board of the Sacramento Community Land Trust from 2021 to 2025. He is also the Founder and Principal of Fawzy Educational Services.

Dr. Naguib holds an Ed.D. in Transformative Action in Education and an M.A. in Educational Administration from the University of the Pacific, and a B.A. in Political Science and Economics from UC Santa Barbara.

Abiya Ahmed | Board Member | Muslim Campus Life

Dr. Abiya Ahmed is a scholar-practitioner whose work centers on higher education philosophy and practice, with particular attention to religious and racial minorities. She is currently Director of the Markaz Resource Center and Associate Dean of Students at Stanford University, where she also teaches courses on the American Muslim experience. She is also on the Advisory Board of Muslim Campus Life, a national organization aiming to transform higher education for Muslim students through advocacy, coalition-building, and education.

Usama Khalil | CEO | Refugee Enrichment & Development Association (REDA) Center

Usama Khalil is the Founder, President, and Chief Executive Officer of the Refugee Enrichment and Development Association (REDA). Since establishing REDA in 2017 to provide sustainable pathways toward self-sufficiency for newly arrived refugees, he has spearheaded its transformation from a grassroots initiative with an initial \$2,000 budget into a \$1.4 million enterprise powered by a team of 25 dedicated professionals.

A recognized subject matter expert on refugee resettlement and Middle Eastern refugee culture, Mr. Khalil has served as a recurring guest lecturer at UC Davis since 2021. His insights have made him a sought-after panelist at political science symposia and a prominent commentator for national and local news outlets, particularly during the critical geopolitical shifts with the 2021 Afghan government transition. Extending his impact globally, he also serves on the Board of Directors for “Ihsan Foundation”, directing healthcare and educational initiatives for vulnerable women and orphan children in the West Africa region.

Neptoune Nilofar Amin | Refugee Program Manager | Opening Doors Inc.

S. Michael Gaddis, PhD | Scholar | QDAC Solutions & Emory University

Dr. S. Michael Gaddis is a Clinical Associate Professor of Management and Policy in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University in Atlanta, GA. He is a methodologist with expertise in survey and experimental design,

PROGRAM

dedicated to advancing our understanding of inequality and discrimination across multiple dimensions. Through evidence-based analysis and expert guidance, his work has prompted changes on the Airbnb platform to reduce racial and ethnic discrimination and has supported the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division by strengthening its enforcement of anti-discrimination housing laws. In 2025 he received the Public Sociology Award from the Eastern Sociological Society. His research has been published in numerous journals such as the American Journal of Sociology, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Social Forces, and Sociological Science and has been funded by the National Academy of Education, the National Institutes of Health, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Russell Sage Foundation, and the Spencer Foundation.

Gulshan Yusufzai | Executive Director | Muslim American Society-Social Services Foundation

Gulshan's experience as a refugee from Afghanistan and multicultural exposure was brought about by living in three

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ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER
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AMERICAN POLICY SUMMIT

**POLICY BEGINS
WITH LISTENING.**

PROGRESS BEGINS WITH COMMUNITY.
CAPIAA proudly supports Sacramento State and the
Iranian and Middle Eastern Studies Center (IMESC) in
bringing policymakers, scholars, advocates, and
community leaders together.

CAPIAA IN ACTION

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**INAUGURAL
MENA AMERICAN
POLICY SUMMIT**

**SEPTEMBER
22
2026**

CONVERSATIONS ON

- EDUCATION
- HOUSING
- HEALTHCARE
- ADVOCACY
- BUSINESS & EMPLOYMENT

SACRAMENTO STATE
University Union Ballroom
8:15 AM – 5:00 PM

COMMUNITY • POLICY • IMPACT
**Distinct Voices. A Shared
Commitment To Equity.**

different countries during her early years. She received her bachelor's degree in Political Science and Government at University of California, Davis. It came relatively natural to Gulshan to develop an interest in issues related to community development and social services catering to different underserved groups in the society.

To this end, in 2004-2008 she worked for the California Institute for Mental Health, a non-profit specializing in mental health services through training, technical assistance, research, and policy development. In 2009-2012, she was the Deputy Director of the California Network of Mental Health Clients, a statewide non-profit focusing on advocacy and program development for the mental health client/consumer community. In October 2013, she joined MAS-SSF as the Executive Director.

Omar Al-Tamimi | Senior Legislative Advocate | California Pan-Ethnic Health Network

Omar Altamimi is the Senior Legislative Advocate at the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network where he advocates on health issues on behalf of underserved and vulnerable communities across the state of California. Formerly he worked at the Council of American-Islamic Relations in Sacramento and is currently an AZM Global Leadership Fellow where he engages in global dialogues.

Amani Younis, ScD | Faculty, Department of Public Health | California State University, Sacramento

Dr. Amani Younis is a public health educator, researcher, and community health leader with extensive experience advancing the health and well-being of Middle Eastern and North African communities in the United States and abroad. As Health Services Director for the Arab American and Chaldean Council in Detroit, she directed primary care clinics and culturally responsive programs addressing maternal and child health, nutrition, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, breast cancer, and youth wellness. Her work has included bilingual health education, community outreach, preventive screenings, advocacy, and efforts to improve access to care for medically underserved populations. Dr. Younis holds a Doctor of Science degree in Global Health Systems and Development. She has also presented nationally on culturally appropriate care for Arab American and Muslim patients and participated in international initiatives addressing the health and broader needs of women and children across the Middle East.

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Khoban Kochai | Director | Office of Health Equity by Design for Inclusive Excellence | UC Davis Health

Khoban Kochai, MPH, is a health equity and community health leader with more than 20 years of experience advancing the health and well-being of underserved communities. She currently serves as Director of the Anchor Institution Mission at UC Davis Health, where she leads strategies that leverage the health system's hiring, purchasing, investment, and community partnerships to advance health equity and economic opportunity across the Sacramento region.

As a refugee from Afghanistan, Khoban brings both lived and professional experience to her work with immigrant and refugee communities, including Afghan and other newcomer populations. She serves on the board of Opening Doors Inc. and co-founded Noor Pathways, a nonprofit focused on advancing health, education, and economic opportunity for underserved immigrant and refugee communities through culturally responsive programs and community-based initiatives. Her work focuses on strengthening connections between healthcare institutions and the communities they serve and addressing the social and economic conditions that shape health. Khoban holds a Master of Public Health from UCLA and is a graduate of UC Davis.



MAS-SSF strives to keep families together by providing wellness and mental health services to immigrants and refugees from the South Asian, North African and Middle Eastern communities.

SERVICES

Offered in six languages: Arabic, Dari/Farsi, English, Pashto, Punjabi/Sindhi and Urdu/Hindi

- Peer Support Services
- Clinical Support Services
- Amanah House
- Support for Seniors
- Amala Youth Hopeline
- Advocacy
- Education
- Training
- Case Management
- Information & Referrals



info@mas-ssf.org | www.mas-ssf.org
(916) 486-8626 | 9 AM - 5 PM
3820 Auburn Blvd., #83 Sacramento, CA 95821

Peer Support Services

HIPAA compliant, culturally appropriate and confidential
Mon-Fri, 9AM-5PM | (916) 486-8626 | counseling@mas-ssf.org

Clinical Support Services

Culturally appropriate one-on-one Clinical Mental Health services provided by licensed counselors

Amanah House

Domestic violence shelter for Muslim women
Mon-Fri, 9 AM - 5 PM | (916) 633-2073 | amanah@mas-ssf.org | After 5 PM calls sent to a 24/7 support line

Support for Seniors

Education and social activities to prevent depression, anxiety, isolation and feelings of helplessness associated with aging

Amala Youth Hopeline

A non-crisis, anonymous and confidential call line managed by youth Peer Support Specialists providing free 1:1 non-judgmental support
M, W, F, Sat and Sun, 6 PM - 10 PM | 855-95-AMALA (26252)

Advocacy

Support on behalf of adults and youth to foster overall wellness and achievement of successful outcomes.

Education

Workshops designed to educate community members on how to navigate day-to-day challenges

Training

Nationally accredited training to the community and non-profits on how to recognize early signs of stress and mental health challenges

Case Management

Assistance with coordination and integration of support services

Information and Referrals

Linkages and assistance to connect with culturally competent and linguistically appropriate resources



Tawfiq Morrar | Attorney | Morrar Law Office

Tawfiq Morrar is from Sacramento, CA. He has been a practicing attorney for nearly almost 15 years, handling transactional and commercial matters, along with complex estate and business planning. He also serves as a Judge Pro Tem in the Superior Court of Sacramento County. Tawfiq serves, advises and counsels countless non-profit and advocacy organizations locally and throughout the State of California.

Clarissa Laguardia | Executive Director | California Center for Civic Engagement

Clarissa Laguardia (she/her) is the Executive Director of the California Center for Civic Participation (CalCenter), where she leads statewide efforts to expand civic engagement and empower historically marginalized youth to become leaders in their communities. Drawing on her own experience as an immigrant from El Salvador, Clarissa is a passionate advocate for language accessibility and equitable civic participation.

Previously, she served as Language Access Manager for California's 2020 Census effort under Governor Jerry Brown, advised state and local Language Accessibility Advisory Committees, managed the national Newman Civic Fellows program for Campus Compact, and founded the grassroots organization Rethink Language Access. Clarissa holds a Bachelor's degree in Intercultural/International Communication and a Master's degree in Public Policy and Administration from Sacramento State University, where she is currently pursuing her Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.), alongside specialized intercultural communication training completed in Milan, Italy.

Oussama Mokeddem | Legislative & Government Affairs Director | Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)

Oussama Mokeddem serves as the Legislative and Government Affairs Director at CAIR California, where he leads statewide legislative strategy to defend civil rights, advance equity, and protect the interests of California's diverse Muslim communities. A longtime member of CAIR's youth leadership pipeline, he began volunteering at the age of 10 and participated in programs such as the Muslim Youth Leadership Program.

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Oussama holds a dual B.A. in Political Science and African American Studies from UC Berkeley. He has served in leadership roles with MSA West and CAIR-CA Sacramento Valley/Central California, focusing on grassroots advocacy and policy development. Before joining CAIR-CA, he directed statewide policy at Public Health Advocates, advancing public health and racial justice.

Yassar Dahbour | President & Founder | Palestine American League (PAL)

Yassar Dahbour is the President and Founder of the Palestinian American League (PAL), Cofounder of Democrats for Justice in Palestine, and a long-time civic advocate based in Sacramento. With an academic background in political science and international affairs from California State University, Sacramento, Dahbour has dedicated decades to building cross-cultural coalitions, advancing civil liberties, and fostering civic participation. He co-founded the Sacramento Regional Coalition for Palestinian Rights, and his leadership spans both grassroots organizing and state-level political engagement, including past service on the Executive Board of the California Democratic Party and as Chair of its Arab American Caucus. Today, he focuses on uniting diverse communities to champion human dignity, international human rights, and equitable policy representation.

Shakeb Kundiwala | President | Sacramento Metro Muslim Chamber of Commerce

Shakeb “Shak” Kundiwala is a Sacramento-based executive, and community builder. He serves as President of the Sacramento Metro Muslim Chamber of Commerce. His 26-year professional background spans wealth management, enterprise technology, business strategy, and community development.

A longtime Sacramento-area business owner, Shak works to strengthen connections between businesses, professionals, students, institutions, and community organizations while expanding economic opportunity and representation for Muslim and MENA-American communities across the region.

OPENING & KEYNOTE BIOS

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Deputy State Controller Hasib Emran

Hasib Emran is California Deputy State Controller for Taxation since January 2023 on behalf of State Controller Malia M. Cohen. As Deputy State Controller for Taxation, he represents Controller Cohen on the California State Board of Equalization (BOE) and Franchise Tax Board. He also served as an Attorney and Special Advisor for then-BOE Chair Malia M. Cohen, providing legal counsel to a California Constitutional Officer in carrying out the Chairperson's constitutional responsibility of administering California's \$100 billion property tax system.

Prior to joining Controller Cohen's Administration, Emran was a law clerk for both Judge Judy Johnson of the Contra Costa County Superior Court and the Enforcement Division of the United States Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington, D.C.

Rhonda Itaoui, PhD | Expert in Social Impact, Equity, and Inclusion

Dr Rhonda Itaoui is a social policy expert and the Principal Consultant at Rhonda Itaoui Advisory. Her work bridges research and community voices to drive policies that are truly informed and deliver real, meaningful results.

As a former Visiting Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, her doctoral research examined the spatial impacts of Islamophobia on Muslim youth in the San Francisco Bay Area and Sydney.

She previously served as the Director of the Centre for Western Sydney in Australia's most culturally diverse region, where she translated community-grounded research into critical policy wins. Under her leadership, the think-tank secured significant public investment and structural reform in regional infrastructure, health equity, digital inclusion, and women's workforce participation.

Operating transnationally, Dr Itaoui now partners with academic institutions, government bodies, and advocacy groups to build equitable, evidence-driven policy solutions. Among other clients, she currently serves as Chief Advisor to Australia's Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, who is the only remaining government-appointed Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia in the world.

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James Zogby, PhD | Founder and President, Arab American Institute | Managing Director, Zogby Research Services

James Zogby co-founded the Arab American Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based organization which serves as the political and policy research arm of the Arab American community, in 1985 and continues to serve as its president.

He is Director of Zogby Research Services, a firm that has conducted groundbreaking surveys across the Middle East. Zogby is featured frequently on national and international media as an expert on Middle East affairs. Since 1992, he has written a weekly column that is published in 12 countries. In 2010, Zogby published the highly-acclaimed book, Arab Voices. His 2013 e-books, "Looking at Iran: The Rise and Fall of Iran in Arab Public Opinion" and "20 Years After Oslo," are drawn from his extensive polling across the Middle East with Zogby Research Services. His most recent book is, "The Tumultuous Decade: Arab, Turkish, and Iranian Public Opinion - 2019-2019" analyzes the fascinating transformations taking place across the Middle East region following the US withdrawal from Iraq and the Arab Spring.

In 1975, Dr. Zogby received his doctorate from Temple University's Department of Religion, where he studied under the Islamic scholar, Dr. Ismail al-Faruqi. He was a National Endowment for the Humanities Post-Doctoral Fellow at Princeton University in 1976 and is the recipient of a number of honorary doctorate degrees.

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