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Hi-tech is the foundation of coexistence

• By EYTAN HALON

Born in the northern town of Rameh to Christian parents displaced during the 1948 War of Independence, the tech career of Prof. Ziyad Hanna is an all-too-rare Arab-Israeli success story.

The youngest of seven children, Hanna's parents may have lacked formal qualifications but values of persistence and a strong work ethic were ever-present during his modest childhood.

"My father started anew, built a family and worked hard in very basic jobs - construction, agriculture and olive growing," Hanna told *The Jerusalem Post*. "Necessity might be the mother of invention. I believe persistence is the father."

Persistence has led Hanna to repeatedly break through academic and corporate glass ceilings for Arab minorities during his career, culminating in his current role as vice president of R&D at Cadence Design Systems. Tasked with managing 10 offices worldwide, Hanna represents the first Arab-Israeli to head global development at a multinational company.

Hanna, who was once the

only Arab student in Tel Aviv University's Faculty of Exact Sciences and subsequently enjoyed a 17-year career at tech giant Intel, was appointed in 2016 as a visiting professor at Oxford University's Department of Computer Science.

"In parallel to my work, I feel an obligation to grow and invest in my community, after I did a lot for myself," said Hanna. "In a world of globalization, where competition is very strong, providing an opportunity for Arab talent in Israel has become an essential act. The current political extremism doesn't serve anything except to increase the gap between Arabs and Jews in Israel. I believe tech is the foundation and the framework for coexistence."

While Arab citizens represent 21% of Israel's population, they constitute just 3% of the Israeli hi-tech workforce, a primary engine of Israeli economic growth. Today, approximately 6,000 Arab engineers work in Israel's tech industry, primarily employed by multinational companies, but they remain significantly underrepresented.

"Hi-tech is one of the key platforms to bridge the gaps between Jews and Arabs. We



PROF. ZIYAD HANNA is the first Arab-Israeli to head global development at a multinational company. His current role is vice president of R&D at Cadence Design Systems. (Eytan Halon)

enter into joint goals, joint agendas and joint dreams. People live together and become more productive. The walls can be destroyed in that framework," Hanna said.

"To continue growing and nourishing the whole economy, Israel needs to bid on hi-tech. To continue doing well and improve, the Arab community is a partner, and a very important one."

While working at Intel, in order to understand barriers to employment, Hanna decided to evaluate the reasons for the rejection of every Arab candidate. Many applicants were re-interviewed after eliminating relevant obstacles.

In partnership with former Intel executive Dadi Perlmutter, Hanna also co-chairs non-profit Tsofen's Public Council for Promoting Hi-Tech in the Arab Society in Israel, bringing together leading stakeholders to advance concrete programs and increase Arab

participation in hi-tech.

Citing the Tuckman model of group development, Hanna believes the Israeli-Arab population is currently in its formative and storming stages. Millennials are increasingly listening to their peers rather than following family expectations, and growing numbers of Arab engineers are serving as role models and ambassadors for their communities.

"I keep analyzing hi-tech in Israel, and trying to understand what is the secret sauce? One element is *chutzpah*," said Hanna. "In the Arab sector, we are a more conservative community. In hi-tech, it's fundamental to fail, and we fail to fail. This conservatism exists mostly among the old generation. The new generation has changed a lot with more initiatives, more motivation and passion to change things."

Arab culture, Hanna adds, also emphasizes individualism and independence, rather than collective impact and working together. In order to be part of Israel's hi-tech success, it is necessary to "change the mindset to work as a team and learn that success is the success of all."

While private entities and

foundations have an important role to play in integrating Arab-Israelis into the nation's hi-tech success story, Hanna ultimately believes that long-term issues can only be resolved by the government. Key issues include improving infrastructure, education, decentralizing hi-tech from central Israel and "disseminating values of living together."

Hanna emphasizes that decentralization does not mean scattering hi-tech around the country, but instead securing government investment to build several innovation hubs.

"Bringing hi-tech to the Arab community has a tremendous effect. It's not only about empowering engineers but improving standards of living and improving the whole ecosystem," said Hanna, highlighting the rapidly growing innovation scene in Nazareth. The same changes have not been witnessed in the so-called Triangle Area of northern Israel or the Negev.

"To do this, it is not just about putting companies in a certain area, but about the wider picture - accessibility, infrastructure and culture."