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Israeli flag at Abu Dhabi energy parley

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The Israeli flag was displayed on the table and on the pins of the country's delegates to the first International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) conference in Abu Dhabi this week.

The Israeli delegation took full part and was received graciously and without a hitch at the conference, which ended Wednesday. It was the first time an Israeli flag has been flown in the United Arab Emirates, since Israel has no official diplomatic relations with the country.

Simona Halperin of the Foreign Ministry and Dr. Avraham Arviv of the National Infrastructures Ministry represented Israel at the conference. They were joined by another 150 delegates from 70 countries to develop IRENA's work plan for 2009-10.

IRENA was launched in January to promote a global transition to renewable energy. The UAE won the competition to provide a base for the organization, and it will have a permanent headquarters in Masdar, near Abu Dhabi, which will be the first entirely sustainable green city in the world.

IRENA has 137 signatories thus far, with Israel being one of the first. Foreign Ministry sources told The Jerusalem Post Wednesday night that joining IRENA and participating in its events and programs fit perfectly with Israel's international policy. Israel is also a pioneer in many different types of renewable energy, from solar photovoltaic and solar thermal to wind turbines and biofuels.

According to IRENA's Web site, "mandated by these governments worldwide, IRENA aspires to become the main driving force for promoting a rapid transition toward the widespread and sustainable use of renewable energy on a global scale. Acting as the global voice for renewable energies, IRENA envisages providing practical advice and support for both industrialized and developing countries, thereby helping to improve frameworks and build capacity.

"Moreover, the Agency intends to facilitate access to all relevant information, including reliable data on the potentials for renewable energy, best practices, effective financial mechanisms, and state-of-the-art technological expertise."

Since the organization is so new, it has not reached the stage of joint projects or pilot projects, but there was a lot of interest in the technologies being developed by Israel.

The work plan that was developed will focus on three areas: knowledge-sharing, capacity-building and pilot projects. The next conference is scheduled for January.

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