

# Could Vaughan learn from Haifa?

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Its population is about 250,000. It is a centre of diversity and inclusivity. It's not Vaughan, but Vaughan could learn a lot from Haifa, says Councillor Sandra Yeung Racco.

The famous city might also serve as an ideal model of coexistence the world at large could learn from, too.

Racco and her husband, Thornhill MPP Mario Racco, recently paid a visit to Israel and were struck by the degree of peaceful coexistence among disparate religious groups in Haifa in particular.

"Haifa is a very diverse place," says Sandra, "but what is so unique about it is how peacefully the various groups live with one another, be they Jews, Christians, Muslims,

Bahá'í, or what have you."

To showcase its diversity and policy of tolerance, the city holds a regular Festival of Lights which celebrates and brings together all of the faith traditions.

Haifa is also the home of the Bahá'í World Centre, a massive complex which serves as the religion's global administrative centre. It features shrines, terraces and an intricate garden network. Adherents of the faith, which itself purports that all religions are meant to live in peaceful coexistence and come together as one, spent millions to craft the impressive site.

Sandra and Mario went to Israel after many years of considering the idea.

"We have expressed an interest in going for quite some time," she says. "We wanted to cultivate a stronger understanding of the Jewish faith, heritage

and people."

While en route to Israel, a chance meeting with a constituent with ties to Haifa meant Sandra and Mario had the chance to not only visit the town, but to meet the mayor of the city, Yona Yahav.

On their trip, the pair learned that Haifa is also a centre of high-tech prosperity. The city has designated a certain area of town a "high tech campus" and has succeeded in drawing plenty of innovative, talented minds from around the world.

"It was incredible to behold," says Sandra of her experience in Haifa. "Especially given the fact the Middle East is known as a violent place with a lot of animosity, to see this centre of peace in the heart of the area was very inspiring.

"I hope we're able to live in harmony the way they do."



**Councillor Sandra Yeung Racco, and her husband, Thornhill MPP Mario Racco, recently travelled to Israel. They were particularly impressed with the level of peaceful coexistence among the various religious groups.**

Thanks to her eye-opening experience, Sandra is preparing a report on the idea of twinning Vaughan and Haifa

to forge stronger links between the cities.

Now, if an oasis of peaceful coexistence can thrive in the heart of the

maelstrom that is the Middle East, isn't it fair to suggest such a near-utopia could be realized in any corner of the globe?