



Press Release

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UNITED NATIONS NORTH AMERICAN NGO SYMPOSIUM ON QUESTION OF PALESTINE TO BE HELD IN NEW YORK, 24-26 JUNE

The annual North American NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine will meet at Headquarters from 24 to 26 June to consider the theme: "Towards a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine". Presentations will be made by experts from the United States and Canada, as well as by Palestinians and Israelis, and there will be an exchange of views on developments relating to the question of Palestine. The non-governmental organization (NGO) Symposium seeks to mobilize NGO action in support of Palestinian rights and to meet the needs of reconstruction and nation-building during the transitional period. Those aims will be pursued in the light of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and subsequent agreements signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The meeting is sponsored by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The opening session will be held at 10 a.m. on Monday, 24 June. Statements will be made by Keba Birane Cisse, Chairman of the Palestinian Rights Committee; M. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Permanent Observer of Palestine; and Larry Ekin, Chairman of the North American Coordinating Committee for Non-governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine.

The rest of the morning will be devoted to the theme, "Self-determination, state building - opportunities and obstacles". Speakers will include Abdulrahman Hamad, Minister of the Palestinian Authority and Member of the Legislative Council; Izaat Abdul-Hadi, Director of the Bisan Center for Research and Development, Ramallah, West Bank; Samia Khoury, representing the Palestinian Network of NGOs, Jerusalem; and Mr. Ekin, of the North American Coordinating Committee. In the afternoon, concurrent workshops will discuss building civil society, "NGO work and developments and the current and continuing political changes", and opportunities for development.

The theme for Tuesday morning, 25 June, will be "Palestine refugees and displaced persons". Speakers will include Salim Tamari, Professor at Birzeit University and delegate to the Multilateral Peace Negotiations on Refugees; Rosemary Sayigh, anthropologist and independent researcher, Beirut; Andrew Robinson, Director-General of the Middle East Peace Process Coordination Bureau of Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs; Don Peretz, Professor Emeritus at Binghamton University, New York; and William Lee, Chief of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East Liaison Office, New York. In the afternoon, concurrent workshops will focus on: the peace process and the diaspora community, and work and cooperation between refugees and NGOs.

On Wednesday morning, 26 June, presentations will address the subject of Jerusalem. Speakers will include Ziad Abu Zayyad, Member of the Palestinian Council, Jerusalem District; Moshe Maoz, Director of the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace at Hebrew University, Jerusalem; Ibrahim Matar, Deputy Director of American Near East Refugee Aid, Jerusalem; and Stephen Zunes, Professor of Politics at the University of San Francisco.

From 2 to 3 p.m., the video "Jerusalem - an occupation set in stone?" will be screened at the Dag Hammarskjöld Auditorium. Themes for the afternoon's workshops will be "Jerusalem: the closure and shifting borders", and the future of Jerusalem. A final meeting will be held at 5:30 p.m. to close the Symposium.

The North American Symposium is convened under the auspices of the Palestinian Rights Committee, in accordance with its mandate under General Assembly resolutions 50/84 A and B of 15 December 1995. By those texts, the Assembly considered that the Committee can make a valuable and positive contribution to international efforts to promote the effective implementation of the Declaration of Principles, and authorized it to continuing exerting all efforts to promote the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The Assembly asked the Committee to extend its cooperation to non-governmental organizations in their contribution towards heightening awareness of the facts relating to the question of Palestine and in promoting support and assistance to meet the needs of the Palestinian people. The Assembly also asked the Committee to take the necessary steps to involve additional non-governmental organizations in its work, and authorized continuation of its programme of NGO meetings.

Invitations to the upcoming Symposium have been sent to all Governments, a number of intergovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, and non-governmental organizations in the North American region, and well as to NGO coordinating committees for other regions. The Palestinian Rights Committee will be represented by its Bureau. The working languages of the Symposium will be English and French.

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