



# Press Release

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## **NORTH AMERICAN NGO SYMPOSIUM ON PALESTINE QUESTION TO BE HELD AT HEADQUARTERS, 9 - 11 JUNE**

The North American Non-governmental Organizations (NGO) Symposium on the Question of Palestine will meet at Headquarters from 9 to 11 June to consider the theme, "Thirty years of occupation -- looking ahead towards self-determination and statehood". The Symposium, which is being convened under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, will be marked by an exchange views and perspectives on developments concerning the question of Palestine.

The Symposium aims to mobilize non-governmental organization action in support of Palestinian rights and in meeting needs for reconstruction and nation-building during the transitional period, in light of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and subsequent agreements signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Experts from the United States and Canada, as well as Palestinians and Israelis, will make presentations on various aspects of the issue.

The Symposium will be opened at 3 p.m. on Monday, 9 June, by the Chairman of the Palestinian Rights Committee. A member of the Palestinian Council, Haider Abdel Shafi, will deliver the keynote address. The balance of the afternoon will be devoted to a panel discussion on the theme, "Key issues of a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine".

Guests who have accepted the Committee's invitation to speak on the subject of Panel I are: Geoffrey Aronson, from the Foundation of Middle East Peace and editor of the "Report on Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Territories", Washington, D.C.; the Reverend Naim Ateek, Director of SABEEL Liberation Theology Center, Jerusalem; Eitan Felner, Executive Director of B'Tselem, The Israeli/Palestine Center for Research and Information, Jerusalem; and Elia Zureik, Professor of Sociology at Queen's University, Ontario, Canada.

From 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesday, 10 June, concurrent workshops for participating non-governmental organizations will discuss strategy for "mobilizing action to oppose the Israeli policy of fait accompli", with a focus on Jerusalem and settlements, as well as the question of Palestine refugees. At 1:30 p.m., a 15-minute film entitled the "Seeds of War in Jerusalem" will be screened in the Dag Hammarskjöld Auditorium.

A second panel will meet from 3 to 4:30 p.m. to consider the theme, "Transition towards permanent status -- the role of the international community". Speakers will include: Gabriel Habib, Consultant to the National Council of Churches in the United States; Gershon Baskin, Director of the Israeli/Palestine Center for Research and Information, Jerusalem; and Ahmed Hamroush, President of the Egyptian Committee for Solidarity, Cairo.

Workshops will be held from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. They will address the following subjects: "Thirty years of occupation, fifty years of partition: joint campaigns with international, North American, Israeli and Palestinian NGOs towards ending the occupation" and "Promoting sustainable development in the Palestinian territories".

On Wednesday morning, 11 June, experts will make presentations on the theme of Panel III, "Promoting joint action of Palestinian and North American NGOs in support of the transition to self-determination and statehood". The speakers are: Samir Barghouthi, Director of the Arab Center for Agricultural Development, Jerusalem; Suha Indiyeh-Mani, Director and one of the founders of the Women's Studies Center, Jerusalem; and Barbara Lubin, Executive Director and founder of the Middle East Children's Alliance, Berkeley, California.

In action-oriented workshops on Wednesday afternoon, non-governmental organizations will discuss "North American public education on the question of Palestine" and "Religious community actions in light of the 1997 anniversaries".

The Symposium is being convened by the Palestinian Rights Committee in accordance with its mandate under General Assembly resolutions [51/23](#) and [51/24](#) of 4 December 1996, which considered that the Committee could make a valuable and positive contribution to international efforts to promote the effective implementation of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. The Committee was asked to exert all efforts to promote the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to mobilize international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people during the transitional period.

Invitations to attend the Symposium have been sent to all governments, a number of intergovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, and non-governmental organizations in the North American region, as 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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