



# Press Release

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## **LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN SEMINAR/NGO SYMPOSIUM ON PALESTINE CONCLUDES IN SANTIAGO**

### **Calls for Boycott of Goods Made In Israeli Settlements on Palestinian Territory**

SANTIAGO, 29 May (Division for Palestinian Rights) -- A seminar on the question of Palestine ended today with participants calling for a boycott of goods made in Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory. In a final document produced at the United Nations-sponsored forum, participants also suggested other actions aimed at helping the Palestinian cause and urged Latin American and Caribbean governments to open diplomatic offices in the area under the Palestinian Authority.

The four-day meeting, which began on 26 May, explored the role of Latin America and the Caribbean in promoting a comprehensive, fair and lasting solution to the question of Palestine through solidarity and assistance. Participants included diplomats, parliamentarians, scholars and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Israel received heavy criticism for its expansion of settlements during panels exploring the current situation of the Middle East peace process.

According to the final document, "participants agreed that settlements create facts on the ground that seriously jeopardize the attainment of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and constitute the greatest obstacle to the achievement of a just and lasting peace".

Expressing grave concern over the prolonged deadlock in the peace talks, seminar participants called for a stop to all settlement activities. They also requested a cessation of all forms of assistance and support for those and other illegal Israeli activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Non-governmental organizations pledged to work with their constituencies to educate the public on the question of Palestine. Latin American and Caribbean countries were asked to contribute with initiatives aimed at granting preferential treatment to Palestinian products. They were also encouraged to help promote the transfer of technology and provide assistance in the fields of health, housing and education. Participants also called on civil society organizations to create a fund in their respective countries to raise resources for specific social projects for the Palestinian people.

The final document invites Latin American and Caribbean governments to participate actively in the "Bethlehem 2000" millennial project and help the Palestinian people with the ambitious goal of rebuilding the historic city in the next two years. It also stressed the importance of dialogue and joint activities by Palestinian and Jewish communities in the Latin American region to achieve better mutual understanding and support for the peace process.

In a final statement at the closing session, Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said actions by the current Israeli Government "feed the sense of hopelessness and frustration and, hence, the cycle of violence". Still, he added, "it is absolutely essential that full confidence in the peace process be restored and tangible improvements in the life of Palestinians be achieved in order to lay the groundwork for the next stage, when fundamental issues will be negotiated as part of the permanent status arrangements, such as Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements and borders".

Chilean Ambassador Cristian Maquieira, Director of the Multilateral Political Office, said "we cannot allow negotiators be silenced or the will of those supporting flexibility, dialogue and peace to continue to be undermined, for there is the risk that again weapons will speak instead of words".

The Seminar and Symposium for Non-governmental Organizations was held at Santiago's Diego Portales Convention Center at Avenida Bernardo O'Higgins 233.

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