

# The Annapolis Conference

## Towards a Just Israeli-Palestinian Peace--or Apartheid?

On November 26, the United States is scheduled to convene an Israeli-Palestinian peace conference in Annapolis, MD. This U.S. attempt at Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking is the highest-level effort made since the final collapse of the Oslo peace process in 2001.

Given the sustained U.S. diplomatic efforts that have gone into convening this conference and its potential to re-frame public discourse in the United States about Israel/Palestine, the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation has put together this fact sheet to raise critical questions for the public and for policy-makers, the answers to which will determine if this conference will be successful.

### **Is the United States willing to be an 'honest broker'?**

Previous U.S. attempts at Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking have foundered because the United States has failed to act as 'honest broker.' The United States cannot simultaneously provide Israel with uncritical military and diplomatic support and function as an even-handed mediator.

Moreover, the Annapolis conference comes just three months after the United States and Israel signed a Memorandum of Understanding for an additional \$30 billion in U.S. military aid for Israel over the next ten years. This proposed increase in military aid for Israel comes despite clear and ongoing Israeli violations of the U.S. Arms Export Control and Foreign Assistance Acts.

The United States has an obligation under domestic law to sanction Israel for its continued misuse of U.S. arms. It also has an obligation to follow the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which ruled that no country can "render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation

created" by Israel's construction of an illegal Wall in the occupied Palestinian West Bank.

### **Will the conference manage Israel's occupation or aim to resolve core issues?**

If recent history is a guide, the conference will do little more than try to buy time for Israel to complete its colonization of West Bank land. Rather than ending Israel's illegal military occupation of Palestinian territory, the Oslo peace process sought to create mechanisms to better manage occupation while Israel doubled the number of its settlers. The peace process shifted the burdens of military occupation from Israel, as required by the 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention, to a powerless Palestinian Authority, creating the illusion that Palestinians were now a self-governing people with functioning, sovereign institutions. In reality, the Oslo peace process provided Israel with an opportunity to deepen and entrench its military occupation of Palestinian lands.

Unfortunately, a recent bipartisan letter from Members of Congress to Secretary of State Rice reveals that the likely agenda for the Annapolis conference again will deal with managing the humanitarian catastrophe created by Israel's military occupation and siege policies, rather than ending these policies. The letter, written by Reps. Gary Ackerman and Charles Boustany, speaks of new U.S. assistance programs because "the immediate needs of the Palestinian people are for clean government, public order, economic opportunity, and salaried employment."

Increased U.S. humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people cannot replace core issues such as ending Israel's occupation, the status of Jerusalem, guaranteeing Palestinian refugees their right of return, and Palestinian self-determination.

### **Is the envisioned peace based on human rights and international law or on the consolidation of Israeli apartheid?**

For a just and lasting peace to be established, the United States and Israel must recognize Palestinian individual and collective human rights guaranteed under international law. These rights include ending Israel's illegal military occupation and colonization of Palestinian lands, the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties, the right of Palestinian citizens in Israel to full equality, and the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. Anything less than the acknowledgment and implementation of these rights will perpetuate Israel's system of apartheid rule over the Palestinian people and fail to bring about a just and lasting peace.

### **What actions can we take?**

Many well-meaning people and organizations made a fateful decision to demobilize their civil society efforts to achieve a just and lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace when the Oslo peace process was launched in 1993. Many assumed mistakenly that official negotiations were all that was then needed to bring about a just and lasting peace.

We should have learned from that mistake and not repeat it again. Now is the time to launch public awareness and corporate accountability campaigns, including campaigns of boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) against Israel and corporations that profit from its human rights violations. Now is the time to continue to pressure our decision-makers to insist that the United States truly become an 'honest broker' and uphold the tenets of human rights, international law, and equality for all as our country's policy toward Israel/Palestine.