THE AMERICAN ALLIANCE for Palestinian Human Rights

2435 Virginia Ave. NW • Washington, DC 20037
(202) 342-8347

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Time for Peace in the Middle East was the title of a panel discussion held in the Russell Senate Building on April 4. Introduced by Senator James Jeffords of Vermont were Ms. Rita Hauser, U.S. Chair of the International Center for Peace in the Middle East; Dr. Rashid Khalidi, University of Chicago Center for Middle Eastern Studies; Mr. Lewis Lapham, editor of Harper's magazine; and the Honorable Michael Sterner, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs. The panelists were asked to respond to four questions posed by Mr. Abdeen Jabara, President of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, whose Research Institute sponsored the discussion. What follows is AAPHR's distillation of the comments.

The time is ripe for a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There is a clear trend toward moderation by the Arab nations. However, unless the United States and Israel move forward toward resolution of the conflict, positions can quickly change. Within the US public, attitudes are changing. Lapham said intellectuals in New York are now asking questions which could not be stated publically a few years ago. Then, he said, Israel held the moral high ground. But that has changed. People now ask why the US gives Israel $3 billion a year. Lapham said he can't see where support is coming from for continuing the policies of the past. Sterner agreed with Lapham that there is wide distaste for Israeli intransigence.

Khalidi said the US should make it crystal clear that there are two peoples involved, the Israelis and the Palestinians, who we expect to negotiate, on an equal basis, for self-determination. However, said Khalidi, the problem is bigger than that; it is a regional problem which must at some point involve all nations in that region.

There was a consensus that, given the US budget deficit, the clear need to assist emerging democracies, and the intransigence shown by Israel, it is logical that continued financial assistance to Israel be tied to actions by the Israeli government. Hauser likened the situation in Israel to that which Gorbachev faced; a "decrepit social policy" and a "preoccupation with militarism".

Khalidi observed that although the president is responsible for foreign policy, Congress has a key role because of its appropriations for foreign aid. Hauser agreed with Sterner that President Bush and Secretary of State Baker are steering the US on a correct path. Those panelists urged the Congress to support the administration. Sterner urged specifically that those on Capital Hill not "sign on" to initiatives which can hinder the Administration, especially if they may have been originated by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

The American Alliance for Palestinian Human Rights is non-political. We recognize, however, that politics affects human rights. Consequently we will, as an information clearinghouse, and a unique communications medium, make available to the public, without editorial comment by AAPHR, information which may not be available in the customary media.