

Support Aid to the Palestinians

March 7, 2005: President Bush has called for significant increases in U.S. financial aid to the Palestinians in both the supplemental appropriation and in the 2006 budget. The FY 2005 Iraq-Afghanistan supplemental includes \$200 million in emergency assistance to the Palestinian Authority and is currently on the Congressional agenda. On March 8th the House Appropriations Committee will hold a mark-up of the President's supplemental request. It is expected that the supplemental bill will go to the floor on March 14. A breakdown of the \$200 million in the supplemental is at the end of this message.

This move is a shock to the Congress which for years has consistently acted to place stringent restrictions on any aid going to the Palestinians and to totally prohibit aid to the Palestinian Authority. Some of the strongest Congressional supporters of Israel are not going along with the new opportunities and new responsibilities of this new era in the U.S. engagement with Israel and the Palestinians. Reps. Weiner (D-NY), Otter (R-ID) and Crowley (D-NY) circulated a Dear Colleague seeking cosponsors on legislation they intend to introduce banning aid to the Palestinians until there is "an end to violence against Israel" and calling for withholding funding "until the PA's actions demonstrate accountability and sustained progress toward peace." The House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-TX) and Nina Lowey (D-NY) are also resisting direct aid; Tom Lantos (D-CA) and Shelley Berkley (D-NV) are insisting on stringent conditions that observers say could sink Bush's plan.

Sen. Barbara Boxer raised concerns about making sure that the aid was transparent and "not wasted" to David Satterfield, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs at a March 2 Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing. He replied, "Senator, the assistance we have provided to the Palestinian people since October 1, 1993, have all been done in a completely transparent and fully accountable manner. We have, on two occasions, provided extraordinary assistance directly to the Palestinian Authority through the ministry of finance, and in those two instances, again, absolute transparency and accountability has been maintained."

Americans for Peace Now and the Israel Policy Forum are urging Members of Congress to support the President's full request for Palestinians in the supplemental. CMEP is urging support specifically for the aid to the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The designation of \$50 million of the \$200 million in the supplement for what is assumed to be high-tech border crossings to speed passage of Palestinian goods and people through security checkpoints is troublesome if those crossing are located within the West Bank or Gaza. U.S. law has long prohibited U.S. aid being used in the occupied territories. Nevertheless, the emphasis in your advocacy should be on support for aid to the Palestinian people and government.

CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVE AND TWO SENATORS.

CONTACT and BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Email your Senators:
http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

Email your Representatives: <http://www.house.gov/writerep/>

The subject line in your email should be "Support Aid to the Palestinians in the Supplemental." Representatives that are members of the Appropriations Committee are particularly important. To find out if your representative is a member go to:

<http://appropriations.house.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=AboutTheCommittee.MemberList&SubcommitteeId=18>

Details of the FY04 supplemental budget request as provided by Lara Friedman of Americans for Peace Now:

\$200 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF) for the Palestinians, composed of:

A. \$60 million for economic revitalization post-disengagement. All projects to be implemented by U.S.-selected contractors or private voluntary organization (PVO). Funding includes:

- \$15 million to support production and marketing of Palestinian agriculture and agribusiness, including transfer and development of agricultural assets in Gaza;
- \$24 million for trade promotion and capacity building to enable Palestinian businesses to gain access to international markets;
- \$1 million to finance home construction in Gaza; and
- \$20 million for job creation through infrastructure development with an emphasis on the construction of schools and community centers.

B. \$90 million to developing the economic, social, political, and security infrastructure for a future Palestinian State. All projects to be implemented by U.S.-selected contractors or private voluntary organization (PVO) except for Road Construction and Rehabilitation, which will be implemented by US-selected contractor and local construction firms; Vaccine program, to be implemented by UNICEF; and Food program, to be implemented by World Food Program (WFP). This includes:

- \$50 million for basic infrastructure development including road construction and rehabilitation and the construction of pipelines to provide clean drinking water;
- \$16 for democratic reform and rule of law programs such as training judges, formation of commercial courts, and work with the newly elected legislature and municipal officials to build an empowered and independent legislative branch;
- \$3 million for support for Palestinian efforts to confront terror and violence and restore the rule of law, including equipping and training PA civilian security services, under the leadership of new Security Coordinator General William Ward;
- \$8 million for expanding education opportunities with an emphasis on vocational training and skill development; and
- \$13 million for provision of social services to the poor to meet emergency needs in the areas of health care and food aid.

C. \$50 million to improve the flow of people and goods in and out of Israel. Details of the program are to be determined.

By Corinne Whitlatch
Churches for Middle East Peace

Published by the Stewardship of Public Life (SPL) advocacy program of the Washington Office, Presbyterian Church (USA), 100 Maryland Avenue NE, Washington, D.C. 20002, (202) 543-1126, www.pcusa.org/washington. For more information about the content of this article, please e-mail Catherine Gordon, at cgordon@ctr.pcusa.org.

Dear Representative and Senators _____

I urge you to support the supplemental aid requested by President Bush for infrastructure and economic assistance for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

The Palestinian election of President Mahmoud Abbas was rightly commended by Congress as a positive step toward a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Now it is essential for Congress to provide timely assistance to the new Palestinian Government and to the Palestinian people. Assistant Secretary of State David Satterfield has testified that past aid was characterized by complete transparency and accountability. Congress must not delay the aid by attaching burdensome restrictions and conditions. The Palestinian people need relief now from their current humanitarian and economic situation of crisis and despair if they are to have hope that a political resolution of the conflict is possible.

Regarding the aid that would be used by Israel to build high-tech terminals in the separation barrier, I urge you to make sure that American funding only pays for construction along the Green Line and not on crossing points inside the West Bank.

Respectfully,