

# There Is A Season...

## *A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted...*

Nearly one year ago, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced his intention to evacuate settlements from the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank. The very idea that one of the major architects of the settlements was serious about removing over twenty of them was met with deep skepticism, cursory dismissals, and loud doubts about his ability to achieve such a radical goal.

But Sharon recognized that Israel could not continue in its current situation, with casualties mounting from endless terrorist attacks, international isolation increasing, and demographic trends working against Israel's ability to maintain itself as a Jewish, democratic state. Against long odds, he embarked on a determined campaign to advance his disengagement plan.

## *A time to keep silence, and a time to speak...*

Americans for Peace Now and the Israeli Peace Now movement recognized early on that disengagement presented an opportunity to set a precedent for the removal of settlements from the occupied territories and the possibility of eventually resuming negotiations with the Palestinians. Even when the situation was bleak and few people were encouraging the prime minister to push ahead with his proposal, we were organizing rallies and demonstrations in favor of his evacuation plan, encouraging the Bush Administration and Congress to support it, and calling on Israelis and the American Jewish community to back this important initiative. Tens of thousands of Israelis and American Jews responded to our calls to speak out on behalf of disengagement and a chance to end the violence.

## *A time of war, and a time of peace...*

What a difference a year makes. With the passing of Yasser Arafat, moderate, pro-peace leaders like Abu Mazen and Abu Ala have asserted their control of Palestinian political institutions and issued a call to end incitement against Israel. Democratic elections are slated to be held next month that could herald the beginning of serious reforms of Palestinian political, security, and financial systems. Prime Minister Sharon has announced his willingness to facilitate the ability of Palestinians to hold their elections and to potentially coordinate Israel's withdrawal from Gaza with the Palestinians. President George Bush has made it clear that the pursuit of Israeli-Palestinian peace will be a priority in his second administration. Egypt is offering to help reform Palestinian security forces and to stop the smuggling of weapons into Gaza. And the World Bank is spearheading an international effort to make sure that the disengagement plan leads to improvements in the Palestinian economy. Although there are no guarantees, after more than four years of the Intifada, Israel may finally be entering a season of peace.

## *A time to every purpose under heaven...*

Now is the time for you to show your support for renewed hopes for peace. As you consider your end of year charitable contributions, please make a generous donation to Americans for Peace Now. Your gift will help us continue the struggle for peace for Israel, building on the momentum that we've helped generate and taking advantage of positive developments as they unfold.

To learn more about how you can help promote *Shalom Achshav* and Americans for Peace Now's efforts here in Chicago, across the US, with our elected officials in Washington, and in Israel, see our local web site at

[www.chicagopeacenow.org](http://www.chicagopeacenow.org)

or contact

Americans for Peace Now

1101 14th Street, NW, Sixth Floor, Washington DC 20006 (202) 728-1893

[www.peacenow.org](http://www.peacenow.org)

