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**Chicago Peace Now Applauds Israel's Impending Pullout from Gaza and the Northern West Bank;
Rejects Irresponsible Condemnations of Israel by Radical Arab and Far Left Jewish Groups
on 38th Anniversary of Israel's Occupation of West Bank & Gaza**

Chicago Peace Now, a Jewish Zionist group dedicated to enhancing Israel's security through peace and to supporting the Israeli Peace Now movement, applauds Israel's impending disengagement from Gaza and the Northern West Bank as a step towards ending the occupation that began 38 years ago today during the 1967 Six Day War. Israel is preparing this summer to remove military installations and all 21 settlements from Gaza, and 4 settlements from the northern West Bank, marking the first time Israel will remove settlements from the occupied territories. We note the widespread support that Israel's plan to disengage from Gaza and the Northern West Bank has received not only from a large majority of Israelis and American Jews, but also from President Bush, the international community, including the European Union, the majority of Palestinians and the Palestinian leadership.

- A poll by the Jerusalem Media and Communications Center found that 53 percent of Palestinians polled - and nearly 57 percent of Gazans asked - said they thought the pullout was good for the peace process, while only 33% thought it was bad. (May 2005)
- Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurie has said that Israel's pullout from Gaza would signal a "very serious, credible step" on the way to implementing the Road Map to peace, (May 21, 2005), while Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has said that "We see this evacuation as a part of ending the occupation..." (May 26, 2005).
- United Nations Under Secretary-General Kieran Prendergast told the UN Security Council on May 18th that "the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank marked an important landmark in Israeli-Palestinian relations. The evacuation of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory set an important precedent. Continued bilateral coordination would be one way to ensure that disengagement proceeded successfully and contributed to the momentum for peace. The Israeli pullout should be seen as a highly significant step along the road towards realizing the vision of two States, Israel and a sovereign, viable, and contiguous Palestine, living side by side in peace and security."

We join the majority of Israelis who, according to polls, hope it will be the first of a series of steps leading to a wide-ranging removal of many more Israeli settlements and military forces from the West Bank, and the establishment of a viable, independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza living in peace next to the Jewish state of Israel (Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, Tel Aviv University, Peace Index, March 2005). Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has said that "Israel will need to carry out a large-scale withdrawal from the West Bank after...[the] initial disengagement from the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria, whether or not a viable peace partner emerges on the Palestinian side." (*Jerusalem Post*, 12/30/04) Former Shin Bet chief Avi Dichter explains: "On a strategic level, it is impossible to continue ruling over another people." (*Forward*, 6/17/05) And Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has acknowledged that "It is...not possible to control densely populated areas for prolonged periods without those populations eventually having to receive rights." (*Ha'aretz*, 4/22/05)

"Following this summer's disengagement from Gaza, Israel should work to complete the de-occupation of that area with the help of the United States and other countries," said CPN President Gidon D. Remba. "We appreciate the cooperation that Egypt has offered to provide Israel in securing its border with Gaza. By helping to stop arms smuggling through tunnels across the border by Palestinian extremists, we hope that Egypt's security plan will enable Israel to withdraw its forces from the Philadelphi Corridor along the border. We also hope that these efforts,

coupled with greater economic aid and involvement from the US and the international community, will enable Israel to safely relinquish control over sea and air access to Gaza, allowing the Palestinian Authority to build a secure and peaceful Gaza as a first step towards a territorially contiguous Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.”

CPN Calls on President Bush to Do More to Stop Continuing Israeli West Bank Settlement Construction and Other Unilateral Israeli Actions Which Prejudge Final Status Negotiations, Undermining Palestinian Moderates: We commend President Bush for his statement at the White House on May 26th: “Israel should not undertake any activity that contravenes road map obligations or prejudice final status negotiations with regard to Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem. Therefore, Israel must remove unauthorized outposts and stop settlement expansion.” The President wisely used the occasion to re-emphasize his administration’s position: “A viable two-state solution must ensure contiguity of the West Bank, and a state of scattered territories will not work. There must also be meaningful linkages between the West Bank and Gaza.” While the President’s comments are praiseworthy, it is clear that they are not nearly enough and must be followed up with action.

Peace Now’s latest settlement report from June 6, 2005, “Democracy Subverted,” shows that almost every outpost is in the process of expansion and construction, with permanent construction taking place in 17 of the over 100 illegal West Bank settlement outposts, in violation of Israeli law and international law. Moreover, the veteran West Bank settlements continue to expand: in the first quarter of 2005, some 3,000 to 3,500 apartments were being built throughout the West Bank, with construction taking place in 32 of the veteran settlements. Reports in the Israeli press indicate that the Israeli government is moving forward with construction of a fence that will connect the West Bank settlement of Ma’aleh Adumim to Jerusalem, thereby unilaterally carrying out a de facto annexation of this territory. The proposed section of the fence will provide for Jewish settlement east of Jerusalem and prevent the Palestinians from establishing territorial contiguity between the north and south of the West Bank. Construction of this part of the fence complements the earlier Israeli decision to build 3,500 new settlement housing units between Ma’aleh Adumim and Jerusalem, as part of a plan to establish settlement contiguity in an area known as E-1.

“While President Bush has appropriately continued to press the Palestinians to meet their obligations to fight terrorism, it's now time for him to spend some of his political capital to stop the Israeli government from unilaterally connecting Ma’aleh Adumim to Jerusalem,” said Debra DeLee, President and CEO of Americans for Peace Now. *Chicago Peace Now believes that all who seek peace must support positive actions by Israel, including the unprecedented Israeli withdrawal of settlements and IDF installations from Gaza and the Northern West Bank this August, while continuing to oppose actions by both Palestinians and Israelis which are inimical to a viable two-state solution to the conflict.*

CPN Supports Israeli and International Direct Economic Aid for Palestinians: Chicago Peace Now commends the efforts by a senior aide to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, as reported in the Israeli newspaper *Ha’aretz* on June 3, to revive the Palestinian economy by raising \$500 million in loan guarantees from Israeli and British investors to build 150,000 housing units for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip in the near future. We support President Bush’s recent decision to provide \$50 million in direct aid to the Palestinian Authority under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas. We call upon the U.S., the oil-producing Arab Gulf states and the G-8 to boost their direct economic aid to the Palestinians to help alleviate the staggering poverty and unemployment levels from which they are suffering, and to strengthen the ability of moderate Palestinian leaders to build a viable state and provide their people with a real peace dividend.”

CPN Rejects Irresponsible Criticism of Israel: At the same time, Chicago Peace Now rejects the one-sided and misleading condemnations of Israel issued by radical Arab and far left Jewish groups in Chicago. Their language demonizes Israel, dismisses its right to protect its citizens from terror attacks, and wrongly places exclusive blame on the Jewish state for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Israel’s occupation is not the sole obstacle to peace between Israelis and Palestinians; it is a strategic and moral mistake to ignore the role played by Palestinian and Arab extremism, including fanatical Islamist terror groups who reject Israel’s right to exist even within the 1967 borders. This rejection of Israel pre-dates the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and continues to undermine

the quest for Middle East peace. While the Chicago groups claim they work “to oppose the obstacles to peace between Palestinians and Israelis,” in fact they lend no support to any practical constructive actions or peace initiatives which have a realistic chance of improving the lot of Palestinians and Israelis and helping them move towards reconciliation.

Israel’s Barrier or “Wall”: These groups also call on Israel to “demolish” the barrier it is building in parts of the West Bank, using reckless and inflammatory language which suggests that Israel’s system of fences, walls and obstacles is comparable to the Berlin Wall and to apartheid South Africa. The Berlin Wall was built by Communist East Germany to keep its *own* citizens from escaping to freedom in West Germany and Western Europe. By contrast, Israel is building a barrier to protect its citizens from the onslaught of suicide bombing and other mass terrorist attacks which have plagued its major cities, killing nearly 1,000 Israelis, mostly civilians, since 2001.

The radical Chicago groups cite the International Court of Justice’s advisory opinion that found Israel’s “wall” in violation of international law. But many prominent international human rights experts—including Doug Cassel, Director of the Center for International Human Rights at the Northwestern University School of Law, and Thomas Buergenthal, the dissenting American judge on the International Court of Justice—have said that the opinion is “one-sided and imbalanced,” that it “virtually ignores the terrorist attacks on Israel, which led to the construction of the barrier,” and that its dismissal of Israel’s right to self-defense against terrorist attacks is “legally dubious” and based on an unreasonable construal of the rights of states to defend themselves that is inconsistent with the UN Security Council’s own resolutions. (*Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 2004) The resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on Israel’s barrier is more balanced, calling on the Palestinian Authority “to undertake visible efforts on the ground to arrest, disrupt and restrain” terrorist individuals and groups, and recognizes the right of all states including Israel “to counter deadly acts of violence against the civilian population.” Yet such demands on the Palestinians or recognition of Israeli rights to self-defense go unmentioned in the radical Chicago groups’ public statements.

Chicago Peace Now supports the steps taken by the Government of Israel in response to a ruling of Israel’s Supreme Court which required that the route of Israel’s barrier be moved closer to the 1967 border, along with other improvements which have reduced the burden placed by the barrier on ordinary Palestinians. We call upon the Government of Israel to do more to move the barrier so that its route is closer to the 1967 border, as it has already done in some areas. In this way it would more fully comply with the spirit and the letter of Israel’s own Supreme Court order to better balance the rights of Israel’s citizens to life against the right to well-being of Palestinians.

Checkpoints and Road Blocks: Radical Chicago “peace” groups have said that they will “construct our own checkpoint to visually demonstrate the profound insult to Palestinian society that they represent.” Yet the checkpoints have repeatedly helped prevent the commission of massacres, horrendous crimes against humanity, by Palestinian terrorists against innocent Israeli civilians. This includes two suicide bombers from Palestinian Islamic Jihad caught this past week by Israel along with their bombs, who admitted that they were planning to “detonate their explosive devices simultaneously on a bus, in a coffee shop or in a synagogue.” One of the bombers *acknowledged that he was unable to bypass Israel’s roadblocks to infiltrate the bombs into Jerusalem* (news story, Israeli newspaper *Ha’aretz*, June 2, 2005).

Chicago Peace Now affirms that Israel has a moral and legal right to defend its citizens from terror attacks by means of checkpoints and road blocks. This in no way justifies instances of abusive Israeli treatment of innocent Palestinians. Israel should remove road blocks and checkpoints whenever it is possible to do so without seriously compromising its citizens’ security, especially in areas where the Palestinian Authority is demonstrating effective security responsibility and cooperating with Israel in preventing attacks. The completion of the barrier and the removal of more West Bank settlements should enable Israel to safely remove many more checkpoints. **We call upon all who seek to promote Middle East peace to refrain from irresponsible rhetoric and to join Chicago Peace Now and other allied groups in the Jewish, Arab, Christian and Muslim communities to engage in balanced and responsible criticism of actions by both Palestinians and Israelis which undermine the prospects for peace and reconciliation.**