

AUSTRALIANS FOR PALESTINE

PO Box 2099
Hawthorn VIC 3122
Melbourne - Australia
Tel: 03 9818 5080
Fax: 03 9818 5009

info@australiansforpalestine.com
www.australiansforpalestine.com

MEDIA RELEASE 3 19 December 2006

Prepared by SK/AFP

AFP/WFP attend UN Asian meeting

Providing a Voice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Release No 3 – 19 December 2006

On 15-17 December 2006, Malaysia hosted the UN Asian Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the UN Forum of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People. The UN Asian Meeting was opened by Malaysia's Minister of Foreign Affairs HE Dato' Seri Syed Hamid Albar and was attended by ministers, diplomats, UN representatives and members of NGOs. An Australian contingent representing Women for Palestine (WFP), Australians for Palestine (AFP) and the Australian Friends of Palestine Association (AFOPA) attended both the meeting and the forum to show solidarity with other civil society groups who desire the fulfillment of the Palestinian right to self-determination and the realisation of a Palestinian state.

WFP spokesperson, Sonja Karkar said that "Australia has a humanitarian obligation as a signatory to the Fourth Geneva Convention to participate in the work of these meetings in the Asia-Pacific region." Commenting on the Australian government's previous non-participation in these committee meetings, Mrs. Karkar said that "it is no surprise in light of Australia's recent 'no' vote with the US and Israel against the UN General Assembly resolution affirming the Palestinian right to self-determination and a state of their own that there is also no representation at this meeting."

AFP spokesperson Moammar Mashni said that "Australia should be taking a leadership role in the region rather than being obstructionist, and more disturbingly, becoming so blatantly supportive of Israel." He added that "the humanitarian situation in Palestine is so severe that no country in the world can afford to ignore this man-made disaster that Israel has been allowed to create and accelerate for its own opportunistic interests."

Addressing US speaker Matthew Hodes of the Carter Centre, Mr. Nasser Mashni, also representing AFP, said that "it is imperative for the US to re-engage in the peace process and force an environment that demands Israeli compliance with UN resolutions." In answer to Mr. Mashni's question asking if there was any hope for a bottom up change in US foreign policy, Mr. Hodes said that the recent Baker and Hamilton report will have an indirect impact and is likely to shape the debate.

During the forum discussion, Ms Dora McPhee from WFP questioned the Israeli founder of the All-for-Peace Radio Station, Ms Sarah Ozacky-Lazar on the stated goals for dialogue with Palestinian groups and how this could be possible without first directing their efforts at ending the occupation. Ms McPhee said "how can you have dialogue and build trust when the conflict is one-sided and the oppressor continues the occupation." Ms McPhee went on to say that "dialogue and reconciliation can only really happen after the occupation ends and not before: and even then it will be a long and painful process."

WFP and AFP delegates and Ms Claire O'Connor from AFOPA, all observed that mention had been made of Australia's noticeable official absence at previous meetings and that appreciation had been expressed from all quarters at the vibrant contributions made by the Australian contingent in Kuala Lumpur.

The five Australian delegates were concerned that Australia is sidelining international law instead of demanding that Israel work within its framework. This will have serious repercussions for Australia's national integrity and undermine the very principles upon which civil society is based.

Mrs. Karkar noted that Dr Andrew Vincent, Director of the Middle East Studies Centre at Macquarie University, Sydney had been the lone voice from Australia at the last three meetings. On behalf of her colleagues, Mrs. Karkar thanked the forum for the opportunity to show that there are Australians who do not support their government's unconditional support of Israel and who do support the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Statements from the meeting and the forum drew attention to the necessity to abide by the rule of law and to honour UN resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515 all calling for Israel to end its occupation and that efforts must be made to intensify initiatives to peacefully negotiate a viable, sovereign Palestinian state.

For further information contact:
Moammar Mashni 0419 999 773

END

