

## **JPL Letter to Sharon and Bush**

**JPL issued an open letter on Jerusalem to Sharon and Bush during their meeting in Washington.**

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon recently said that American Jews must speak out on the issue of Jerusalem. In a speech to members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations in Jerusalem, Sharon stated that it is the duty of world Jewry to interfere in this issue; "Not only can you interfere, but you have to interfere when it comes to Jerusalem." These remarks were reported in both Ha'aretz (23 Feb. 2001) and the New York Times (24 Feb. 2001).

The Jewish Peace Lobby welcomed Sharon's invitation to American Jews to voice their opinion on Jerusalem. JPL organized an open letter to President Bush and Prime Minister Sharon which was signed by 100 American Rabbis - but it was not the message that the prime minister had in mind.

The Rabbis stated their opposition to exclusive Israeli sovereignty over all of Jerusalem. They affirmed that "Prime Minister Barak was quite right in his appraisal that sharing Jerusalem is the price that the Jewish people must pay for lasting peace."

Focusing on Sharon's desire to achieve an interim agreement with the Palestinians that does not take up the Jerusalem question, the Rabbis noted that such an interim agreement would require "that neither side use its power to unilaterally foreclose solutions to those issues that are postponed."

Thus the Rabbis called upon the Israeli Prime Minister to refrain from any expansion of Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and they called on President Bush "to vigorously express American opposition to any such unilateral steps."

The Israeli press has reported that when secretary of State Powell was in Israel he stated American opposition to new Israeli construction in East Jerusalem, but that Sharon refused to agree to such restraints.

The statement was drafted by JPL president, Jerome Segal. Dr. Segal said that "It is important to understand that Ariel Sharon is a man of action. He intends to create facts on the ground that will prevent any future Labor government from making the kind of compromises Barak offered on Jerusalem. If he succeeds, then real peace will be impossible."

The central question is: What does Sharon really seek with his proposal for an interim-agreement? Does he truly want to put the permanent status issues on hold, and seek progress on matters of security, economic cooperation, and development? Or does he mean only to put negotiations of issues like Jerusalem on hold, while trying to change the reality on the ground? Is his objective to make it impossible for any future Israeli government to again offer the compromises Barak offered on Jerusalem?

Some support a "Give Sharon a Chance" approach to see whether he will genuinely pursue a

series of interim agreements with the Palestinians or just use the time to eliminate options for compromise. Instead of this wait and see approach, the Rabbis have a different idea. Their letter is an initiative to stop Sharon from taking unilateral action in Jerusalem that could hinder future negotiations. The recent decision to build another 2,800 dwelling units in Har-Homa only proves the importance and timeliness of the Rabbis' initiative.