

U.S Jewish peace group warns of Sharon's plans

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Rabbis presented Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his host, President George W. Bush, a petition calling on Israel to take unilateral steps in the territories in support of peace.

The Jewish Peace Lobby is also calling on Sharon to end the expansion of settlements and to cease building new Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem.

Rabbi members of the organization have said they oppose Israel's sole sovereignty over Jerusalem. They also called on the Bush administration to reiterate U.S. opposition to unilateral actions, including the continuation of Israeli construction in parts of East Jerusalem.

"Sharon is a man of action and he intends to create facts on the ground which will prevent every [Israeli] government in the future from carrying out the necessary compromises," said Jerome Segal, president of the Jewish Peace Lobby. "If he [Sharon] succeeds, it will be impossible to achieve genuine peace," Segal warned.

Lobby members said they prepared the petition in response to a call by Sharon to diaspora Jewry to make their voice heard on the issue of Jerusalem, and the decision to construct thousands more apartments in the neighborhood of Har Homa.

This follows a speech made by Sharon to AIPAC (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee) lobby on Monday, in which he declared "united Jerusalem as the eternal capital of the state of Israel."

To a crowd that included senior Bush administration officials, dozens of ambassadors and thousands of American Jews, Sharon declared that, "Jerusalem belongs to the Jewish people. ... Only under Israeli sovereignty will Jerusalem be open to all the faiths. Jerusalem will remain united under Israeli sovereignty - forever."

A number of Muslim and Arab organizations in the United States have also been highly critical of the Sharon visit to Washington and have accused the Bush administration of exercising a double-standard in favor of Israel, while ignoring human rights violations against the Palestinians.

A number of organizations have petitioned U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to set up a war crimes tribunal for Israel, similar to those set up to try suspects of crimes against humanity in Rwanda and the spin-off states of the former Yugoslavia.

These organizations argue that the United States has granted Sharon the status of a rehabilitated criminal, instead of demanding he face trial - the same way Washington insists former Yugoslav strongman, Slobodan Milosevic, should be brought to justice.