

Palestine conflict

# Why I Will Not Participate in the Madrid Social Forum for a Just Peace in the Middle East

AIC and PNGO protests

Saturday 29 December 2007, by [Alternative Information Center](#), [PNGO](#), [WARSCHAWSKI Michael](#) (Date first published: 15 November 2007).

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I have no problem in taking part in a conference where Zionist spokespersons are invited too, for debates are part and parcel of a healthy political arena. As well, I have no problem being invited to official public meetings, initiated by government agencies, including Israeli ones. I need, however, to know exactly what kind of gathering I am supposed to participate.

By its own definition, the Madrid Social Forum for a Just Peace in the Middle East belongs to the family of "social forums," as defined in the Porto Allegre Charter, i.e. a forum of grassroots and popular organizations, without any involvement of State's agencies, political parties (or armed-organizations). The Alternative Information Center (AIC), together with PNGO (Palestinian NGOs coordination), Ittijah, the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) and the Israeli Women Coalition for a Just Peace were much involved in the International Committee that was established in order to assist the local committee in shaping the forum and fixing the list of the invited organizations.

Whoever has been involved in Middle East progressive politics is aware that the list is a major political issue: most Arab organizations, including Palestinian ones, do not participate in political gatherings with Israeli organizations that don't support Palestinian rights, as defined by the United Nations and international law, including, obviously, the Right of Return of the Palestinian refugees. This excludes most of the Israeli Zionist organizations.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, the Madrid organizing committee and the international committee issued, at an early stage, a Declaration of Principles that defined the political framework of the Madrid Social Forum. On the basis of that Declaration of Principles, the Israeli delegation was designed and the speakers for the various plenaries were selected. In a nutshell, Madrid is the first big international Anti-Annapolis conference, and this is why it is so important.

The composition of the delegations, however, especially the Israeli one, didn't satisfy the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs... or the Peres Peace Center. Obviously, the Spanish government has the right to sympathize more with Zionist organizations, and it can organize its own conference. Nevertheless, it cannot interfere in the Social Forum. Two months ago, I wrote on the AIC website:

*"The involvement of a government ministry in a social forum is, in and of itself, a serious violation of the Porto Alegre charter, which established the absolute independence of the social forums from the government. Yet the problem is not only statutory but absolutely political: what are bodies that openly support neoliberalism and the war doing with a conference that is entirely in opposition to neoliberalism and the war??! This is not the first time that this quasi-governmental entity attempts to sneak into a conference of non-governmental organizations, and we have reviewed other attempts in the past [...]. However, this time the matter is more serious, as a majority of the participants perceive the forum in Madrid as being anti-Annapolis, and it is unacceptable that blatant supporters of Annapolis will be present to seek converts for their plan of war, a plan being created right before our eyes". ("Anti-Annapolis in Madrid," 29 November 2007).*

In an unacceptable procedure, the Spanish Foreign Ministry established a parallel Israeli delegation, bigger than the official one, aimed to change the agenda of the Madrid Social Forum from an Anti-Annapolis conference to an "all inclusive" gathering, discussing the pro and against of the war plans shaped in Annapolis by George W. Bush and Ehud Olmert. The procedure is unacceptable, the content is outrageous.

As a result, the Palestinian delegation decided, at the last moment, to boycott the Forum, as did participants from other parts of the Arab world. One can object that the protest should have done in Madrid itself, at the site of the Forum, including boycotting it. This was, however, the decision of PNGO, and, while driving to the airport on my way to Madrid, I got the information and took the decision to return to Jerusalem, in solidarity with the Palestinian civil society organizations.

One should not underestimate what is at stake. It is not a matter of this or that person or organization being present at the Madrid Social Forum; it is not even the question of the heavy involvement of the Spanish government in a Social Forum. It is the question of **War and Peace in the Middle East**, what George W. Bush calls World War III, the core political issue of the moment!

In Annapolis, the United States and their allies have finalized the plans of the next war, not hesitating even to speak about nuclear strikes. It is a war against Iran, against Lebanon and Hezbollah, against Hamas and the Palestinian people, part of the global war planned by the neoconservatives of Washington and Tel Aviv.

The world today is divided between the supporters of such a war and those who oppose it: the line that divides them should be hermetic, because it is the line separating freedom from oppression, peaceful coexistence from aggression, life from death.

Some of the newly-invited Israeli organizations to Madrid are, to say the least, not fully opposed to the war plans of their government or their US godfather. To mention only two: Shimon Peres (founder of the Peres Peace Center) is calling for a preemptive war against Iran after having supported the last aggression against Lebanon; Peace Now supported the war in Lebanon in summer 2006—that is, until it became a military fiasco. It is a matter of private ethics: I do not want, today, to be in the same forum with such people. The blood of the martyrs of Tyre and Bint Jbail is not dry yet, and the noises of the next war, a war that they will undoubtedly support, are already in our ears.

*Post Scriptum: We must emphasize how unacceptable the role played by some of our Israeli colleagues has been in this. They have crossed the lines, back and forth, between the civil society organizations and the Spanish Foreign Ministry, creating the whole mess and provoking the decision of the Palestinian organizations to boycott the Forum.*

**Thursday, 13 December 2007**

## **AIC Denounces Continued Intervention in Forum for a Just Peace in the Middle East**

**Saturday, 15 December 2007**

The Alternative Information Center (AIC) denounces in the strongest possible manner the continuing undemocratic intervention of the Spanish Foreign Ministry in the Madrid Forum for a Just Peace in the Middle East. The AIC particularly denounces last night's threats aimed at AIC Program Director Sergio Yahni, member of the Forum's International Organising Committee, by representatives of the Ministry.

In complete violation of previous assurances it had given to Forum organizers, the Spanish Foreign Ministry did not respect the integrity, independent and democratic nature of the Madrid Forum. Negating the participatory work and consensual decisions of the Forum's organizing committees, the Spanish Foreign Ministry invited to the Forum its own delegation of Israelis, bypassing committee decisions and the Forum's own elected delegation from Israel. This delegation was composed of Israeli groups unwilling to endorse the Forum's own reference document, a mandatory step for all other participants from throughout the world. This blatant intervention led, on 12 December, to the boycott of this event by the Palestinian delegation and in its wake, the withdrawal of the delegations from Israel and other Arab countries.

Spanish police are currently (noon Spanish time, on 15 December) guarding the entrance to the Forum, and it is unclear who is in attendance. A large group of protesters, including Palestinian, Israeli and Spanish delegates who refuse to participate in the Forum as currently constructed, are being kept out of the Forum venue.

**The Alternative Information Center (AIC)**

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## **Palestinian Delegation Withdraws from Madrid Just Peace Forum Protesting Serious Violations**

**Thursday, 13 December 2007**

The Palestinian civil society delegation to the Forum for a Just Peace in the Middle East, planned for December 14 to 16 in Madrid, has decided not to participate in the Forum due to serious last-minute violations. Coordinators of the delegation, which was to be led by the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO), learned last night that due to unprecedented pressure from the Israeli establishment, a substantial Israeli delegation (different from the progressive civil society Israeli delegation led by the Alternative Information Center (AIC), scheduled to participate in the Forum) was

undemocratically and underhandedly “invited” to participate in the Forum without endorsing the Forum’s Reference Document [1]. This is not only a significant breach of the key rule of participation; it is a contravention of the express will of the overwhelming majority of the International Committee, the decision-making steering committee of the conference.

The International Committee, which includes representatives of PNGO, the AIC, and other key Arab and international civil society networks, decided as far back as July that any group that wishes to take part in the Forum must first endorse the Reference Document as a necessary condition of participation. This Reference Document articulates the consensus principles agreed upon by the diverse international groups organizing the Forum, and projects an alternative vision for justice and peace based on international law and universal human rights. We, and virtually all of our partners, view the violation of this basic criterion as an undemocratic, unprofessional and utterly unacceptable attempt by some to impose governmental will on a distinguished civil society initiative. Protesting this infringement of democratic principles and recognizing that it effectively opens the door to the possibility of imposing an agenda at odds with the Forum’s vision, several of our local and international partners have also decided to withdraw. These include the Israeli delegation led by the AIC, the Occupied Syrian Golan-Heights delegation, as well as many Arab and international figures and institutions.

We are deeply disappointed, saddened and surprised by this not-so-innocently-timed turn of events. We sincerely regret that an otherwise truly inspiring and democratically-organized initiative advocating peace based on justice and solidarity between nations has been hijacked by outside groups that, after failing to influence the progressive and visionary political platform of the Forum, resorted to an undemocratic coup to impose their will. Their political agenda essentially contradicts the basic principle that only peace built on justice, international law and human rights, as outlined in the Forum’s Reference Document, can be viable, equitable and sustainable.

We deeply appreciate the Spanish civil society organizations’ noble and untiring efforts in organizing this Forum in the most professional, progressive and inclusive way. They are our partners for the long haul in the struggle against the forces of occupation, racism and imperial hegemony. We share with them our aspirations for a just peace.

### **Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO)**

[1] [http://www.foroporlapaz.org/upload/documentos/D0005-07\\_Reference\\_doc\\_FINAL\\_EN.pdf](http://www.foroporlapaz.org/upload/documentos/D0005-07_Reference_doc_FINAL_EN.pdf)

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### **P.S.**

\* From

<http://www.alternativenews.org/blogs/michael-warschawski/why-i-will-not-participate-in-the-madrid-social-forum-for-a-just-peace-in-the-middle-east-20071213.html>

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