

Palestinians on the march in North America

By Mark A Bruzonsky

LAST December 200 to 300 Americans and Canadians of Palestinian background gathered in New York at the Biltmore Hotel.

As I reported at that time in the *Saudi Gazette*, this unprecedented gathering of Palestinians in North America symbolised "the first steps toward creating a single organisation to represent Palestinians living in the United States and Canada."

Stimulated then by intense opposition to the Camp David accord and now to the Egyptian-Israeli treaty, Palestinian Americans appear to be drawing together in search of political power.

Creation of what is already being referred to as the Palestine American Congress (PAC) could prove a landmark development.

Parallel

There seems a growing recognition that "one of the most important fronts in our attempt to liberate Palestine is right here in this country," as the representative of the American Federation of Ramallah Palestine — the oldest and largest organisation of Palestine Americans upto this time, noted at the December meeting.

By choosing the Biltmore Hotel for the initial gathering, the organisers seemed to be creating a parallel with Jewish American influence in the U.S. for it was at the famous 1942 Biltmore conference that representatives of

American Jewry first endorsed the idea of a sovereign Jewish state in Palestine.

Now, the new Palestine American Congress (PAC), an umbrella organisation linking previously disparate groups, may evolve into a political lobby as has the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (Aipac), popularly referred to in Washington as "the Jewish lobby."

This weekend another major step is being taken in the establishment of the PAC. In preparation for a formal constitutional convention scheduled for August 17 to 19 in Washington, 22 area conferences are being held throughout the U.S. and Canada.

At these regional assemblies delegates to next month's constitutional convention are to be selected. In addition working papers and the draft constitution prepared by a preparatory committee are to be reviewed.

Beyond these geographically selected delegates for the constitutional convention, currently existing Palestinian organisations in the U.S. and Canada will also be sending delegates.

"We lack unity, co-ordination, and organisational leadership," Dr Ahmad Isa, representing the United Holy Land Fund, said last December in New York. "So let this meeting be a new beginning, a new start. If we are serious in meeting these challenges we have to reorganise ourselves, redefine our priorities.