

Saudi Gazette, Thursday, December 7, 1978

LET'S GET OFF THE STAGE OF TALKING AND GET ON THE STAGE OF DOING?

THE first steps towards creating a single organisation to represent Palestinians living in the U.S. and Canada were taken last week and an extraordinary special conference held in New York at the Biltmore Hotel.

Aroused by hostility towards the Camp David agreements, the delegates passed resolutions reaffirming full support for the PLO and its political programme and establishing a committee to prepare for starting of a Palestinian American National Congress within six months.

It has not as yet been decided whether this new organisation will be an umbrella for existing organisations, a federation, or a totally new organisation representing the estimated 60,000 Palestinians living in the U.S. and Canada.

Abdeen Jabara, an attorney from Detroit, opened the assembly which attracted between 200

The start of real unity of Palestinians in U.S.?

By MARK A BRUZONSKY reporting from Washington

and 300 Palestinian Americans and a few Palestinian Canadians declaring it to be a "truly historic meeting that I hope one day will be written about in the history books."

Historic

Many of those present at the Biltmore drew the historical analogy with the 1942 meeting of American Zionists where for the first time creation of a separate Jewish state in Palestine won wide support from American Jewry.

In a show of unity and unre-

served support for the PLO, seven Palestinian American organisations sent representatives specifically authorised to discuss creation of a single unifying organisation.

In what proved to be nearly universally supported views, the representative of the Palestine Red Crescent declared "total rejection of the Camp David agreement which represents a flagrant surrender to our Zionist enemy."

He went on to "reaffirm our identity as one people, one nation,

with a common destiny wherever we may live on this earth" — an expression also certainly echoed, in the same room in 1942, but then with reference to the Jewish people.

Action

Dr. Ahmad Isa, representing the United Holy Land Fund, strongly chastised the assembled delegates by urging them not to repeat past mistakes by allowing this meeting to succeed rhetorically but not politically. "Year after year we listen to speeches and see the same faces," he declared.

"But we lack unity, coordination, and organisational leadership. 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. Let's get off the stage of talking and get on the stage of doing."

Speaking for the American Federation of Ramallah Palestine, the oldest and largest organisation of Palestinian Americans, the Biltmore delegates were told that "one of the most important fronts in our attempt to liberate Palestine is right here in this country."

One of the major reasons behind the establishment of the new National Council seems to be the desire, on the part of Arab Americans, to increasingly challenge the American government by information campaigns directed to American public opinion.

Other organisations represented at the Biltmore were the Palestine Arab Fund, the Committee for Democratic Palestine, the Palestine Aid Society and the Palestine organisations of Canada.

Various local Palestinian American organisations such as the Arab-Americans Society of Dallas and Houston, the Committee on Palestinians in New England, and the Arab Palestine Federation of Michigan were also represented.

Intellectuals

Though a majority of those attending were in their 30s, a considerable number of older Palestinian Americans and a number of the most noted Palestinian intellectuals such as Dr. Fayez Sayegh,

Dr. Ibrahim Abu Lugod and Dr. Edward Said were also at this preparatory conference.

Members of the PLO who are at the UN General Assembly were also in attendance. Shafiq Al Hout told the assembly, "we are one people but on different battlefields." Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the PLO's political department, was honoured at a Sunday afternoon banquet where he reviewed in detail the history of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle.

Theme

Universal condemnation of Camp David was the overall political theme of the conference. Indeed, camp David may eventually be seen as the father of a Palestinian American National Congress if one is established in the coming months.

Professor Edward Said of Columbia University declared, Camp David to be "a throwback to the 19th century — like the Congress of Vienna — where great powers would closet themselves and decide on the fate of smaller, weaker nations."

"Camp David is an attempt to keep the Palestinians out not only from their homeland but from their future," Said insisted. "We must refuse to accept the straight jacket into which we have been forced. We must push out from where imperialistic forces push us. We are part of a great wave of anti-imperialism sweeping the world and it is our role to be a vanguard part of this struggle."

Racism

Fayez Sayegh, a senior and well-respected member of the Palestine National Council who currently serves as adviser to the Kuwaiti mission to the UN and is generally given credit for initiating the "Zionism is racism" resolution, proclaimed: "Our first task is to undo Camp David. In my view, this is a positive act. It will allow us to struggle without the fetters which Camp David imposes."

"In order to defeat (David, to make it a forg document," Sayegh argued, first instrument is the cont rejection by our people of West Bank and Gaza fromicipating at all... once (David is known and perciv have been defeated, the U.S enter into one of its famous 'sessments,'" Sayegh conclud "Then, either it will was hands of the whole problem will realise it cannot circun the Palestinian problem. T why I say the defeat of (David is not just negative. Iti positive."

Demonstration

In addition to the two da meetings at the Biltmore, co ence participants staged a leight march on the Israeli sion to the UN to protest ag Israeli treatment of Palesti on the West Bank — especial new wave of arrests of those have spoken out politically ag Camp David.

"Hands off Bir Zeit" was popular slogan referring to it students recently arrested a West Bank's only university, the students go."

"Long live the PLO. Down Camp David. Down with Sac was another chant as the mar stood across from the Israeli sion only blocks away from Biltmore.

Then the marchers proce to the U.S. Mission to the where their chant containe central message of the e weekend's discussions. "Mr. ter you should know, we suj the PLO" echoed for 3 minutes on 44th street anc avenue." But few were arou Saturday evening to hear, ju few in the U.S. hear the voi Palestinian Americans.

Whether creation of this organisation will make a di ence remains to be seen.