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#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 4, 2009  
 10:07 AM

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## CODEPINK Interrupts Israeli President at AIPAC Conference Calls for Ending Occupation, Lifting Siege of Gaza, and Diplomacy with Iran

WASHINGTON - May 4 - During Israeli Pres. Shimon Peres' speech today at the annual AIPAC (American Israeli Political Action Committee) policy conference at the Washington Convention Center, CODEPINK members raised banners saying "Want Peace? End the Occupation," "What About Gaza?," and "No Money for War Crimes."

As the six activists were forcibly dragged away from the stage, they shouted similar phrases including "Tikun olam (Heal the world) for Gaza, too!", all meant to draw attention to widespread opposition to AIPAC's policies lobbied to Congress that include unconditional support and financing for Israel's militaristic policies including the recent devastating invasion of Gaza, building of illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the separation wall, refusal to negotiate with the Palestinians' democratically elected representatives, and threats to attack Iran.

"The brutal invasion of Gaza was a breaking point for me and many American Jews," said CODEPINK co-founder Medea Benjamin, who recently led a 60-person delegation to Gaza. "I was appalled by the devastation and the suffering I saw, particularly among the children. As a mother, I feel compelled to speak out against Israel's bombing of civilians and the ongoing siege that is so devastating to the lives of Gaza's 1.5 million people-most of whom are under 18."

While AIPAC claims to represent the U.S. Jewish community, its wholesale support of the Israel government goes against the majority opinions of the Jewish Americans. According to a recent survey by the Jewish lobby group J Street, 76 percent of American Jews support a two-state solution, 69 percent support negotiating with a Fatah-Hamas unity government, and 59 percent felt the Gaza invasion did not improve Israel's security.

"Like most American Jews, I grew up with a deep appreciation for the state of Israel," said Rae Abileah, a young American Jew of Israeli descent. "After witnessing the attack of Gaza on TV and hearing the calls for crippling sanctions on Iran, I can no longer avert my eyes to the other side of the story most rabbis still aren't talking about. I am joining the dozens of Jewish organizations, and the growing global movement, advocating a change in the Israeli policies of occupation and aggressive violence. It's high time to drop the victim narrative so that we may all survive, and one day thrive as neighbors."

CODEPINK activists inside the AIPAC conference (with its theme "Relationships Matter") were: Medea Benjamin, 56, Rae Abileah, 26, Blaine Clarke, 29, Christianna Reinstein, 21, Desiree Fairouz, 53, and Tighe Barry, 52.

"The most important relationships for Israel to cultivate are not with U.S. Congressional allies but with the Palestinian people," said Christianna Reinstein, a student of Middle Eastern studies who joined the protest inside the AIPAC conference today. "AIPAC's lobbying of Congress has not made Israel more secure and has hurt American efforts to improve relations in the Arab world."

For more information, please call Medea Benjamin, CODEPINK co-founder, at 415-235-6517, Rae Abileah at 415-99401723 or Jean Stevens, media coordinator, at 508-769-2138. Visit [www.codepinkalert.org/gaza](http://www.codepinkalert.org/gaza).

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*CODEPINK is a women-initiated grassroots peace and social justice movement working to end the war in Iraq, stop new wars, and redirect our resources into healthcare, education and other life-affirming activities. CODEPINK rejects the Bush administration's fear-based politics that justify violence, and instead calls for policies based on compassion, kindness and a commitment to international law. With an emphasis on joy and humor, CODEPINK women and men seek to activate, amplify and inspire a community of peacemakers through creative campaigns and a commitment to non-violence.*

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