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Speech by

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Organization**

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Mr President,
Excellencies,
Dear Friends,

Last week some of you were with us in Palestine and today we meet on the soil of France, that great and friendly country which has contributed so much to the history of human emancipation, together with all the great leaders present here, who represent forces of progress and emancipation throughout the world: from Asia and from Europe, from Africa, from the Americas and from Australia. The Socialist International is a truly universal organization, a truly international family of peace and justice-loving men and women, and we are proud to be part of it. Our Palestinian people are quite confident that the Socialist International, with its principles and its values, will continue to support their march towards the realization of their right to self-determination and towards the establishment of the independent Palestinian State. The course of the negotiations that have just started between us and our Israeli neighbors must be crowned by real peace, the peace of the brave for both peoples and for the region as a whole.

This twenty-first congress takes place on the eve of the twenty-first century. The century that now comes to a close has been one of unprecedented bloodshed, the like of which had not been witnessed in the whole of human history, even though it was also a century characterized by great scientific progress and space discoveries, as well as considerable developments in the field of information and communication, developments that exceed, by hundreds of times, the achievements of the human race throughout its long history.

Today I would like to reflect with you upon three important paradoxes witnessed by my generation: the first is the great change that has taken place in international relations: the motion away from the equation shaped by the Cold War, the certainty that the old world has lived and the establishment of a new world order.

Secondly, the century now coming to a close has been one of national liberation for so many peoples throughout the world: we have seen with our eyes the rise and fall of apartheid in South Africa, while our Palestinian Arab people is still knocking on the door of international legality, striving to exercise their inalienable rights, recognized by the world through the resolutions of the United Nations, the declarations and statements of the international community, and the agreements signed in the wake of the Madrid Peace Conference, and to overcome the historical and human oppression inflicted upon them.

The third paradox consists in the resurgence of Europe after the IInd World War, which was engineered by two great statesmen - Konrad Adenauer and Charles De Gaulle. These two leaders worked to make Germany the backbone of progress in Europe, and as a result, Germany has indeed become a major economic and political power. But it had also set a precedent in international relations, and the model of a just peace as a basis for coexistence between peoples.

Dear friends,

The major interrogation facing statesmen in the Middle-East as they prepare to enter the next millenium is the following: "As we enter the twenty-first century, has the process of reconciliation in the Middle-East become a stable reality, on the basis of which the area is being transformed ? Is our region moving surely towards peace, security, cooperation and coexistence between our two peoples and all the peoples and states of the region, as was agreed in the Madrid Conference, in conformity with international legality and UN resolutions ?

The answer to this question could be totally affirmative if the coming generations of Arabs and Israelis are committed to see to it that the logic of peace replaces the logic of war, that the logic of justice replaces that of domination and in justice, and if the logic of democracy replaces that of authoritarianism. In other words, yes, provided that the logic of a just and comprehensive peace prevails in the region.

Dear friends,

For more than a quarter of a century, the Socialist International has contributed a lot to lay the foundations of a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis, and in the region as a whole, on the basis of UN Resolutions 242, 338 and 425, the principle of Land for Peace, and the recognition of the need for partnership in shaping the future; on the basis of the realization of the mutual interests of both parties, and upholding the language of peace because it is the only strategic option.

Today, on behalf of our Palestinian people, I call upon the present leaders of the Socialist International, who will undoubtedly play a role in the coming XXIst century, to keep on supporting this effort, and to keep on mobilizing its forces in order to make just peace a reality. Just Peace starts with the recognition of the independent and sovereign Palestinian State, and continues with the solution of the pending issues: settlements, Jerusalem, Refugees, borders and water, in accordance with international Law and with the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference.

My dear friends, International Legality is the reference for any just peace, and international legality is both indivisible and equally binding for all and everywhere; International legality is pivotal in the search for a just and comprehensive peace. Even more so if we talk about historical reconciliation. We do not demand absolute justice, which does not exist in this world. We aspire, however, to that real-world justice which consists in equality, fairness and equity; because without that measure of justice Peace will not strike roots among the peoples. And this we must keep in mind when we prepare to devise a just solution the problem of Palestinian refugees, in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194. This is how I understand what my partner-in -peace, the late Israeli Prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, did

when we exchanged letters and accepted a compromise solution based on international legality as embodied in UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which call upon Israel to withdraw from the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, in return for Peace and Security. These resolutions stipulate the exchange of Land for Peace, while stating the "inadmissibility of acquisition of territory by war". There can therefore be no unilateral annexation of any portion of Palestinian territory and this equally applies to Holy Jerusalem, to Bethlehem, to the Latrun area and to the southern shores of the Gaza Strip, or whatever other areas evoked in the Israeli media.

The principle of a just peace contradicts the continued existence of settlements erected in order to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian State, and to undermine the geographical integrity of the Palestinian territory. Is there any country in the world in which there are settlements not under its sovereignty ?

The Likud government of Menahem Begin dismantled the settlements erected in the occupied Egyptian territories, and now the Barak government envisages to dismantle the settlements erected on the Golan Heights. Nothing except the logic of injustice can legitimize the continued existence of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. It has become a crucial necessity to stop all settlement activities in the Palestinian territory, totally and not selectively. For settlements are not only illegal, and a breach of international law; they are destructive to the peace process itself.

We and the Arabs have welcome Ehud Barak's victory in the Israeli elections because he declared his commitment to peace, and said he would walk in the footsteps of the late leader Yitzhak Rabin on the way to the Peace of the Brave. Both peoples must coexist and elaborate true partnership in the shadow of comprehensive peace in the region, on all the Arab, Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese tracks. A new state of peace in the Middle-East, for our children and for the next generations.

Mr. Barak has declared his support for the Peace of the Brave. We saw he also had the courage to express his sorrow for the pain and suffering which the Palestinian people has endured over a period of time longer than any other people in history, and has accepted to search for ways of coexistence and partnership between the two peoples. We welcomed the victory of Mr. Barak in the last Israeli elections, we congratulate him for the confidence of those Israeli voters who aspire to peace, and hope the rest of the Israelis will rally them.

Thus could we reach the Sharm El Sheikh agreement on a timeline of implementation of the signed interim agreements, paving the way to the resumption of permanent status negotiations. Thus could we rejoice in seeing some crucial elements of the said agreements at last implemented: another phase of Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, two successive waves of prisoners release, the beginning of operation of the long delayed safe-passage between the two parts of the Palestinian territory. And we are confident that this

forward motion will continue until full implementation of the interim agreements: the release of all prisoners, further redeployment, fully-safe passage for all Palestinians on both the southern and the northern route, the agreement to begin the construction of the Gaza sea-port and the return of the Palestinians displaced as a result of the 1967 war; This will create the conditions for fruitful negotiations on permanent status, while allowing to pursue, with the help and support of the international community, the construction of our economy and the democratic development of our society.

Dear friends,
Brothers and Sisters
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the core of the Arab-Israeli confrontation. There will be no real and durable peace relations between Israel and the rest of this area unless an independent, sovereign Palestinian State with Holy Jerusalem as its capital becomes a central element of regional stability, but also unless there is progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the negotiations.

In the long and difficult path to end the conflict and to achieve peace, we were not alone. We have enjoyed the active support of the successive US administrations, who have made tireless efforts to maintain the peace-process alive and to keep it moving forward. We highly value these efforts, the importance of which should not be underestimated. A few days ago we were in Oslo, where President Clinton once again put his personal weight in the balance to push the process forward and in order to elaborate a joint formula that could pave the way to a trilateral - American-Palestinian-Israeli - summit next February, to conclude a framework agreement on the permanent settlement.

We also appreciate the support of the Donors community, including the European Union, Japan, China, Russia, Norway, the Non-Aligned countries, the World Bank and the IMF, who have helped us to survive under the very difficult conditions imposed upon our renascent economy; We have also enjoyed considerable economic, but also moral support from the European Union as a whole as well as from its member-states individually. We have consistently called for an increased political role for Europe, in the brave spirit of the March 1999 Berlin Declaration, At last, we have received the consistent support of our Jordanian, Egyptian and other Arab brothers, as well as that of the peace-forces in Israel, and to begin with of the Israeli voters, who have voted for peace.

Finally, allow me to thank my friend Pierre Mauroy for his support in this effort. Allow me to recall Pierre Mendes-France and Francois Mitterrand, who played a decisive role at crucial times in the history of our people. As President of the Socialist International, Pierre Mauroy continued and developed, with success and skill, the work started by a great friend already gone, the late Willy Brandt, who, together with Bruno Kreisky and Olof Palme, who also left us, had opened the Socialist International to the world. Pierre Mauroy has

made it the great international organization it has become today. I am confident that his successor, our friend Antonio Guterrez, will bring it to even brighter shores, wish him all success and assure him of our support.

Let us make the coming century the beginning of a new era of justice and prosperity for all the peoples of the world. Let me finally repeat my invitation to all of you to participate with us in the historical and religious celebrations in Bethlehem on the occasion of the second millenium of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Peace Be onto him.