

**U.S. Consulate General, Jerusalem**  
**Webchat with Students of Relief International Schools Online**  
**West Bank Centers**

**January 27, 2009**

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** Welcome to the webchat page for the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem!

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** Please join us on January 27 at 4:30 p.m. to chat about the recent inauguration of President Barack Obama and other questions you may have about the Obama administration.

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** Once submitted to the queue, your questions will appear in red.

**RI-SOL-Kameel-Jenin:** Good afternoon everybody

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** Welcome!

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** Hello everyone and thanks for joining us today! Please submit your questions. They will appear in red and will be sent to the queue.

**Jacqueline:** Hello everyone! Thanks for joining us in this webchat. I understand that you all watched President Obama's inauguration on January 20 and I'm sorry that Internet problems prevented us from doing the webchat that day. I'm looking forward to hearing your questions and will do my best to answer them.

**RI-SOL-Ashraf-Jenin:** Hi, I'm Ashraf from Jenin.

**Jacqueline:** Hi Ashraf! Thanks for joining us today.

**RI-SOL-Noor-Jenin:** Hi, everybody.

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** Welcome!

**RI-SOL-Noor-Jenin:** It's Noor from Jenin.

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** Hello and welcome!

**RI-SOL-Ashraf-Jenin:** Thanks, can I add my questions now?

**Jacqueline:** Yes, please do!

**Bethlehem RI-SOL CBLAC:** Hello everybody... This is the student club of Bethlehem, Relief International Center

**Jacqueline:** Welcome, Bethlehem!

**Bethlehem RI-SOL CBLAC:** Thanks, Jacqueline.

**Jacqueline:** So far, we have RISOL centers in Bethlehem and Jenin. Any others logged in yet?

**Lamis:** hi

**Jacqueline:** Hi! What's your name?

**Lamis:** My name is Lamis.

**Jacqueline:** Hi, Lamis. Welcome to today's webchat. Do you have any questions you want to ask?

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** We see your questions coming in! Thank you. They are being added to the queue. Jacqueline will answer them as quickly as she can.

**RI-SOL-Noor-Jenin:** Do you think Mr. Obama will make change in America [now that] he became President?

**Jacqueline:** Hi Noor. As you know, President Obama campaigned on a platform of "change," so I do think we'll see some differences between his administration and former President Bush's.

**Ola Al-Tamimi:** Thanks a lot.

**Bethlehem RI-SOL CBLAC:** Nadim here is asking a question: What are Obama's plans for the current financial situation in Palestine and the Middle East?

**Jacqueline:** The US government is engaged in a lot of work to support the Palestinian private sector and provides budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority. And as you might have heard, Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell is arriving in the region and will be talking to Palestinian leaders as well.

**Ola Al-Tamimi:** Also I wonder if [the] Middle East will have any chance for peace during Obama's governing period.

**Jacqueline:** President Obama is personally committed to helping to bring about Middle East peace, and is sending George Mitchell to the region to help bring that about.

**Ola Al-Tamimi:** I would like to ask about the youth's role in Obama's plan to restart America's economy.

**Jacqueline:** President Obama's campaign really focused on engaging youth. What type of role do you think that youth such as yourselves can have in bringing about peace in this region?

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** To learn more about President Obama's policies please go to <http://www.whitehouse.gov>

**RI-SOL-Ashraf-Jenin:** And he said [that] America is a friend for all countries all over the world, but he didn't do [a] thing about Gaza.

**Jacqueline:** One of George Michell's priorities while he's here is to make sure the ceasefire is lasting, and to make sure humanitarian assistance reaches Gaza. President Obama has also expressed deep concern over the humanitarian suffering of the Gazan people.

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** Welcome to those who have just joined us! We are taking your questions about President Obama now.

**RI-SOL-Kameel-Jenin:** Hello, I would like to ask - everybody here in Palestine has the same question: Why did Mr. Obama not mention the war on Gaza in his inaugural address?

**Jacqueline:** President Obama's inaugural address was actually quite short, and dealt with large themes, such as America's engagement with the Middle East.

**Lamis-Jenin:** I am back.

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** Good to see you!

**Lamis:** What changes do you expect this year in the Middle East?

**Jacqueline:** As you know, President Obama has already signed an executive order closing Guantanamo, and is reaching out to the countries of the Middle East. And he has named a Special Envoy for Middle East Peace, George Mitchell to bring about the vision of two states, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace.

**Lamis-Jenin:** But what we read about Mitchell in the newspaper is different.

**Jacqueline:** I'm sorry. What do you mean? I don't understand your question.

**RI-SOL-Fateh-Jenin:** Hi, I am Fateh.

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** Hi - welcome to our chat, Fateh.

**Alaa ramallah:** Hi, I am Alaa.

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** Hello, welcome!

**RI-SOL-Kameel-Jenin:** But, aren't the 1,500 souls lost in Gaza worth a single word?

**Jacqueline:** One of his first priorities was to name a Middle East Envoy for Peace, and ask him to arrive in the region immediately, in order to work on a durable ceasefire. And in President Obama's statements to the press, he has expressed deep concern over the humanitarian suffering in Gaza.

**RI-SOL-Saleh-Jenin:** Hiii I am Saleh from Jenin.

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** Hi Saleh! Welcome to the webchat.

**Hebron:** Hi, I'm Lubna from Hebron, Palestine.

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** Hi Lubna, we're glad you are joining us today.

**Deeb Bader - RISOL - Hebron:** Welcome, Salah.

**Sami Gaoud:** Hi, I am Sami from Palestine.

**Sami Gaoud:** Hebron, Palestine.

**RI-SOL-Noor-Jenin:** But what happened in Gaza proves that Israel doesn't like peace.

**Jacqueline:** President Obama does not feel he should tell the Israelis or Palestinians what's best for them, but believes the moment is ripe for both sides to realize that the path that they are on is one that will not result in peace and prosperity and security for their people, and that instead, it's time to return to the negotiating table.

**Noor Jaradat:** Hi, I'm Noor from Relief International, Nablus district

**Ameer Qaisi:** Hi, I am Ameer Qaisi from Hebron, Palestine.

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** If you would like to be part of our international community on Facebook, please visit: <http://co-nx.state.gov>.

**RI-SOL-Noor-Jenin:** Welcome, all.

**Omar N. Shamali-Ramallah:** Hello everyone, first congratulations to President B. Obama.

**Bethlehem RI-SOL CBLAC:** A question from Ranim: What is the U.S. presidential plan for decreasing weapon use in the Middle East?

**Jacqueline:** President Obama has sent his Special Envoy for Middle East Peace, George Mitchell, to this region in order to listen to the leaders and the people. The President has not articulated all of his policies yet. He wants to hear back from George Mitchell what Mitchell heard during his discussions with leaders in this region.

**Lamis-Jenin:** Hi,Omar.

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** Welcome to all who have just joined us! Please continue to submit your questions. Jacqueline is answering them as quickly as she can. Thanks for your patience.

**Diana- Ramallah:** Hi everyone.. welcome.. as you know, Palestine has been under occupation since 1948. In your opinion, when do you think we will have a FREE PALESTINE????

**Jacqueline:** President Obama doesn't want to put a timeline on this, but has sent George Mitchell to the region--within a week of his assuming the presidency--because it's very high priority and he wants to begin work on this immediately.

**RI-SOL-Ashraf-Jenin:** Welcome all my friends from other centres.

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** For more information on Obama and his cabinet, please scroll through the presentation on the left called "Helpful Links." You can also go to [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov) for more information on Obama's policies on the Mideast.

**Noor Jaradat:** George Bush dreamed that there would be a Palestinian state for Palestinian people. Do you having the same dream of a Palestinian state???

**Jacqueline:** President Obama has clearly stated that he will actively work towards bringing about the two-state solution, with Palestine and Israel living side-by-side in peace.

**RI-SOL-Fateh-Jenin:** I'm back - Web problems

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** Good to see you!

**Ameer Qaisi:** Are we going to see any changes in the strategy in the Middle East?

**Jacqueline:** Yes, but please keep in mind that President Obama assumed office just one week ago. He has sent his Middle East envoy to the region immediately, to listen to what leaders have to say. Mr Mitchell will then report directly to the Secretary and the President, who will continue to formulate policy. The President also noted that it's important to deal with the region as a whole, that all issues are interrelated, and that he wants the Arab and Muslim world to know that the U.S. is ready to initiate a new partnership, based on mutual respect and mutual interest.

**RI-SOL-Ashraf-Jenin:** They said that before, but Israel will take the majority of Palestine and we will have nothing.

**Jacqueline:** President Obama wants to work with both Israelis and Palestinians to reach a negotiated agreement that is acceptable to both. He supports the two-state solution, which means an independent, viable Palestinian state that allows freedom of movement for its people, allows for trade with other countries, and the creation of businesses and commerce, so that people have a better life.

**Alaa Ramallah:** From your point of view, how we can support the Palestinian children in bettering their condition?

**Jacqueline:** President Obama said in his Al Arabiya interview that he recognizes that the situation for ordinary Palestinians has not improved, and that the bottom line in all these talks is to answer the question: Is a child in the Palestinian Territories going to be better off? Do they have a future for themselves? Is the child in Israel going to feel secure about his safety? And if we focus on making the lives of all children better--Palestinian and Israeli--and looking forward, then we have the opportunity to make real progress.

**RI-SOL-Fateh-Jenin:** Yes, but each new president says the same thing, but we do not see any changes.

**Jacqueline:** President Obama began tackling this issue within days of taking office by immediately naming a Middle East envoy and sending him to the region to listen and talk with leaders.

**Lamis-Jenin:** What about Jerusalem?

**Jacqueline:** Again, President Obama will be working with Israelis and Palestinians to reach a peace agreement acceptable to both sides.

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** Please join our CO.NX Facebook community. We ask that you give us feedback on programs and suggest future programs you'd like to be a part of.

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** <http://co-nx.state.gov>

**Noor Jaradat:** Can you do something to make Israel withdraw from Palestinian Territories??

**Jacqueline:** President Obama and his envoy George Mitchell have promised to work hard on reaching an agreement that would lead to the establishment of an independent, viable Palestinian state. As you know, George Mitchell is expected in the region soon, to begin that work immediately.

**Diana- Ramallah:** I'm a high school student and I'll graduate next year. What kind of help are you offering for Palestinian students to get, maybe, scholarships or be educated in your country and interact with American people so that we can learn what they think about the situation that we're living in, from a different source than the government??

**Jacqueline:** That's an excellent question and my colleague who works on exchange programs is planning to hold a webchat soon. We'll let you know when it's taking place! And our office at the Consulate, along with USAID, does quite a lot to assist Palestinian universities, helping them to fulfill their own goals and potential.

**Lubna RI-SOL Hebron:** If the President supports the two- state solution, do you have any solution for the displaced Palestinians?

**Jacqueline:** That would be part of the solution negotiated by Palestinians and Israelis.

**Naser Zeer- RI – SOL- Hebron:** Hey: Will the situation in Palestine continue or be insulting, or be totally changed?

**Jacqueline:** I'm unclear what you mean by "insulting," but I can tell you that President Obama is forging ahead with a new approach to the Arab and Muslim world. He has made a point to say that he will use a language of respect when speaking to and about Muslims, and that his job is to communicate to the American people that the Muslim world is filled with extraordinary people who simply want to live their lives, and see their children live better lives.

**RI-SOL-Ashraf-Jenin:** What else did Mr. Obama say about Palestine or about the Middle East, besides what you wrote?

**Jacqueline:** He gave a very long interview with Al Arabiya yesterday. Have you seen it? He spoke a lot about the Palestinian issue. It's a great interview!

**RI-SOL-Ashraf-Jenin:** Jacqueline, what is your opinion about Palestinian and Israeli negotiations? Are they good for us and will they give us our rights?

**Jacqueline:** The US believes that negotiations are the only path to peace and that violence will not advance, but only retard, the hope for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. President Obama believes that the moment is ripe for both sides to return to the negotiating table.

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** To see a transcript of that interview on Al Arabiya go to: <http://mideast.blogs.time.com/2009/01/27/obama-mideast-watch-the-al-arabiya-interview/>

**Webchat Moderator (Kristin):** You can also watch it here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zblKT6Z-LV0&feature=related>

**Omar N. Shamali-Ramallah:** Would Obama's government deal with a new, [Palestinian] unity government (that would include Hamas)?

**Jacqueline:** President Obama has made very clear that Hamas can join the peace process at any time, as long as it fulfills certain requirements such as the renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel and recognition of previous agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. Please check out the link that Kristin provided--the whole interview with Al Arabiya was about the Middle East, specifically about the Palestinian issue. It was really great.

**Naser Zeer-RI-SOL - Hebron:** What are the future plans for withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq?

**Jacqueline:** President Obama wants to return full authority for security in Iraq over to the Iraqis. For more specific information on his plans, please check out [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

**Alaa Ramallah:** When we graduate from college, the students will be desperate because of the huge number of graduating students. Will you have employment programs for the students?

**Jacqueline:** A big part of the Consulate's work is to assist in the economic development of the Palestinian Territories so that students can find jobs in their fields when they graduate from university. We will continue to work on this actively, as helping to build a viable Palestinian economy is an important U.S. priority.



**Lubna RI-SOL Hebron:** And do you think that this will be the end of the conflict, because I don't think so.

**Jacqueline:** President Obama said in his interview that if we keep focused on making the lives of Palestinian and Israeli children better and look forward, and not simply think about all the conflicts and tragedies of the past, he thinks we have an opportunity to make real progress.

**RI-SOL - Hebron:** [Will the U.S. be building] the [U.S.] economy or will you be interested in [helping other economies] ???

**Jacqueline:** USAID and the Consulate work actively with the Palestinian Authority and local businesses to help build the Palestinian economy, so that Palestinian youth will have better lives and better futures.

**RI-SOL-Fateh-Jenin:** But there is no negotiation with the Israelis [to gain] our freedom and [free] the areas occupied by Israel.

**Jacqueline:** President Obama has stated that the time is ripe to return to negotiations with the goal of establishing an independent, viable Palestinian state.

**Lubna RI-SOL Hebron:** Does Obama think that the solution to the Palestinian case or the end of the conflict [can be found] just in negotiations, because I don't think so .....!!!

**Jacqueline:** The President doesn't believe that violence brings peace or the establishment of a Palestinian state any closer. As I said earlier, he thinks that the time is ripe to return to negotiations with the goal of establishing an independent, viable Palestinian state.

**Bethlehem RI-SOL CBLAC:** How will USAID policy for youth be constructed in the next period? In what fields is it going to be oriented?

**Jacqueline:** The new administration will soon elaborate its priorities for development through USAID, but we expect it will continue to work in the usual areas, including health, economic development, education, business and enterprise development, justice, rule of law, etc.

**Diana- Ramallah:** About these exchanges you mentioned, what kind of exchanges would they be? I mean do they require something specific??

**Jacqueline:** There are a lot of different exchanges--I couldn't possibly summarize them all here, but we will let you know when we will hold the webchat specifically on exchanges. And you can also check our website for more

information, and also research on the Internet the many opportunities for private scholarships.

**Jacqueline:** Thanks for your interest in this webchat--we've already been going for an hour and I'm going to have to wrap this up in another 5 minutes or so. How about just 1-2 more questions?

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** A good place to start your research on exchange programs is the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Education and Cultural Exchange at: <http://exchanges.state.gov/>

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** If you would like to be part of our weekly CO.NX webchat newsletter, please send a note to conx@state.gov and we will sign you up.

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** One last item, at America.gov we have a new blog focused on the new Obama Administration...you can post your thoughts and comments at <http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/>

**RI-SOL Hebron Muhannad:** I hope so, but what is your suggestion for resolving the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians?

**Jacqueline:** Well, President Obama said in his interview yesterday that he thinks that there are many ideas across the region about how we might pursue peace and that he wants to listen to them and set aside preconceptions that have built up over the last years.

He also said that he doesn't think that it's possible to think about a solution without also thinking about the region as a whole, about what is happening in Syria or Iran or Lebanon or Afghanistan and Pakistan.

He also said that there are Israelis who want peace and will be willing to make sacrifices, if the timing is appropriate and there is serious partnership on the Palestinian side.

He believes that there is a possibility for some breakthroughs, at least.

**Ameer Qaisi:** Does the President believe Hamas is a terrorist organization? Will he not accept to negotiate with them?

**Jacqueline:** The President has made clear that Hamas can be a part of the peace process by accepting some basic and very clear principles: Renunciation of violence and terror, Recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements between the parties.

**Omar N. Shamali-Ramallah:** X-president Bush entered Iraq for the reason of, "fighting weapons of mass destruction." The result was streets of blood (on both

sides). President Obama has decided to withdraw the army from Iraq, which reason will convince the world?

**Jacqueline:** Which reason would convince the world of what?

**RI-SOL-Ashraf-Jenin:** I heard that the economy in America is falling down. What do you say about that?

**Jacqueline:** The economy in the U.S. is going through a period of very serious difficulty, but it's not the first time that this has happened--during the Great Depression of the 1930s, the situation was worse, but America pulled together, and our economy bounced back. President Obama has already begun to address this problem.

**Jacqueline:** Sorry, everyone--time is up! Thank you very much for participating in today's chat, and we will keep you posted on future webchats, like the one, I mentioned before, about exchange programs.

**Nada:** Hi, I am Nada from Relief International Nablus district.

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** Hello Nada, welcome!

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** Thanks, everyone for joining today's webchat.

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** There were many questions coming in today.

**RI-SOL-Kameel-Jenin:** Thank you very much.

**Ameer Qaisi:** Thank you so much.

**Ameer Qaisi:** I hope that you can do it again

**Omar N. Shamali-Ramallah:** Thank you.

**Alaa Ramallah:** Thanks and bye.

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** Thank you!

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** If you have any questions about how to access the chat room, please write [conx@state.gov](mailto:conx@state.gov).

**RI-SOL-Fateh-Jenin:** Thanks for all.

**Bethlehem RI-SOL CBLAC:** Thanks!

**Lubna RI-SOL Hebron:** Thanks a lot. Hope to have this chat again.

**SAMI RI-SOL- HEBRON:** Thank you for everything.

**Jacqueline:** THANKS EVERYONE!! IT WAS GREAT CHATTING WITH YOU!!

**SAMI RI-SOL-HEBRON:** Thanks.

**Omar Al-Sahili:** Thanks for your time.

**RI-SOL Hebron Muhannad:** Thank you for this discussion and I hope you make that again.

**RI-SOL-Ashraf-Jenin:** Thank you a lot for this opportunity.

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** You are invited to join the CO.NX Community on Facebook at <http://co-nx.state.gov>

**RI-SOL-Ashraf-Jenin:** And I hope there will be a next time.

**Webchat Moderator (Mark):** Thanks again, everyone. The web chat is now closed.