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AIPAC APPLAUDS HOUSE PASSAGE OF FOREIGN AID BILL INCLUDES \$2.4 BILLION FOR ISRAEL

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) applauds House approval of the annual Foreign Aid bill, which contains \$2.44 billion in U.S. aid to Israel, including \$2.4 billion in military aid and \$40 million in assistance for the resettlement of refugees from the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and Ethiopia.

The foreign aid package is included in the Fiscal Year 2008 (FY08) Foreign Operations Appropriations bill, which passed the House by a vote of 241-178, with 13 members not voting. The Senate is expected to mark-up its version of the bill shortly.

"I applaud the House for passing the annual foreign aid bill," said AIPAC President Howard Friedman. "U.S. aid to Israel is critical to keeping our democratic ally Israel safe and strong and reaffirms our nation's deep commitment to our friends in Israel."

"This year's package holds heightened significance as the United States, the region and Israel face renewed challenges from Iran's drive to acquire nuclear weapons and its support for Islamic radicalist movements including Hizballah and Hamas, as well as the danger posed by Hamas's recent violent take over of Gaza," Friedman said. "Congress' support for this year's aid package sends the strong, unambiguous, message that the United States stands firmly behind Israel, and underscores the strength of the US-Israel bond," he added.

The bill also conditions Palestinian aid on the fulfillment of "any benchmarks that have been established" in the pursuit of peace with Israel, requires an audit of Palestinian finances in the West Bank, prohibits aid to any organizations connected to or engaged in terrorism and directs the Secretary of State to submit to Congress a report outlining ways of supporting and strengthening Palestinian moderates willing to confront the extremists in their midst.

Also among the many other interesting provisions, there is language in the legislation that directs the Secretary of State to undertake efforts to restrict the supply of refined gas to Iran in order to prevent Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons, and provides \$50 million to promote democracy, the rule of law and governance in Iran.

The aid to Israel represents the last year of a 10-year plan between Israel and the United States which phases out economic aid to Israel while gradually increasing the amount of military aid. As President Bush said during Prime Minister Olmert's visit earlier this week, "I am committed to reaching a new ten-year agreement that will give Israel the increased assistance it requires to meet the new threats and challenges it faces."

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