

Netanyahu Urges Ambassadors to Oppose Unilateral Palestinian Move at U.N.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday urged 19 visiting diplomats to oppose a drive by the Palestinians to win unilateral recognition of statehood at the United Nations without negotiating a peace agreement with Israel.

The delegation of 18 Washington-based ambassadors from four continents and one other senior diplomat met Netanyahu on day two of a five-day fact-finding mission to Israel and the West Bank organized by The Israel Project.

"I am going to ask you not to support this resolution," Netanyahu told the group. He said the resolution, which Palestinian leaders are expected to bring to the United Nations General Assembly next month, could seriously damage the peace process and make future negotiations much more difficult.

Such a resolution, if supported by the General Assembly, would lock future Palestinian leaders into extreme positions and make it very difficult for them to make the needed compromises for peace with Israel, Netanyahu said.

The envoys, most of whom had never been to Israel, also met on Monday with President Shimon Peres and Minister for Strategic Affairs Moshe Yaalon.

Netanyahu received the group in the cabinet room and later gave them a tour of his office, pointing out an image of an ancient seal from biblical times bearing his name.

The Israeli leader again reiterated his readiness to go to Ramallah to meet with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at

any time joking that he would make the short trip even though it would be a nightmare for his security detail.

On Tuesday, the group, representing nations in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas will meet with Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in Ramallah as well as Sir Ronald Cohen of the Portland Trust, a British non-profit which promotes Palestinian economic development. A recent poll by The Israel Project showed that job creation is the top priority for Palestinians.

A packed schedule also features a helicopter ride over the northern and southern borders of Israel during which the envoys will see some of the country's strategic defense challenges and security threats.

Entrepreneurs and innovators in alternative energy, agriculture, medicine and environmental services will brief the group which will also visit Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation, which since 1958 has provided development training to more than 200,000 people from around the world.

The ambassadors will also learn about Israel's humanitarian programs that respond to natural disasters around the world and explore opportunities for bilateral trade. Israeli organizations are currently on the ground in Japan dealing with the aftermath of this year's deadly tsunami.

The trip is sponsored by The Israel Project, an American non-profit educational organization that provides facts, analysis and background information about Israel and the Middle East to the media, public officials and the public. TIP also reaches out to Palestinians and other Arabs in Arabic through its "People to People" Peace program, which works to open hearts and minds in the Arab world toward peace and a better future for both sides.

More than 100,000 people in the Arab world have signed up as

“fans” of the TIP Arabic Facebook page, “Israel Uncensored” which was launched only two months ago.