

(Jerusalem) -

U.S. Representative Jason Altmire (PA-4) will wrap up a week-long visit to Israel and the West Bank on Saturday. During his first visit to the Middle East, Congressman Altmire met with high-ranking Israeli and Palestinian officials about the challenges facing Israel and the region and the efforts to develop a lasting peace in the Middle East.

"This visit has been extremely beneficial," said Congressman Altmire. **"I have had the opportunity to meet with both Israeli and Palestinian representatives and I believe that a level of trust exists with the new Palestinian leadership that has been severely lacking in the past. I am hopeful that both the Israeli and Palestinian leadership will be able to urge their people toward a lasting peace in the region."**

"American security rests with what happens in the Middle East, of which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a key focal point," added Congressman Altmire. **"This trip allowed me the opportunity to see first-hand the challenges faced by both sides and to learn more about how we can move forward in the peace process in a way that makes sense for America."**

During the week-long trip, Congressman Altmire met with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in Jerusalem and traveled to the West Bank to meet with Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in Ramallah. He also met with three former Israeli prime ministers who now hold positions within the current government: President Shimon Peres, Likud Party Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu, and Minister of Defense Ehud Barak. In addition, top Israeli security and intelligence officers briefed Congressman Altmire on Iran's nuclear ambitions and the progress of its nuclear program.

Congressman Altmire's trip included tours of Israel's borders with Jordan; Lebanon, the site of the 2006 war; and Syria which is comprised of the strategic Golan Heights. He also visited Gaza and viewed the high-tech fencing on the Israeli border with the West Bank, where a number of Palestinian suicide bombers have crossed into Israel. Congressman Altmire visited local townspeople affected by the Lebanese bombings during the 2006 war, as well as residents of southern Israeli towns outside of Gaza that continue to suffer from bombings by Hamas.

Congressman Altmire was joined on the trip by 17 other House Democrats, including Majority Leader Steny Hoyer. The American Israeli Education Foundation (AIEF) sponsored the trip. The AIEF is a supporting charitable foundation of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).