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## Palestinians abandon struggle with Israel

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Closing a bloody chapter in history, the Palestinians' parliament-in-exile declared Wednesday that it no longer sought Israel's destruction and had abandoned armed struggle.

With the vote, the Palestine National Council moved peacemaking with Israel back on track even as Israeli warplanes bombed fellow Arabs in Lebanon. It gave a boost to both Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, who had threatened to suspend peace talks if the PLO leader missed his promise to remove the offending charter sections by May 7.

Despite the historic importance of the vote, Israel still faces threat of attack from Muslim rebel groups — such as Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad and Hamas — which oppose the PLO position and deny Israel's right to exist.

To the Palestinian leaders, many of them former guerrillas, the vote signaled the beginning of the end of a 32-year, often violent struggle for statehood.

"I voted for this position to give peace a chance," said Mohammed Abbas — also known by his nom-de-guerre Abul Abbas — mastermind of the 1985 Achille Lauro hijacking in which a disabled American cruise passenger was shot and killed. "This is a message from the fighters to the world and the Israeli people that we can take a step forward toward peace."

In a show of hands, the council

voted 504-54 with 14 abstentions to revoke all clauses in the 1964 PLO founding charter that call for the elimination of Israel. The council decided all articles of the PLO charter that contradict letters of mutual recognition exchanged by Israel and the PLO in 1993 would be abolished, and that work should begin on writing a new charter.

The vote was held behind closed doors and there was no debate. Several PNC members ran up to the podium afterward and hugged and kissed a haggard-looking Arafat.

Peres — running neck and neck with hard-line challenger Benjamin Netanyahu in the campaign for Israel's May 29 presidential election — needed a clear Palestinian stand against violence to help persuade an increasingly skeptical Israeli electorate that Arafat is serious about reconciliation.

An elated Peres said the vote proved Arafat was a partner for peace.

"People always asked, 'Can you trust Arafat?' It emerges that he can be trusted," Peres said.

Trust between the two sides was deeply shaken by four suicide attacks by Palestinian militants in Israel in February and March. The bombings killed 63 people, including four assailants.

Israeli government spokesman Uri Dromi said he hoped Arafat would now apply the same resolve to crushing the Islamic militant groups.

## Congressional leaders agree on spending bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congressional leaders and White House officials announced agreement Wednesday on a huge bill financing dozens of federal agencies for the rest of the fiscal year, solving a long standoff that had become a political embarrassment for both parties.

Nearly seven months after fiscal 1996 began, the two sides resolved a handful of stubborn environmental disputes — in many cases following retreats by Republicans — and prepared to push the \$160 billion measure through Congress on Thursday.

"We believe we have agreement on remaining issues," said Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., as yet another day of closed-door bargaining came to an end.

Mike McCurry, presidential press secretary, told reporters about an hour later that President Clinton would sign

the legislation as soon as it reaches his desk.

"The administration is satisfied that the president's priorities have been addressed as well as they can be addressed," McCurry said.

Money for agencies covered by the bill was due to run out at midnight, since they have been financed all fiscal year by a series of temporary stop-gap bills. So to head off a third federal shutdown since autumn, the House voted 400-14 to keep programs running for 24 more hours. The Senate, by voice vote, shipped it to Clinton for his promised signature.

Wednesday's agreement would leave bills financing all federal agencies this year at \$23 billion below 1995 levels, Republicans said. The agreement enables them to assert that their agenda of shrinking government had triumphed.

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