

Bush firm on Hamas in talk to American Jewish Committee: No support for "elected officials who are not committed to peace"

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With two world leaders beside him at the American Jewish Committee's 100th anniversary gala in Washington, President Bush criticized Hamas for being in "the camp of terror" and vowed not to work with the Palestinian party until it recognizes Israel.

"I'm a strong believer in democracy and free elections, but that does not mean we have to support elected officials who are not committed to peace," Bush said May 4 at the AJC centennial event. "Hamas must accept the demands of the international community to recognize Israel, disarm and reject terrorism, and stop blocking the path to peace."

The president was flanked on the podium by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and German chancellor Angela Merkel.

Bush also said he will continue to pressure Iran to comply with UN Security Council resolutions.

The president got the most enthusiastic response when he turned to Darfur, the western region in Sudan afflicted by what his administration has called genocide. "We must understand that the rape and the murder and the suffering must be stopped," Bush said. "And that's why I believe strongly that we must augment AU [African Union] forces with a blue-helmeted UN force, with a NATO overlay, so that we can send a clear message to the leaders of Sudan: We will not tolerate the genocide taking place in that country."

During his speech, Annan sidestepped Darfur, instead assuring that Israel will someday hold more clout in the United Nations and that peace with Palestine is possible. "I hope within my lifetime, just as in this country, where Jews are accepted without question as full citizens, by all their fellow citizens, so Israel will be accepted without question as a member by the whole family of nations," Annan said.

Merkel sided with Bush in comments on Iran and Hamas and expressed regret for the Holocaust, reaffirming Germany's mission for "peace in freedom, human rights and democracy. These are the values that guide us and that we shall do our utmost to stand up for." *-Religion News Service*