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Statement on the Death of PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat

New York, November 11, 2004 ... James S. Tisch, Chairman, and Malcolm Hoenlein, Executive Vice Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, issued the following statement on the death of Chairman Arafat:

The death of PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat opens the opportunity for the emergence of a new leadership in the Palestinian Authority that could put an end to terrorism and renew the prospect of peaceful coexistence with the State of Israel. Chairman Arafat had the opportunity to leave a legacy of fulfilling the aspirations of the Palestinian people for national self-determination but instead chose to continue on the route of violence, terror and corruption. His decisions deprived Palestinians, Israelis and the entire region of the prospect of a better future. We hope that the Palestinian people will demand a leadership that puts their interest first and that will be able to live up to the commitments in the Road Map and those outlined in President Bush's June 24, 2002 speech. Chairman Arafat was unable to make the transition from terrorist to statesman. He leaves a record of bloodshed that has taken a heavy toll on the people of Israel, the Palestinian people, and innocent civilians and diplomats – including many Americans.

Steps must be taken to prevent Chairman Arafat's death from resulting in a political vacuum that will give rise to chaos and competition by terrorist organizations seeking to enhance their influence. Preventing this outcome will take courageous leadership both from among the Palestinians, the leaders of neighboring Arab countries, and the international community.

The Conference of Presidents is the central coordinating body representing 52 national Jewish organizations on issues of national and international concern.