

# Arafat will not attend Arab summit in Beirut

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP) — Yasser Arafat decided to bow out of this week's Arab summit on Tuesday, a senior Palestinian official announced, hours after Israel's prime minister imposed more conditions on the Palestinian leader's travels.

The announcement by Palestinian Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo said only that Arafat had decided not to take part in the summit that starts Wednesday in Beirut — a gathering that is expected to take up a Saudi peace overture. Earlier in the day, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's government said Mubarak would not attend the summit. Egypt also advised Arafat to stay away, angered by conditions Israel has imposed on the Palestinian leader.

Ten heads of state from the 22-member Arab League are not attending the two-day summit. The absence of Mubarak could undermine chances for a strong moderate voice on the Saudi proposals, which had been praised by the United States and which the Arab leaders had been expected to adopt.

Egypt's foreign minister said Mubarak could not attend because of unspecified "domestic commitments."

The Saudi proposal, as floated by Crown Prince Abdullah last month, would offer Israel full normalization of relations with the Arab world in return for a withdrawal from Arab lands occupied in 1967. A proposal of normalization would be the strongest offer made by the Arabs since the peace process began.

But in the past weeks, more hard-line Arab states have sought to change to offer to full peace

— seen as a lower level than normalization, which would entail more cultural and trade exchanges.

As they left debate of the Saudi initiative for their leaders, who open the summit Wednesday, the Arab foreign ministers drew up a more hard-line draft final statement. It demanded complete Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab lands but said little about what sort of peace Israel would receive in return.

Any decision on the Saudi initiative could be worked into the draft, which also dealt with Iraq and other issues, or passed alongside it at the end of the summit.

Summit preparations have been overshadowed by the question of whether Israel would allow Arafat to leave the West Bank town of Ramallah for the first time in months and come to Beirut.

Despite U.S. pressure, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon set more conditions Tuesday night for allowing Arafat to travel. Sharon insisted he reserved the right to prevent Arafat from returning home if there are terrorist attacks while the Palestinian leader is gone. Israel has also been demanding Arafat agree to a U.S. brokered cease-fire as a condition for leaving.

Egypt said it was better for Arafat to stay home.

"The Israelis have been playing games with this matter of whether Arafat will attend," Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher told CNN. "They were trying to impose conditions, unacceptable conditions, and the honorable way is for Arafat to say that he is not coming, because it does not depend on the decisions of Israel."

## Peace overtures are back at the table

A Saudi peace proposal calling for Israeli withdrawal from occupied lands in return for full normalization of relations will be taken up at the Arab League Summit in Beirut, Lebanon. It is the most recent attempt for peace in the Middle East.

Sept. 17, 1978 Israel and Egypt sign Camp David agreement ending hostilities and establishing full diplomatic ties; Israel returns Sinai peninsula, captured in 1967 war.

Sept. 13, 1993 After months of secret talks in Oslo, Norway, Israel and PLO agree on interim framework for autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat shakes hands with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at the White House.

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