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[**Conference brings Palestinians across North America to UBC Campus**](http://www.cpavancouver.org/index.php/2013/04/08/conference-of-the-palestinian-shatat-in-north-america/)

Palestinians are converging in Vancouver on May 3-5 for a weekend of discussions, cultural expression, and protest, at "Return and Liberation: Conference of the Palestinian Shatat [Diaspora] in North America," taking place at the [University of British Columbia](http://www.palestinianconference.org/conference-centre-will-be-buchanan-a-building/). (Full conference details are available at the website, [palestinianconference.org](http://palestinianconference.org/).)

Conference participants, who include Palestinians from across Canada, the United States, and the UK, will participate in over 20 workshops and major plenaries focusing on how Palestinians outside Palestine are represented and organized to seek freedom for their homeland.

The conference also coincides with a Western conference by the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, and conference organizers and attendees will participate in a protest of CIJA's keynote speakers at 4 pm on Sunday, May 5, after the official close of the Palestinian conference.

"There are millions of Palestinians outside Palestine - over 6 million Palestinian refugees who have been denied their right to return home for over 65 years now. This conference is an opportunity for us to come together as Palestinians in North America and say that our voice must be heard," says Khaled Barakat, conference coordinator and Vancouver community activist.

Conference panels will include presentations by Karma Nabulsi of Oxford University, Rabab Abdulhadi of San Francisco State University, Loubna Qutami of the Palestinian Youth Movement, Abdelrazzaq Takriti of the University of Sheffield, and Issam Yamani of Toronto's Palestine House, a large Palestinian community organization that was recently defunded for its immigrant settlement services by the Harper government's Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

"It is particularly important for us to discuss how to challenge the Harper government and Canadian policy towards Palestine," said Omar Shaban, conference organizer. "Canada has a long record of supporting Israeli occupation, and the repeated public statements of John Baird, Jason Kenney and Stephen Harper praising Israeli apartheid and demonizing Palestinian and solidarity organizing within Canada are a real affront to our community."

Conference participants will also engage in a cultural evening with Louisiana-based Palestinian singer Nisreen Hajaj and Jafraa Dabke Troupe, a Palestinian traditional dance troupe from Seattle. The conference will begin at 5 pm on Friday, at UBC's Buchanan A Building, and close at 2 pm on Sunday, May 5, before the protest of CIJA's keynote speakers.

"We want to focus on our own goals at this conference, not CIJA's event. They are welcoming, however, Israel's ambassador to Canada; Dennis Ross; and John Baird and it is important that people in Vancouver speak out to say that official representatives of war crimes and apartheid are unwelcome," said Barakat. "But the real work of this conference is bringing Palestinians together to talk about what we can do from North America to change the conversation and achieve Palestinian rights, and ensure our voice is heard."