

Rice: Middle East peace a top priority

by UPI

RAMALLAH, West Bank -- Peace in the Middle East is a top priority for the final 15 months of U.S. President George Bush's administration, his secretary of state said Monday. Besides reiterating the importance of peace in the region, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said she would work ceaselessly to end the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians, The Washington Post reported. Rice expects an international peace conference planned for this fall in Annapolis, Md., would be serious and substantive, she said during a news conference in Ramallah, West Bank, following her meeting with Mahmoud Abbas, Palestinian Authority president. "Frankly, we have better things to do than invite people to Annapolis for a photo op," Rice said. "We are not going to quit until I have given it my last ounce of energy and my last moment in office." Rice is in the region to try to help Israelis and Palestinians find common ground on an unfinished document that could help launch the peace conference. Palestinians want the document as detailed as possible about parameters of a final peace agreement while the Israelis prefer to keep the language vague. On Sunday Rice met with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

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