
OPT: Top Hamas official criticizes Palestinian bid for statehood**الأرض الفلسطينية المحتلة: مسؤول في حماس ينتقد مسعى إعلان الدولة الفلسطينية**

GAZA CITY, 23 September 2011 (IRIN) - As Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas launches a Palestinian [statehood](#) bid, a top Hamas official in the Gaza Strip says Hamas was not consulted on the bid, the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) is ill-prepared for it, and new strategies need to be devised to put pressure on Israel; he hailed Turkey's recent role, and called for "new connections with Arab countries".

Abbas sidestepped the Hamas-led government in Gaza in his move to the UN, although potential economic sanctions against the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank could directly affect Gaza's 1.6 million residents. Half of the PA's estimated 150,000 employees are in Gaza, and the PA pays 57 percent of its budget to Gaza for electricity, water, and fuel.

"It is very difficult to build a state under occupation," Gaza deputy foreign minister Ghazi Hamad, told IRIN. "Palestinians are unable to access over half of the West Bank due to Israeli restrictions and many areas are isolated by the settlements. How can we build a state when geographic connections between major West Bank cities like Nablus and Jenin are restricted? There are 500,000 Israeli settlers living in the West Bank.

"Hamas supports the creation of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital, but as history has shown, negotiating with Israel is not going to bring statehood," he said, adding:

"President Abbas took this decision unilaterally; he did not consult any Palestinian factions, especially Hamas... We need to formulate a new strategy. We need to give people hope and an alternative. Turkey is a model of political Islam - this is what we need... Turkey is now putting pressure on Israel. We [the Hamas government] are looking to other nations in the region to pressure Israel to end its occupation.

"We are looking for support from Arab nations, like Turkey and Egypt, and other countries that believe the Palestinians deserve a state... We have to create new connections with Arab countries."

Hamas officials and independents in Gaza see the wave of revolutions across the Arab world as an opportunity for the Hamas government to foster new diplomatic ties, potentially with newly formed governments in Libya and Egypt.

Hamas shunned by West?

"Until now, the US and European Union only deal with the PA in the West Bank, despite the fact that Hamas was elected," said Hani Besous, a political analyst at the Islamic University in Gaza.

Palestinian factions Fatah (in control of the PA in the West Bank) and Hamas (in control of the Gaza government) have yet to implement their latest reconciliation agreement signed in Cairo.

"Abbas's move to the UN is a good idea, because we deserve a nation," said Autef Adjour, 24, from Gaza City. "We can't wait for the mercy of other countries," said the former fighter in Fatah's military wing, now unemployed.

"We need a new political party, but more importantly we need jobs and to end Israel's blockade."

Enas Shrafi, 30, a high school teacher from Gaza City, said she supported Abbas's move to the UN, but feared Israel would punish the PA. "I am concerned that I will not receive my salary, and I have two small children."

Israel collects about \$1.2 billion in fees annually for the PA and has previously withheld the funds to exert pressure on the PA.

The US Congress has called on President Obama to reduce US aid to the Palestinians, about US\$500 million annually, if they proceed with their request for statehood.

"I want defined borders for Gaza, and an open border, so I can go to visit my family in Saudi Arabia," said Areej (she only gave her first name) from Jabalayah. She hoped the UN would accept the Palestinian request for statehood.

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