
UN official urges world community to match 'courage' of Palestinian unity government

27 February 2007 – The agreement to form a new Palestinian Unity Government challenges the international community to “match the courage and compromises” shown by the rival parties with “bold steps of its own,” a senior United Nations official said today.

“The inter-factional fighting that raged across parts of Gaza posed a genuine threat to the existence of the Palestinian polity,” UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) Commissioner-General Karen Koning AbuZayd [told](#) a meeting of the agency's Advisory Commission in Amman, Jordan.

“Palestinians had to confront the shocking – and embarrassing, I might add – realization that their vulnerability to destruction could come not only from the modern armaments of their old foes across the green line but also from within,” she added.

Ever since Hamas, which refuses to recognize Israel, defeated the long-ruling Fatah in elections early last year and formed a Government, Israel stopped handing over tax and customs revenues it collects on behalf of the Palestine Authority and international donors suspended direct aid, calling on Hamas to commit to non-violence, recognize its neighbour and accept previously signed agreements between Israel and the Palestinians.

Earlier this month Hamas and Fatah reached an agreement in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, to form a unity government, but the accord only mentions respecting previous agreements.

Since then, the diplomatic Quartet, comprising the UN, United States, Russia and European Union (EU), which has been seeking to broker a two-state solution of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace, has reiterated support for a Palestinian Government “committed to non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations.”

The Mecca Agreement “represents a courageous step back from that abyss,” Ms. AbuZayd said today. “The Agreement challenges the international community to match the courage and compromises shown by the parties with bold steps of its own, bearing in mind that the choices it makes will have profound consequences on the future of Palestinians and Palestine.”

She underlined the hardships faced by the Palestinians. “Turning a blind eye to [Israel's] expanding settlements and the extension of the [separation] barrier, to economic blockades, to occupation generally, works against our goals and indeed vitiates our purpose for being here,” she declared, referring to UNRWA's humanitarian goals.

“The stark reality is that Palestinian space, both physical and political, is shrinking. This space is the only foundation on which to build the stability and peace so necessary for the well-being of the people we serve.”

Established in 1949 after the first Israeli-Arab war, UNRWA is the main provider of basic services - education, health, relief and social services - to over 4.3 million registered Palestine refugees throughout the Middle East.