
Security and the Palestinian Elections

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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I welcome yesterday's statement by Acting Prime Minister Olmert that he will recommend to the Israeli cabinet that the Government of Israel allow voting by Palestinians, including those in East Jerusalem, in accordance with existing precedent. I also welcome the statement on January 9 by President Abbas that Palestinian Legislative Council elections will be held on schedule and that PA security forces will take the necessary steps to ensure those elections take place in a safe and secure environment free of violence and intimidation.

Holding free and fair Palestinian Legislative Council elections on January 25 represents a key step in the process of building a peaceful, democratic Palestinian state. The Quartet has previously stated its view that armed groups have no place in the democratic process. It remains the view of the United States that there should be no place in the political process for groups or individuals who refuse to renounce terror and violence, recognize Israel's right to exist, and disarm. Development of a Palestinian democracy based on tolerance and liberty is a key element of the Roadmap. To participate in a peace process of Israelis and Palestinians, the Palestinian partner must at least accept Israel's right to exist. To implement agreements on movement and access for the Palestinian territories, the Palestinian partner must be committed to preventing violence. In short, the Palestinian partner must be committed to peaceful development. As President Abbas has said, democratic elections can be the prelude to laws and policies embracing peace, excluding the advocates of terror and violence and implementing Roadmap obligations to dismantle the infrastructure of terror.

I have discussed these issues with the Quartet and other foreign leaders. Like them, President Bush and I support and admire the steadfastness of the Israeli people at this difficult time. Let there be no mistaking our condemnation of those who spout hate, and our resolve to stand against those who threaten violence and support terror. The international community speaks with one voice in denouncing the recent statements of the Iranian President, who continues to isolate the Iranian people from the rest of the world through his hateful comments. We will not tolerate terror from anywhere, including from its sponsors in Syria and Iran. We continue to pray for the recovery of Prime Minister Sharon. My thoughts and prayers are with him, his family, his colleagues in government, and the people of Israel. The United States stands with you at this difficult time, and we remain resolute in our friendship with the people of Israel and our commitment to the safety and security of our close ally and friend.

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