

“Ending the Political Division and Achieving National Conciliation”

Attendance (without distinction)

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Introduction:

A public policy meeting was held on April 20 as part of efforts by civil society organizations throughout 2015 and 2016 to support women's initiatives aimed at promoting national unity and ending the political division. It was also based on recommendations from the “Women's Call...One Country, One People, One Flag” conference. The meeting was held to discuss the obstacles in the way of implementing agreements and understandings signed between Palestinian factions to achieve national reconciliation, through constructive dialogue between Palestinian factions' representatives and women political and social leaders. The overall goal

was to come up with practical recommendations that would prompt the achievement of national reconciliation. The policy meeting was held via video conference in Ramallah and Gaza.

Discussion: Overall framework

Fatah-Hamas talks: The current talks between Fatah and Hamas are serious and have made important strides even though the focus is to end the political division, not to manage it. They are also aimed at conducting a continuous dialogue to end this exceptional political situation by implementing the Cairo agreement as a basis of ending the political division. The parties also stressed on their adherence to the Egyptian role in this regard.

There are those who described the talks as lacking seriousness due to political considerations of the two rival parties and the lack of a political will from either side to end the division. This is in addition to the fact that the talks are being held outside the homeland which means the other political forces cannot be sources of pressure on the two sides. These weaknesses, they said, necessitate mobilization from the all Palestinians to put pressure on the rivals even though there are certain circles within the two movements that are benefiting from the division's continuation. They say the key to ending the division is in the hands of President Mahmoud Abbas given that he has the power to call for its end and to hold elections. Furthermore, Hamas and other forces are hindering the end of the division, cycles which all must be broken.

The PLC: The PLC is a main player in the political division; it must fulfill its role in the resignation of its current members and in calling for new elections. The people alone are the ones who can renew the mandate of the current PLC members or elect others. The participants pointed to the need to adhere to the periodicity of the elections and respect for its results.

National Unity Government: The current vision is summed up in the formation of factional, national unity government with a political program and which bears full responsibility for managing the affairs of citizens in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Political program: The present discussion revolves around the character of this political program and resolving political differences within the various parties. It also revolves around respecting the democratic institutions of the PLO, adding that agreement over this program could be reached after the formation of the government.

Gaza Strip employees: This has occupied a large part of the discussions between Hamas and Fatah. There is an administrative committee following up on all the appointments that were made after the division so they could be reinstated in their positions and so there could be job security for all.

Freedoms committee: This committee is active but ineffective and has no executive nature even though it delivered an 11-point document to the Egyptian sponsor and to the two sides of the division for implementation. However, nothing has been implemented to date.

Absenting the role of women: Women are absented from all the talks that took and continue to take place. The division will remain in place and continue as long as women are not represented in these talks and related committees.

Temporary follow-up committee: There have been many efforts exerted at the popular level to end the political division. A temporary follow up committee opened to all was formed, aimed at continuing popular pressure on Fatah and Hamas to achieve national reconciliation, with emphasis that popular movements are guaranteed to achieve this and that for a national unity government to be established, there must be an end to the political division.

Victims of the political division: Jerusalem, holy sites, children, and women of Palestine are all victims of the ongoing division, especially with the continued popular uprising and the rise in the number of martyrs and Israeli occupation violations in addition to settler attacks in Jerusalem and on the Aqsa Mosque. This necessitates that both sides of the political division end this unnatural political situation; furthermore, failure to end the division has resulted in beneficiaries from both sides who want to defend their interests.

Legitimacy of political parties: the people 's will is the leader and the party with the mandate and power to renew the legitimacy of all political forces without exception, so the people could renew their confidence in national figures that are not beneficiaries of the division. Today, all political parties are absent from the scene. There are no leadership meetings that present the truth to everyone about what goes on behind the scenes of these talks. At the same time, there is a depreciating of the two highest national bodies: the Central and National Councils. The current PLO Executive Committee meetings are a mere formality for a body whose mandate has expired, just like the PLC.

External interferences: This played a very negative role in terms of the prolonged division and pressure on Fatah and Hamas not to end it, all of which threatens the absence and demise of the Palestinian national project.

Conditions in the Gaza Strip: There is a predominant fear that things will spiral out of control due to the difficult circumstances under which Gazans live because of the continued division, especially the youth who suffer from unemployment and a lack of hope for the future. This could push them to more extremist views than what we see today.

Recommendations

One: Reaffirmation of the periodicity of elections and the need to abide by them and honor their results.

Two: Restoring consideration to independent Palestinian national decisions and rejecting any external interferences in this regard.

Three: Implementing the Palestinian Central Council decisions on ending the division and setting a specific timeframe for this.

Four: Conducting a national referendum and signing a popular memorandum demanding an end to the political division and achieving national unity, also setting a specific timeframe for this.

Five: Including all national parties in the framework of current discussions between the two players in the division including the active representation of women.

Six: Immediately halting security coordination of all kinds with the occupation based on the Central Council decision in this regard; resolving the issue of Gaza Strip employees through the relevant committee.

Seven: A call on the Elections Committee to announce a specific and agreed on date for holding legislative and presidential elections.

Eight: A call on the unified leadership framework of the PLO to exercise its role and influence on ending the political division and achieving national reconciliation.

Nine: Promoting coordination and joint action between the temporary follow-up committee to end the division, created out of the Women's Call conference and the "Nationals for Ending the Division" committee to rally more pressure on both Hamas and Fatah to achieve national reconciliation and unify efforts in one national body.

Ten: A call on PLC members and leaders whose term has expired to tender their resignations ahead of free and honest elections in which the various sectors and groups participate.

Eleven: To call on Hamas to view the Gaza Strip from a comprehensive national perspective, noting that the political division is not only between Fatah and Hamas but between Hamas and all the national factions, therefore stressing on the need to begin a comprehensive national dialogue on this basis.

Twelve: A call on President Mahmoud Abbas to visit the Gaza Strip and to consider his responsibilities towards achieving national reconciliation given that the key to this is in his hands.

Thirteen: A call for popular action and pressure in the West Bank and Gaza in tandem, to end the political division; holding a major national convention for national forces and civil society institutions that would climax with a million-person march in which Palestinians inside the homeland and abroad participate.

Fourteen: Imposing the will of the prisoner movement on the two rival parties to achieve national reconciliation.