

The role of youth in political parties

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Introduction:

With the continued deterioration and lack of political and economic stability on the Palestinian scene, the crisis of Palestinian factions has heightened coupled by the lack of participation from Palestinian youth. This is besides the disregard for the role of youths in the resistance, which was prominent during the first and second Intifadas, especially at the grassroots and popular levels all the way up to political decision-making positions.

Based on this, it was imperative to delve into the reasons for this exclusion and setback, especially given the fact that youths were at the forefront of national action at various stages. However, after the achievements of the revolution turned into posts and honorary positions, the persons assuming these posts held fast to their seats, completely ignoring the up-and-coming youth leaders.

Discussion:

Setback in the cultural and political level

Palestinian society, like all Arab societies, is still first and foremost patriarchal and suffers from the problem of absolute power of those in senior positions over the younger generations. This reflects itself on the thinking and ideology of factions and their bylaws, which reinforced this reactionary principle. Their hierarchical authority was based on this patriarchal and centrist logic, which was clear from appointments and the age for candidacy.

In the past few years, youths began a movement in order to regain their true role in the political decision making process. However, this movement was aborted repeatedly, something which generated frustration among youth leaders and kept them from political participation. It also reinforced the gap between leaders and the youth and resulted in their role in society being confined to what it was in the past.

Still, the youth sector must exercise their role and regain their rights with their own hands, appreciating the importance of free will to escape from the feelings of failure and frustration. However, at the same time, there must also be a focus on promoting a culture of true democracy and political, cultural and progressive awareness so they can be prepared to work and defend their rights in political action, public freedoms and social justice.

The question is where the problem actually lies. Is it in the leaders who have monopolized decision-making positions and distanced themselves from any participation at the grassroots level with their people? Or does it lie with the youth, who abandoned their revolutionary role of society-building only sit back and wait to be handed their right of participation? The answer to this question, based on experience, is that the responsibility lies with both sides. The setback in awareness among youth, their lack of confidence in themselves, fear of taking risks and their truncated role as tools used for factional agendas in addition to their limitations within parties, all contributed to their absence in the work of political factions. Likewise, the setback in ideological awareness of factions and the lack of allocating a part of supportive budgets to the youth sector or making them a priority, only deepened the crisis.

Executive tools among factions

In spite of all the political and social changes taking place in Palestinian society, Palestinian factions have never shifted their tools, programs and mechanisms in a way that is compatible with the requirements of each stage. This further excluded youths and confined political action in the hands of the leaders. This is in spite of the fact that youths were present in the various stages of the Palestinian struggle, whether after the Nakba of 1948 or the Naksa of 1967 and during the two popular uprisings. However, this presence on the ground or in political factions fell to the side and diminished after national concepts turned into utilitarian ones.

No doubt, the political split also deepened the youth crisis and hindered any possible solutions for it. Furthermore, the failure of the leadership to embrace and direct the youth sector led to their setback and the failure of the national project.

Hence, it is imperative to deal with the changes taking place in society and confront the growing religious and fundamentalist tendencies in it so that we can come out with an enlightened view of these contemporary issues and address the degenerating level of knowledge and political awareness among youth.

Recommendations:

1. Youths must take back their rights with their own hands and not ask for them from anyone; they must appreciate the importance of free will to escape the frustration they are in.
2. Youths – both male and female – must exercise their role at the national level, such as reviving the March 15 Palestinian youth movement for change to end the split, for example.

3. Youths need to be included and given space to exercise their natural role as effective and active members of society.
4. Reviving the role of student bodies and the general union of Palestinian students and also holding student council elections in universities and unions.
5. Developing the tools, programs and work mechanisms of factions in a way that will guarantee the participation of youth in political action in tandem with the requirements of the current circumstances.
6. Focusing on the promotion of a culture of true democracy and political and cultural awareness among the youth sector so that they are prepared to work and confront challenges and spread the principles of social justice and respect for liberties.
7. Dedicating a public policy session at MIFTAH to discussing ways and mechanisms to breathe life back into the youth sector.