

Joint Open Letter to President of the Palestinian National Authority

5th of April, 2014

Mr. Mahmoud Abbas
President of the Palestinian National Authority
Ramallah, Palestine

Dear President Abbas,

In view of the intense pressure being brought to bear on the Palestinian National Authority by Israel and the U.S. Administration to negotiate a final agreement which will claim to settle all past and present rights and demands of the Palestinian people, and considering the present interruption in negotiations brought about by Israel's customary practice of reneging on its commitments, we Palestinian and other Arab scholars and professionals with longstanding commitments to the Palestinian cause send you the following message:

1. We urge you to stand firm for the national rights of all Palestinians, and to declare that no individual or group of individuals has the unconditional authority to reach a final agreement on behalf of the Palestinian people. Only the Palestinian people, in their global multitude, have the right to accept or reject a final settlement proposal. Any such proposal must be submitted for consideration to a Palestine National Council (PNC) whose members are chosen by all Palestinians in free, fair and open elections, and meeting in freedom beyond Israeli interference.
2. Notwithstanding U. S. and Israeli pressure, the Palestinian people have a number of fundamental collective and individual rights, above all the internationally-recognized right of return to their homeland. These rights inhere in the Palestinians as individuals, as families, and as a people; by their very nature, they are not subject to negotiation and cannot under any circumstances be bartered away.
3. The parameters of the current talks, like those that preceded them, preclude the fundamental Palestinian right of self-determination; an Israeli return to the pre-1967 borders without adjustments; removal of all or even the majority of Israeli colonists and colonies from the West Bank and East Jerusalem; Palestinian sovereign control of East Jerusalem; autonomous control of borders, airspace, water and other resources, and the freedom to enter alliances with other states, which are the minimal hallmarks of

sovereignty. What is on the negotiating table, in other words, is not a sovereign Palestinian state, even in those fragments of historic Palestine whose future status is nominally being negotiated, but rather the shimmering and evanescent outline of such a state, wholly inadequate to the rights and needs of even that minority of the Palestinian people currently resident in the territories occupied in 1967.

4. Nor do these talks seriously address the rights—above all the right of return—of the members of the Palestinian diaspora who live in exile outside historic Palestine and who constitute about half of the Palestinian people. Neither do these talks address the rights of Palestinians living within pre-1967 Israel, including their right to equality with Jewish citizens and the restoration of the property that had been confiscated from them in the wake of the Nakba of 1948. On the contrary, in the new demand that Israel be recognised as a “Jewish state,” these talks threaten to confirm official Palestinian acceptance of the negation of all these rights. Such recognition would abandon these Palestinians to continuing discrimination and in all likelihood a deterioration of their circumstances, if not outright ethnic cleansing. By excluding Palestinians inside Israel and those in exile, the negotiating framework excludes the majority of the Palestinian people.

5. Given the above, while the Palestinian people should be consulted via the democratic process already alluded to in order to make their determination, it is in effect inconceivable that they would accept now or in the future the parameters of the present negotiations, which are incompatible with their rights and legitimate aspirations. We therefore believe that the time has come, once and for all, to declare a final break from the pattern of endless negotiations established more than two decades ago at Oslo, which has only provided time for Israel to annex and colonise more territory and impose crippling restrictions on Palestinian life. The time has come, then, to facilitate a new dialogue among the Palestinian people about the future and aims of the Palestinian struggle, and the appropriate means to secure the rights of all Palestinians—those living under occupation, those living with second-class status in Israel, and those living in enforced exile. We are confident that you will enjoy the support of the overwhelming majority of the Palestinian people if you take it upon yourself to help facilitate a new national dialogue with these ends in view.

6. It is abundantly clear not just to us but to countless other observers that you and your leadership will soon be trapped in an impossible situation, which calls for urgent action to pre-empt. We call on you to take the initiative rather than helplessly waiting for the inevitable moment when you will be presented with what will be packaged to the world as an honest and neutral set of American proposals but will in fact have been jointly concocted with Israel and will be irreconcilable with the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people. You will in effect have no choice but to reject these proposals, thereby allowing the U. S. and Israel, yet one more time, to depict you and the Palestinian people as obstacles to peace. Rather than waiting, we urge you to act pre-emptively, and to declare, before the anticipated Framework of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry becomes public, a clear statement of principles making clear in positive

rather than negative terms that you are committed to a formula for peace that is premised on the internationally-recognized rights and needs of all Palestinians.

After decades of struggle to achieve fundamental Palestinian rights, we are not ready to surrender, and we reject the attempt by anyone to surrender in our names. We call upon you in your capacity as Chairman of the PLO to recall without delay a democratically reconstituted Palestine National Council (PNC) and entrust it with the process to articulate a new path to a just and lasting peace that will secure the rights of the Palestinian people. Were you to follow this course, you would have not only the support of the Palestinian people but also surely the endorsement of the majority of the people of the world, who have for decades been resolute and steadfast in their support of the Palestinian cause.

Respectfully,

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