

The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of **Global Dialogue and Democracy**. MIFTAH
المبادرة الفلسطينية لتعميق الحوار العالمي والديمقراطية



"The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict in the Palestinian Legislative Elections"

The Fourth Report

Media Monitoring Unit

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In Cooperation with the European Union

Media Monitoring Unit Team
Media Analyst: Mohammed Yaghi
Information Coordinator: Ruham Nimri
Administrative Assistant: Nahed Abu Sneineh
Monitoring Unit: Yassin Abbas, 'Ala Farid, Abeer Ismail, Sa'ed Karazon

Steering Committee for this report:

Dr. Hanan Ashrawi,
Dr. Lily Feidy
Maha Awwad,
Mansour Tahboub,
Basem Barhoum,
Khalil Shahin,
Mousa Qous,
Rami Bathish,
Hisham Abdallah

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Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy-MIFTAH

P.O. Box 69647 Jerusalem, 95908

Phone Number (Jerusalem) 972 2 5851842; (Ramallah): 972 2 2989490

Fax number (Jerusalem): 972 2 5835184; (Ramallah): 972 2 2989492

E-mail: info@miftah.org

Website: www.miftah.org

Foreword

This is the fourth report issued by The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy- Miftah on the media coverage for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in coordination with Keshev- Center for the Protection of Democracy in Israel on monitoring the media coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The goal of the project is to facilitate the development of a bold and professional media, and a culture of tolerance, moderation and understanding between the two peoples, through monitoring, research, advocacy and lobbying activities without infringing upon the freedom of the media and the freedom of expression.

In our previous report, we essentially addressed the type of media coverage through the unilateral disengagement from Gaza Strip and clarified that the Palestinian media had been trapped in the official story and had not attempted at challenging it. We also made a number of recommendations, most notably that in order to diverge from the official story, the media must distance itself from the circle of influence of the Authority and become independent.

In this report we discuss the media coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict during the Palestinian Legislative Council Election, specifically the campaigning of the different electoral blocs from 3 January 2006 to 23 January 2006, due to the extreme importance of that period, during which the Palestinian forces sought to win the support of the Palestinian public opinion for their different programs, and during which the ability of the Palestinian media to influence voters and urge them to choose what best suits their interests could be monitored.

Since the launching of the election campaigns, the Media Monitoring Unit at MIFTAH divided the subjects to be monitored into the following categories:

- 1. Palestinian media coverage of the positions of the different electoral blocs towards Jerusalem:** Was the subject raised by the blocs? How was it raised? Under what headings was the Jerusalem issue addressed? For example, supporting the steadfastness of the people of Jerusalem, isolating Jerusalem from its surroundings by the Wall, means of confronting the situation, inviting the people of Jerusalem to participate in the elections, gatherings and demonstrations in Jerusalem if they occurred, special programs on the participation of Jerusalemites in elections; was the limited participation in Jerusalem overlooked and why? What were the policies, if any was drawn, adopted by electoral blocs for enhancing participation. How were these policies presented and what space did they occupy in the Palestinian media?
- 2. The political programs of the electoral blocs:** How did the media present the programs of each bloc; what were these programs, and did they focus on popular, armed or nonviolent struggle? Did these programs propose political plans for resolving the conflict, and what were those plans? Did the Palestinian media seek to highlight the political differences, if they existed, between political blocs? Was there any bias to a certain party and what was the nature of such bias? Did the electoral

blocs focus more on internal issues, such as corruption and security disorder, or on the conflict with Israel? Did the blocs address the Road Map, and how did the media present such an issue?

3. **Hamis in the media:** *Hamis* participated for the first time in the Legislative Election. How did the media present their political program, or the discourse of its political leaders? Is there any contradiction between participation in the Election and what *Hamis* maintains regarding its rejection of the Oslo Agreement and its outcome, including the authorities and commitments; how was this presented?
4. **The Palestinian political prisoners:** How did the media present the process of the participation of prisoners in elections, whether through their presence in electoral lists, or through their denial of their right to vote? Did the media focus on that issue? Was this issue present in the media in the first place, and how was it presented to the public?
5. **Israeli closure of Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the practices of the Israeli occupation:** How did the media address the fact that Jerusalem was closed against candidates? Did the media highlight the impact of the closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip on candidates, and how did it address the fact that Israeli authorities denied the candidates freedom of movement through fixed, mobile or flying checkpoints? Did the Palestinian media cover the Israeli occupation measures against candidates, lists and voters, specifically those measures that negatively influence the elections process?

It should be pointed out that a large part of this issue overlaps with the two subjects on Jerusalem and *Hamis*. For this reason we tried to avoid repetition, despite the fact that occupation practices inside Jerusalem may be listed under the subject of Jerusalem, closures or under abusive practices of the occupation against the electoral process as a whole.

Jerusalem and the Legislative Election

In accordance with the Election Law, campaigning for the different electoral blocs started on 3 January 2006, at a time when the Israeli government had not made up its mind over allowing the Palestinians of Jerusalem to participate in those elections. This has provided rich material for the Palestinian media to monitor the positions of different electoral blocs, the Palestinian Authority, the Government of Israel and the Quartet, as well as an opportunity to focus on political issues and the peculiar status of Jerusalem in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Despite the clear rift in the position of the different electoral blocs regarding the need to continue the elections until the end, or stopping it at the right moment in case of an Israeli position that prevents Jerusalemites from participation, the Palestinian media highlighted these positions superficially, without any real focus or concentration that enabled the Palestinian voters to distinguish between the attitudes of the different electoral blocs towards this issue.

Any observer of internal Palestinian affairs may note that the positions of the electoral blocs towards this issue were explicitly divided into three:

First: The position of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (*Fateh*) and the Third Way blocs, which was harmonious with the position of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), and which stipulated not conducting the elections in case Israel prevented Jerusalemites from participation in the election, while at the same time holding Israel responsible for the failure to conduct the Election on the scheduled time, and its lack of commitment to signed agreements, particularly those that allowed conducting elections in Jerusalem in 1996, since waiving that right meant an implicit willingness to subsequent relinquishment of the issue of Jerusalem during the Final Status negotiations.

Second: The position of the Reform and Change bloc (*Hamas*), and *Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa* list, that saw the need for conducting the Legislative Election on time irrespective of the position of the government of Israel towards the participation of Jerusalemites, and to impose such participation on the Israeli occupation, without clarifying how it can be done, or having specific and declared proposals on means of handling the issue of the representation of Jerusalem.

Third: *Independent Palestine* and the Alternative (*Al-Badeel*) lists, whose positions were ambiguous and unclear, as both called for not using Jerusalem as a pretext for postponement, but did not announce any mechanisms through which such participation can be imposed.

Such discrepant positions were monitored through the following headlines, published in Palestinian press:

Al-Quds Daily newspaper, 3/1/2006, Front page:

Fateh: Participation of Jerusalemites is a Precondition for Conducting Elections.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 3/1/2006, p.4

Fayyad: No Elections without the Participation of Jerusalemites, Stopping Israeli Aggression and Controlling Security Conditions.

Al-Quds, 4/1/2006, Front page:

Prime Minister: Jerusalem is the Crux of the Conflict and is the State; No State or Elections without our Holy City.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 5/1/2006, p.7:

Dr. Ashrawi: No Legislative Elections without Jerusalem.

Al-Ayyam, 5/1/2006, Front page:

Dahlan Slams Hamas Position towards Elections in Jerusalem.

Al-Ayyam, 5/1/2006, p.11:

“ Hamas ” Insists on Conducting Elections and Asserts its Willingness to Adopt Mechanisms to Overcome the Obstacle of Participation of Jerusalemites.

Al-Ayyam, 7/1/2006, Front page:

Barghouti: Elections in Jerusalem Constitute a Form of Sovereignty, and we Promise to Build a Strong Authority that Gains the Respect of Citizens.

Al-Quds, 7/1/2006, Front page:

A Massive Hamas Rally in Gaza Supporting Jerusalem and Denouncing Security Disorder.

Details: Sheikh Said Siyam reprehended what he described as overbidding, and said: “It is strange that the issue of Jerusalem becomes a commodity in Election campaigns”.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 8/1/2006, Front page:

“Fateh” in Jerusalem Calls for a National Stand in Support of Abstaining from Elections without the Participation of Jerusalemites

Al-Quds, 8/1/2006, Front page:

Salihi Rejects Using the Lack of Participation of Jerusalemites as a Pretext for Postponing Elections.

Palestine Television Station covered the issue of elections in Jerusalem in news bulletins, through covering violations against candidates, the statements made by the Central Elections Committee (CEC), including the statements of Ziad Bakri, the Elections Coordinator which was aired by Palestine TV on the 9 a.m. news bulletin on 7 January 2006. However, Palestine TV did not seek to demonstrate the positions of electoral blocs towards conducting elections in case of Israeli rejection to include Jerusalem in the election process.

Following 9 January, 2006 Palestinian media also highlighted the preliminary approval of the Israeli government of launching the election campaigns in the city of Jerusalem, as well as the American assurances to the PA in this regard. Nevertheless, the situation remained uncertain since the official Israeli position was not issued until 15 January 2006. Even then, the Israeli position raised two main problems:

1. The Israeli approval of conducting the Election in Jerusalem was accompanied by an Israeli decision to ban *Hamas* candidates from campaigning inside Jerusalem, which provided *Hamas* with a kind of free publicity.
2. The Israeli decision was not sufficiently clear as to whether it would allow the names of *Hamas* candidates to be listed on the ballot on Election day, especially after announcing the ban on *Hamas* campaigning.

Al-Quds, 9/1/2006, Front page:

Occupation Authorities Allow Legislative Candidates to Launch their Campaigns in Jerusalem.

Details: It seems that this news item has not been taken from an Israeli source but from Fateh Candidate Hatem Abdul Qader who said that the “Israeli police had informed him of a political decision to allow Legislative candidates to campaign in Jerusalem.”

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 10/1/2006, Front page:

The President: We Received American Assurances Regarding Jerusalem and Elections will be Conducted as Scheduled.

Al-Ayyam, 14/1/2006, Front page:

Qidwa: We Insist on Conducting Elections according to Schedule, but Postponement is a Possibility if Jerusalem is Excluded.

Al-Quds, 16/1/2006, Front page:

Israel Permits Elections in Jerusalem, and Bans “ Hamas ” Candidates from Campaigning.

Despite all the above, the Palestinian media featured the activities of the Electoral lists in Jerusalem and the Israeli breaches against them, in addition to the detention, arrest and aggression against candidates, in attempts to prevent them from launching their election campaigns. Two cases were the Third Way bloc who announced the launching of their campaign at Damascus Gate in Old Jerusalem and the Independent Palestine bloc, who launched their campaign at Qalandiya Refugee Camp. The media also featured the Israeli occupation forces preventing electoral blocs from practicing their right in campaigning in Jerusalem. In this context, the following headlines appeared in the Palestinian press:

Al-Ayyam, 4/1/2006, Front page:

Occupation Represses Election Campaigns in Jerusalem.

Details: Damascus Gate became the center of events when Israeli Police arrested Fateh candidates Ahmad Ghuneim, Nasser Qaws, Hamdi Rajabi, Dimitri Deliani and Majed Alloush, in addition to Dr. Mustafa Barghouti (Independent Palestine List) who was arrested inside the Old City, and citizen Jawad Obaidi, who was arrested while accompanying Dr. Hanan Ashrawi (The Third Way), who was also assaulted by police members at Damascus Gate; moreover several citizens were arrested.

Al-Quds, 6/1/2006, p.9:

Israeli Authorities Interrogate Abdullatif Ghaith, the Independent Candidate for Jerusalem Electoral Department

Al-Quds, 9/1/2006, p.10

Reform and Change Candidates Met International Observers in Jerusalem

Al-Ayyam, 14/1/2006, p.6

Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa List Organizes an Election Rally in North West Jerusalem.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 15/1/2006, Front page:
Candidates Continue Campaigning in the City, and the Majority of Israelis Opposes the Participation of Jerusalemites.



In its news bulletins and programs, Palestine TV covered the same subjects, but did not actually go to the site to broadcast to the public, nor did it monitor and broadcast the reactions of the Palestinian public in Jerusalem to these practices. It reiterated the position of the Palestinian President that the elections would be conducted according to schedule and would include Jerusalemites (Palestine TV-15/1/2006, 7:00 p.m. news bulletin), and covered the official Israeli approval of the participation of Jerusalemites in accordance with the conditions of the 1996 Election (Palestine TV, 15/1/2006, 9:00 news bulletin).

As for the programs of the electoral lists regarding Jerusalem, their position towards means of confronting the Separation Wall around it, the continuous Israeli pursuit for its Judaization and means of supporting the steadfastness of the Palestinian people, all these issues were reported in the media as mentioned in the programs of these lists, without any attempt to give them a specific dimension through interviewing heads of lists in order to clarify the nature of the discrepancies in the programs of different lists over this subject and over means of protecting Jerusalem.

With respect to the anticipated size of Palestinian participation of the Jerusalemites in the Legislative Election, the media featured the CEC statistics on the number of registered voters, indicating the series of obstacles imposed by the Israeli government to hinder a comprehensive registration process conducted by CEC, including the limited number of registration centers which the occupation authorities approved inside Jerusalem and the short time given to the CEC to operate in Jerusalem.

This coverage was mostly distinguished by an absence of a format that would enable the Palestinian public to distinguish between the positions of different blocs towards this

issue, which is one of the core issues of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Moreover, such coverage lacked an effort by the Palestinian media to give this subject the priority it deserves in terms of the political differences between electoral blocs, through addressing the heads of these blocs in order to shed light on the reality of their positions towards elections in Jerusalem, and to make it a central cause for the Palestinian voter upon casting his vote, especially that most lists had launched their campaigns in the City of Jerusalem because of its distinguished status in the Palestinian consciousness, and because it constitutes a main component of the conflict with Israel. Even the lists which selected very special symbolic places to launch their campaigns, such as Fateh, which launched its campaign at Martyr Yasser Arafat's grave, Reform and Change List which launched its campaign at Martyr Ahmad Yassin's house, or Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa List which launched its campaign at Jericho Prison where its head was imprisoned, also announced the launching of their campaigns in Jerusalem, which remained the most important hub for electoral blocs especially during the first days of campaigning.

The Political Programs of the Electoral Blocs

Legislative election provided a real opportunity for the media to inform the Palestinian public of the reality of the political programs of the lists participating in elections, in terms of their immediate and long-term political goals, as well as their means to achieve those goals, especially that the available options for the Palestinian people to move forward at this stage are limited, though clear, and they merely need an honest and direct media discourse that reaches out to the public.

For example, at the political level there is the Road Map, towards which the positions of different electoral blocs vary. Some accept it and demand its implementation in order to gain the necessary international support that forces Israel to fulfill its commitments towards the final status negotiations; some also reject it in principle, while others either demand certain conditions for accepting it or alternately call for an international conference for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

At the resistance level, some demand the restriction of the forms of resistance to popular and peaceful means only, while others demand the combination of negotiations and armed struggle. Some forces call for resistance as the only means for achieving the goals of the Palestinian people for freedom and independence. In this regard, the issue of the legitimacy of resistance inside Israel as a principle and its advantages and disadvantages for the Palestinian national project as a whole is raised.

In general, elections constituted a great opportunity for the Palestinian media to clarify to the Palestinian public the positions of the Electoral Lists, and consequently the political forces they represent, towards the conflict with Israel, or towards local and internal issues such as corruption and security disorder, and to demonstrate the crucial differences between them in order to provide the public with sufficient information that enables them to select their representatives in a fully conscious manner that expresses their own

interests. The media was supposed to play a crucial role in raising the awareness of the Palestinian voter of the reality of existing options that are available, especially that the outcome of the elections has local, regional and international dimensions, upon which the subsequent conflict management with Israel is based, as well as the future relations of the Palestinian Authority with the international community.

Although the media has published the programs of the different electoral blocs in newspapers, and Palestine TV has allocated time for the campaigning of different blocs in accordance with the law, yet the Palestinian media has largely failed to raise discussions around these programs, clarify their contents and unveil their ambiguous aspects. Consequently, the Palestinian public cast their votes without being sufficiently informed and capable of distinguishing between the positions of different blocs towards the issues that influence their lives and future the most, or the means that would be adopted in order to attain these goals.

Some may say that the media must be neutral, especially during the legal campaigning period. However, this does not justify its failure to grasp the crucial political differences which the public is entitled to know without any ambiguity, without being biased in favor of any electoral bloc or its programs.

Another excuse to the media may be the proximity of the electoral political programs of the two major blocs; the *Reform and Change* bloc for example did not present in its program any of its principles that call for the elimination of the state of Israel, but settled for speaking about ending Israeli occupation to the Palestinian territories, which is similar to what the Palestinian National Liberation Movement *Fateh* bloc and other electoral blocs demand. It may also be said that all electoral blocs have asserted the legitimacy of resistance, which did not give the media the opportunity to explain to the public the points of difference between them.

However, the opposite is true: it is specifically because of the above, and because the Palestinian public should not have been left to fall as victims of the deception of ambiguous electoral programs, that the Palestinian media should have intervened and posed the appropriate questions on the representatives of these blocs, highlighting the reality of their convictions and programs. The principle of ending occupation enjoys national consensus. However, this principle does not necessarily mean those who raise such a slogan agree on the two-state solution over the land of Historic Palestine, which enjoys international consensus and the support of a Palestinian popular majority, in addition to its being a main cause for the economic support to the Authority from donor countries and a reason for the political support expressed by most forces, movements and peoples of the world to the cause of the Palestinian people.

The legitimacy of resistance asserted by all electoral blocs in their campaigns does not necessarily mean their approval and adoption of some forms of resistance that contravene with international law. Moreover, some electoral blocs believe in and prefer popular, peaceful and non-violent resistance to armed resistance due to their conviction that such forms better serve the Palestinian cause. Other blocs believe in armed struggle inside the

1967 Occupied Territories, while others claim the legitimacy of armed resistance inside Historic Palestine. Consequently, the media should have pointed out to the Palestinian public the differences in the concept of “legitimacy of resistance” among these blocs, rather than leave it ambiguous.

It should be noted that although the Palestinian media tried to give equal opportunities to electoral blocs, the fact that *Fateh* is the ruling party led to providing larger media space to its candidates, programs and activities, which may be considered as promotion and publicity to *Fateh* and its candidates. In this context, Palestinian newspapers published the electoral programs of electoral blocs verbatim, with no comment or elaboration, mostly as paid advertisement in the press and unpaid advertisement on Palestine TV.

Al-Ayyam 4/1/2002,
P.4

Sha'ath: We Seek to Make Elections a Success and We Expect Good Results

Details: Fateh launched its campaign near President Arafat's grave, and its program aims at achieving security, combating corruption, stopping the Separation Wall, establishing the independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

P.5

“The Alternative (Al-Badeel)” List launches its Campaign in Ramallah under the Slogan: No to Security Disorder.

Details: Combating corruption, fighting unemployment and poverty, and assertion of national imperatives.

P.6

“Independent Palestine” organizes an Election Rally in Hebron.

Details: Ending occupation, combating corruption, achieving democracy and freedom, establishing a Palestinian state with Holy Jerusalem as its capital.

P.7

Haniyyeh: We do not seek to take exclusive control of the PLC or to isolate and marginalize others.

Details: Hamas launched its campaign at Ahmad Yassin's House, with the protection of resistance and its program as a strategic option being the main item of its program.

P.9

Al-Bireh: Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa List launches its Campaign at the Martyrs Graveyard

Details: Preservation of national imperatives, opening and addressing corruption files, protection of martyrs' families, liberation of prisoners and fighting poverty.

Al-Quds Newspaper 7/1/2006

Front page:

Marwan Barghouti: The Forthcoming Elections Constitute a New Democratic Intifada to Renovate the Palestinian Political System.

Details: Marwan Barghouti called upon Fateh to perform radical and wide-scale reform, eradicate corruption and its symbols, impose the rule of law and order and eliminate all forms of chaos, security disorder and disorganized arms.

P.2

Fayyad: Putting an End to Security Disorder is the Main Task of the Authority, and the Presence of Occupation Must not Constitute an Obstacle to Reform and Establishing Good Governance.

Details: Salam Fayyad, the candidate who heads the “Third Way” List, indicated that our priorities and programs focus on the issues of reform and internal building, based on good governance, proper management, combating corruption, providing security and putting an end to security disorder.

Al-Ayyam, 8/1/2006, Front page:

Zahhar: Hamas will Work on Severing Relations with Israel upon Winning, and will not Negotiate with it.

Al-Ayyam 16/1/2005, P.16

Fateh Candidates Rjoub and Abu Sabha Meet the People of Ramadeen

Details: Both candidates asserted that they would enhance the national struggle against settlements and the Separation Wall, and would continue to work for accomplishing the national liberation project and the establishment of the independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

Al-Quds 17/1/2006

Fateh Candidates in West Bank and Gaza Governorates Call for the Success of Elections and the Preservation of National Unity.

Details: Fateh launched its campaign in several locations and governorates; among the main points in its program: national liberation, renovation of political system, political partnership, separation of powers, combating occupation and corruption and liberation of prisoners.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 22/1/2006, P.4

Candidate Saeb Erekat: Fateh Worked Alone while Others Stood Aside.

Al-Ayyam, 22/1/2006, P. 11

Hamas Candidate in Jenin, Khaled Said: We Seek to Get a Politically Pluralistic Legislative Council.

Details: Establishing the Arab and Islamic identity of Jerusalem, the right of return to refugees, support to resistance and the release of prisoners.



Television Interviews with Representatives of Lists and Television Advertisements

During the period of 3-23 January 2006, and upon agreement with CEC, Palestine TV broadcast separate interviews with representatives of electoral lists, of equal duration and broadcast at the same time. Al-Arabia TV also broadcast these interviews. Entitled

Palestine Votes (Falasteen Tusawwet), the program was presented by Sa'ed Khatib of Palestine TV, while Dr. Ali Jarbawi, Professor of Political Science at Birzeit University and former CEC Chairman, and Mr. Hafez Barghouti, Chief Editor of Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah Newspaper, posed questions and directed discussions. This program was aired at 7:30 pm and broadcast again at 1: pm of the following day.

In this regard, MIFTAH wishes to point out that despite its utmost respect for Mr. Hafez Barghouti, yet his selection by CEC was not appropriate, since he is the chief editor of a newspaper that receives assistance from the Palestinian National Authority, and thus some may contest his neutrality in favor of a party that is participating in the elections. Consequently, it would have been better if an independent journalist had been selected to pose the questions in a neutral manner.

Nevertheless, these dialogues/interviews provided a valuable opportunity for Palestine TV to inform the public of the programs of all electoral blocs prior to elections and to get into the political details which these blocs wish to conceal from the public, specifically the most controversial political issues, namely: the position on the Road Map, the positions on the two-state solution based on two states for two peoples living side by side with secure and recognized borders, the position towards suicide bombings inside Israel, the different forms of struggle, the truce, the PLO, the unilateral Israeli solution and the international legitimacy resolutions.

Although the interlocutors raised these issues, there was no focus or concentration that enabled the audience to reach a conclusion by the end of the episode regarding the position of the electoral blocs, allowing them to cast conscious votes on Election day, based on the grounds of fundamental differences between the electoral programs, rather than use their votes and the process of selection of their representatives for protest.

During these programs it was clear that the *Reform and Change* bloc, for example, avoided responding to two issues: accepting the principle of the two-state solution in accordance with international legitimacy resolutions, as Ismail Haniyyeh responded to the interlocutors by saying that *Hamas* does not say that it will throw Jews into the sea, but that occupation must end and we must restore the Palestinian land with Holy Jerusalem as its capital (Palestine Votes, 17/1/2006, 7:30 pm). The second issue is its position on the PLO as a sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, as well as the position on international legitimacy resolutions. But the interlocutors failed to get an explicit position from the *Reform and Change* bloc towards these central issues, which seemed not to constitute the crux of political differences between electoral blocs, but rather that accepting or rejecting them was secondary in the overall Palestinian political action, and did not have an impact on the possibilities of achieving the goals of this action.

Slogans of the *Reform and Change* bloc filled the streets, essentially focusing on two: "One Hand Builds and the Other Resists," and "10 years of Negotiations were Futile, and Five Years of Resistance liberated Gaza." But Palestine TV did not ask the representatives of this bloc during their interviews about the party that was responsible

for obstructing the negotiations in 1995 and 1996, through a series of suicide bombings in Israel, and whether they aimed at halting the process of negotiations? Did they lead to creating a large defect in the signed agreements and create an atmosphere of lack of confidence between both sides? Did they lead to a change in the political map of Israel that brought the Israeli Right wing into government, causing a total paralysis of the political negotiations that lasted for three years that were necessary to examine whether political negotiations were feasible or futile. The fact that the interlocutors acknowledged and accepted that 10 years of negotiations were futile either reflected their own convictions or indicated that they were not well prepared for these TV interviews.

Similarly, the interlocutors did not ask the Palestinian National Liberation Movement *Fateh* the most important question: Why did their bloc have an electoral program that was different from the program upon which the President of the National Authority, their own candidate, a member of their Central Committee, and the most prominent leader in it was elected?

Fateh filled the streets with slogans that spoke about the resistance program in general, and call for mixing resistance with the option for negotiations such as: “We resist and Negotiate,” or “*Fateh* was the First to Shoot Bullets, and the First to Throw Stones.” This bloc was not asked about its position on the *Hudna* (period pf calm) which its President continuously calls for, while its military wing adopts military operations. *Fateh* bloc was not asked about its acceptance of the Road Map and its call upon other political forces to commit to it, at a time when it failed to commit its own members, specifically its armed wing.

Again that was the case with *Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa* and *Independent Palestine* blocs, whose positions towards suicide bombing inside Israel were not understood, nor were their attitude towards negotiations, or how it would be possible to impose the international conference which both blocs demanded. The degree of differences between the two blocs was not clear as well.

The impact of the media on the issue of corruption, which ranks first in the list of concerns among the Palestinian people and was influential on Election day, was as weak as its impact over political issues. Although corruption acquired a distinctive status in the media in terms of the frequency of mentioning, since it was observed that all electoral blocs focused on the topic, the Palestinian media settled for conveying what these blocs said without questioning them who the corrupt were, what evidence they had on their corruption and how they intended to combat them?

The same applies to the issue of the chaos in the use of arms and ensuring the security and safety of Palestinian citizens. The Palestinian media did not question the electoral blocs on means of achieving that. It did not raise questions on their role in causing this chaos, or on their willingness to abandon arms in favor of unified arms in the hands of the National Authority. It did not remind them of facts and incidents that had caused many casualties among our people as a result of that. The electoral blocs were left to “escape” the election milestone, which required clarity over a number of issues that cannot be kept

general and as ambiguous as saying: “A distinction must be made between the arms of resistance and those of bandits.”

In general, the *Palestine Votes* Program and the electoral debate which Palestine TV aired on 23 January 2006 at 6:00 pm, whose aim was to bring to light the programs of different electoral blocs, inform the Palestinian voters and provide them with sufficient amount of information that enables them to distinguish between these blocs, did not serve their purpose. Television has equally failed in achieving these goals just as the press had failed too. Consequently, the Palestinian voter elected his representatives without being influenced by the media. In an article published on www.almashreq.org, Palestinian writer and journalist Hisham Abdullah wrote that “The experience of the Palestinian press in covering general elections may be weak and limited, but Palestinians have gone through more than one similar experience during the past two years, starting with the Presidential Election in January 2005, the Municipal Elections and finally the Legislative Election in January 2006. It was not possible throughout the last three experiences to observe any change worth mentioning in the performance of the local press, which continued to perform merely the same role: pure news coverage of one political color. Hence, when the last elections were conducted on the basis of political plurality, the coverage was inconsistent with the principles of the role of the media in shaping the public opinion, and consequently voters were making their decisions away from this influence.” Indeed that is what happened.

***Hamas* in the Media**

The participation of *Hamas* acquired special focus in the Palestinian media, especially that *Hamas* had opposed and boycotted the 1996 elections. Obviously, the tendency of the Movement to participate in elections came after the truce declared by the Palestinian President in February 2005, and the subsequent dialogue conducted between the different Palestinian factions and forces, which successfully led to the so-called “Cairo Agreement” concluded on 15 March 2005. Despite the Israeli violations of the Agreement which afflicted *Fateh*, *Hamas* and *Islamic Jihad* activists, *Hamas* maintained the calm period with the aim of participating in the Legislative Election. Even when the elections were postponed from July 2005 to January 2006 due to the delay in completing the Election Law -according to the Presidential announcement at the time- *Hamas* also maintained the calm. When Israel delayed declaring its position towards allowing the participation of Jerusalemites in the Election, *Hamas* sought to belittle the issue, providing alternative slogans such as “Imposing Elections in Jerusalem” or “Reaching consensus to solve the problem of Jerusalem” but never announced or threatened to boycott the elections at any stage.

The Palestinian political factions and their representative institutions, specifically the Presidency, as well as the Palestinian media, considered the participation of *Hamas* in the election a supreme national interest, not only for preserving the unity of the Palestinian people and preventing the drift into internal fighting, but also as a necessity for enriching the Palestinian political plurality and establishing the important principle of resorting to democratic elections and their outcome as a political conflict-resolution mechanism. This

would bring about broader national consensus that would put an end to the manifestations of security disorder, the pluralism of general political decision-making centers and would open the road for the rule of law.

In this context, the Palestinian media highlighted the participation of *Hamas* in election, covering the activities of its candidates and shedding light on its position in a similar manner to other electoral blocs. Following are samples of the coverage of the activities of the *Reform and Change* bloc:

Al-Quds, 5/1/2006, p.4

-*“Reform and Change” Bloc Candidates Continue their Campaign in the Governorates of the Country.*

-*“Hamas” Calls for the Protection of Al-Aqsa Mosque and Warns of Repercussions of Harming it.*

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 9/1/2006, p. 10

-*Sheikh Siyam: We will Seek to Revitalize PLO, Build its Institutions and Open all Corruption Files.*

-*Zahhar Calls for Enhancing the Political Participation of Women.*

-*Haniyyeh: “Hamas” Looks Forward to Establishing a National Coalition Stream at the PLC.*

-*Baher: Among our First Priorities is Preserving the Resistance Agenda.*

Al-Quds, 10/1/2006

Front page:

“Hamas” will Seriously Study the Possibility of Renewing the Calm Down through Palestinian Consensus

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Zahhar: Women have an Important Role in Political Partnership with Men and our List will Include Distinguished Women.

Al-Ayyam, 10/1/2006, p.5

Haniyyeh: “Hamas” Will Deliver A Different Political and Media Discourse after The Legislative Elections.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 10/1/2006, p. 6

Siyam: Tampering Elections will Deal a Fatal Blow to the Palestinian People.

Al-Quds, 14/1/2006, Front page:

-*Haniyyeh: We Adhere to the Slogan of “Islam Is The Solution”.*

Al-Quds, 15/1/2006, Front page:

-*“Hamas” Electoral Program Focuses on Reform and Change at the Political, Economic, Social, Health and Educational Levels-in an elaborate interview with Said Siyam, one of the candidates and leaders of the Movement.*

-Haniyyeh: Major European States are Willing to Deal with “ Hamas ” if it Wins Elections.

Al-Ayyam, 15/1/2006, Front page:

-Zahhar: We Refuse to Negotiate and Coordinate with Israel, and the “ Qassam Brigades ” will Increase in Number and Arsenal after Elections.

-Haniyyeh does not Rule out the Possibility of Giving a Ministerial Post to a Woman from Hamas soon.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 16/1/2006, p.11

-“ Reform and Change ” List Continues its Campaign in North Gaza

-“ Reform and Change ” List Continues its Campaign in Hebron.

Al-Quds, 18/1/2006, p.13

Sheikh Khaled Suleiman Candidate of the “ Reform and Change ” List in Jenin Speaks about its Program and Ambitions.

Al-Quds, 19/1/2006, p.2

“ Hamas ” Insists on Practicing its Right of Campaigning in Jerusalem

Al-Ayyam, 19/1/2006, Front page:

“ Fateh ” and “ Hamas ” Agree on not Appearing in Arms on E-day and on Setting Up Field Committees.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 21/1/2006, p.10

Candidate Haniyyeh: “ Hamas ” has Organized its Relations with the Arab and International Circles and is Open to Everybody.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 22/1/2006, p.10

Dr. Baher: Hamas will neither Deprive of Livelihood nor Silence Voices, and will Pardon those who Inflicted Injustice on it.

But the media also published a number of news items and statements by *Hamas* leaders without attempting to highlight their realities and connotations or transform them into useful media material that benefits the Palestinian voter in his decision-making process. Following are some samples:

Al-Quds, 14/1/2006, Front page:

Haniyyeh: We Adhere to the slogan: “ Islam is the Solution ”.

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Abu Zuhri: There is no Contradiction between “ Hamas ” Electoral Program and its Charter.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 15/1/2006, p.8

Candidate Haniyyeh: Palestinian Muslim Women are Purer than what they Call for in all Women Forums.

Al-Ayyam, 15/1/2006, Front page:

Abu Tayr: " Hamas" will Negotiate with Israel better than Others (Denied the next day by Sheikh Abu Tayr).

Al-Ayyam, 17/1/2006, p.8

Haniyyeh: " Hamas" Boycotted the First Elections from a Political Perspective.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 17/1/2006, p.13

Candidate Haniyyeh: " Hamas" will be Patient with the Slander Campaign, and Fateh Emerged from the Heart of the Muslim Brethren.

Al-Quds, 17/1/2006, p.10

Israeli-American Intransigence towards " Hamas" Contributes to its Election Campaign.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 18/1/2006, p.13

Al-Ghul: " Hamas" Will Work to Make the Islamic Shari'a the First Source of Legislation.

Al-Quds, 21/1/2006, Front page:

Zahhar: We Will Reformulate the Society Based on Correct Islamic and Administrative Foundations.

Al-Ayyam, 24/1/2006, Front page:

Zahhar: Political Negotiations are not " Haram." and we will Find a Thousand Appropriate Means for them.

Such news is essentially important to the Palestinian voter, and is in need of an honest media approach and many interviews to get the details of the attitude of those who issue these statements. For example, what are the political, economic, social and cultural components of the slogan "Islam is the Solution;" does this mean that the bloc raising this slogan will implement a penal code that is concomitant with the Islamic Shari'a? Will music and cinemas be banned? Will banking transactions be banned? What does reformulating the society based on correct Islamic and administrative foundations and making the Islamic Shari'a the first source of legislation mean? Does this mean that the bloc believes that the current society is not an Islamic society and is in need of reformulation? What are the existing legislations that conflict with Islamic Shari'a?

Also there should have been a discussion of how correct it is that there is no contradiction between the electoral program and the charter of *Hamas* and the reasons that prevented it from participating in the first elections, while it participated in the second elections, although the National Authority and its Legislative Council are among

the outcomes of the Oslo Agreement which it rejects. There should have been intensive media reports on the positions of *Hamas* towards negotiations, the principle of a two-state solution for two people, armed resistance, international legitimacy resolutions, the proposed long truce as an alternative to ending the conflict, and the positions towards the PLO and the unilateral Israeli solutions, which are positions that had remained ambiguous throughout the campaigning period.

Our aim is to inform Palestinian voters of the programs of the electoral blocs and their positions towards all issues that underlie the future of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the future of their personal lives and the socio-economic system within which they will live after the elections, and not to score on specific bloc or another. But the media dealt negatively with all these issues, due to the fear of accusations of being biased in favor of one party against another, although originally the media is supposed to be biased in favor of the truth and of its role as an observer that defends the interests of the public and their right to get all information. This cannot be accomplished through merely conveying statements and news, but through questioning, researching and investigating facts even if some try to hide them.

Palestinian Political Prisoners

All electoral blocs showed great interest in the subject of political prisoners; some lists were headed by prisoners, such as the Palestinian National Liberation Movement *Fateh* which chose Marwan Barghouti who had been arrested by Israel in 2002 and had received a life sentence, together with a number of its cadres in prison, and *Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa* List, which chose its Secretary-General Ahmad Sa'adat, who had been detained then by the Palestinian Authority, until Israel stormed the prison on 14 March 2006 and arrested him. The *Reform and Change* bloc representing *Hamas* nominated a large number of its prisoners both at the levels of electoral district and lists. Fourteen out of these prisoners won, three from *Fateh*, one from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, PFLP (*Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa* List), and ten from *Hamas*, three of whom were released by Israel after the results.

Electoral blocs also considered the liberation of prisoners among the most important items in their programs, asserting that they would seek their liberation. Some blocs linked the existing state of calm, at least verbally, to closing this file. In most fundamental issues that require a political position, these blocs did not hide the fact that they had to consult with their leaderships in prisons for the final say. Most electoral blocs signed a pact of honor that considers the liberation of prisoners a condition for maintaining the calm. This issue was also used for media overbidding with the aim of winning the support of voters, such as the statement made by Mahmoud Zahhar, the prominent *Hamas* leader, who said "We no longer have a choice but to kidnap Israeli soldiers in order to exchange them with Palestinian prisoners," during a rally in Khan Younis, Al-Ayyam, 19/1/2006, p. 11.

Despite the grave importance of this subject, the Palestinian media did not allocate a large space for it, nor did it prepare special press or TV reports about the issue of prisoners, their exact number, as well as other statistics regarding their age groups, the

numbers of women and children, their distribution over different prisons, the duration of their detention and the number of sentenced prisoners.

Although the Palestinian press allocated a large space for the statements made by the head of the *Fateh* list Marwan Barghouti and published the televised interviews that were conducted with him in prison, and which were broadcast by some Arab satellite channels, the media did not highlight the personal history of prisoner candidates and the charges against them, but settled for stating the fact that they were prisoners, with some reference to the date of arrest. Consequently, the media coverage of the issue of prisoners seemed to be void of content and of a much smaller scale than the role assigned to these prisoners or the dimension of their cause. Following are samples of the coverage of the issue of prisoners and their opinions in Palestinian press.

Al-Ayyam, 4/1/2006, p. 9
Sa'adat Calls for Wide Participation in the Legislative Elections

Al-Quds, 5/1/2006, p.3
PLC Member Husam Khader: No Elections without Jerusalem

Al-Ayyam, 5/1/2006, p. 7
Prisoners of Jerusalem: No Elections without Jerusalem

Al-Hayat al-Jadidah, 7/1/2006, p.6
Sa'adat: Elections are a Democratic Process that Aims at Protecting the Internal Front and the National Project.

Al-Quds, 8/1/2006, p.6
Al-Badeel (The Alternative) Organizes a Demonstration in Nablus in Support of Prisoners in Israeli Prisons.

Al-Quds, 10/1/2006, Front page:
Prisoner Candidates to the Legislative Elections Transform their Tents into Campaigning Centers.

Al-Hayat al-Jadidah, 14/1/2006, p.4
The Participation of Prisoners in Elections: A Winning Card for Competing Forces at the Expense of their Cause?

Al-Quds, 19/1/2006, Front page:
Signing a Pact of Honor that Gives Priority to the Issue of Prisoners.

Israeli Closure of Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the Israeli Occupation Measures

The Israeli occupation authorities asserted their presence during the Legislative Election through various means and methods. Although no one needs a reminder of the severity of

occupation and its practices, the repetitive patterns of these practices were monitored in the media during the period of official campaigning, including the arrest of candidates and members of election campaigns, banning electoral conferences and attacks against participants in addition to restricting the movement of candidates and voters.

We have provided many examples in this regard under the subject of Jerusalem at the beginning of this report. Following are other samples of coverage of the occupation practices that affected Elections.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 7/1/2006, p.5
Closing Occupation Checkpoints Targets Elections.

Al-Ayyam. 8/1/2006, p.9
CEC Employees Prevented from Entering Al-Aghwar Area.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 8/1/2006, p.4
Occupation Denies Fateh Candidate of Tubas Access to Al-Aghwar Area.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 8/1/2006, p.6
Independent Palestine Spokesman Denounces Preventing Dr. Barghouti from Reaching Gaza.

Al-Quds, 14/1/2006, p.13
“Reform and Change” List Denounces the Arrest Campaign against its Activists and Supporters in Tulkarem.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, 14/1/2006, p.2
Occupation Prevents Candidate Masri from Entering Gaza Strip.

Al-Ayyam, 21/1/2006, p.3
Occupation Prevents Candidate Bani Odeh from Reaching Bardalah.

Results and Recommendations

First: The Palestinian Legislative Council Election has occupied the main news headlines in the press and television for three continuous weeks, and the strong competition between different electoral blocs, specifically the former ruling party, Palestinian National Liberation Movement *Fateh* and the opposing party, *Hamas*, represented by the Reform and Change List prevailed. The controversial issues that existed between all electoral blocs on one hand and *Hamas* on the other hand, specifically the issue of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict were large and divergent, most notably the differences over the acceptance of the principle of a two-state solution over the land of Historic Palestine, the position towards international legitimacy and the signed agreements between the PLO and the successive Israeli governments, in addition to the position towards the Road Map and the sole representation of the PLO to the Palestinian people. However, in spite of all

the above, the Palestinian media did not transform any of these issues into a debate, or a central issue through which the Palestinian voter could realize the main differences between these blocs at the political level, and consequently the voter went to the ballot with feelings of resentment against corruption which the former ruling party is accused of, anger against the security disorder, and an absence of a political horizon because of the daily Israeli practices and the suspended political negotiations, all of which produced results that came as a surprise even to the winners.

Secondly: In addition to its failure to unveil the reality of the political programs of electoral blocs to the voter, the Palestinian media failed to transform the position towards elections in Jerusalem into an issue that sheds light on the position of different electoral blocs from the issue. The media neither raised questions for those who called for imposing elections in Jerusalem or reaching a consensus on it, about the mechanisms that would be adopted to impose elections, nor inquired about the alternative solutions if they existed. It did not ask those who preferred postponing the elections if Israel did not approve conducting them in Jerusalem about the reasons that pushed them to take such a stand.

Third: The Palestinian media did not try to clear the ambiguity surrounding the obvious contradiction between *Hamas* charter and its electoral program. Moreover, it did not seek to know the reasons that prevented their participation in the 1996 elections and allowed it in 2006. It did not even discuss its political role during the nineties. The same applied to *Fateh* bloc, which the media did not ask about the reasons for the security disorder whose own members commit in Gaza, nor about its position on the Road Map, or its inability to merge its armed wing into the Palestinian security organs or any civilian organs. The media did not ask *Fateh* about the reasons for campaigning under an electoral program that differed to some extent from that upon which President Abbas had been elected, regarding the issues of resistance and negotiations.

Fourth: The Palestinian media did not give prisoners their right share of coverage, and their subject, which enjoyed the priority in all electoral programs, was not transformed into media material that sheds light on their conditions and the circumstances surrounding their arrest, or about the fact that their cause is central to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Fifth: The media did not play its presumed role in following up rumors and negative campaigns that were circulating among the public, and which were used by some blocs to gain positive publicity for themselves or negative publicity against their competitors. Among the most prominent examples in this regard are the accusations launched against some blocs or candidates regarding the sources of funding, which did not receive any coverage worth mentioning despite its importance and in spite of the possible impact of such baseless rumors and accusations on voters.

In general, the Palestinian media did not perform its role in a professional manner, as a watchman for the Palestinian public, leaving the voter to go to the ballot without clear and focused information about the programs of different political electoral blocs. Consequently, it had a limited role in influencing the tendencies of the Palestinian voter,

allowing internal Palestinian issues, such as security disorder and corruption, to play a decisive role in shaping the electoral orientations of the voting public.

In this context, Miftah wishes to present the following recommendations:

First: MIFTAH has previously recommended the need for establishing a higher media council that is independent from the government, with a strictly supervisory role that enables the media to function in a professional, objective and free manner, and to avoid the control of the executive authority. The Government may establish a press office that covers its own activities. **MIFTAH** asserts that this is the best and shortest way to overcome the inadequacy of the state-run media institution.

Second: Miftah asserts that the weak professionalism with which the media handled the issue of elections requires serious reconsideration by the owners of media institutions, as well as an evaluation of its performance during the electoral campaigning period, in order to develop its operations, become capable of playing the role of defense of the interests of the Palestinian public, and to watch over the state institutions, facilities and leading political forces. This requires a larger degree of courage in raising issues of interest to citizens, and more openness towards the ideas that lead to intellectual liveliness within the Palestinian society.

Third: MIFTAH wishes to reiterate that the Palestinian Legislative Election has resulted in new realities that require the media to function in a critical manner and to adopt one major aim, that is to focus on the interests of the Palestinian public, through communicating full facts and information to the public and enabling them to constructively contribute to making those decisions pertaining to their destiny.