

## United States 2008 Elections

### Attendees (without distinction):

- From The American Consulate: Micaela Schweitzer-Bluhm, Suzan Nammari.
- Palestinian Civil Society Representatives: Sahar Qawasmi, Arnan Bashir, Shaker Khalil, Haitham Arar, Rami Mahdawi, Jameeleh Abed.
- From MIFTAH: Lily Feidy, Bisan Abu-Ruqti, Reem Wahdan, Shadi Abu Ayyash, Manar Harb, Maleeha Nassar, Nadia Awad, Arwa Jaber, Maysa Hindaileh, and Nadia Awad.

### Background

The Palestinian initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, in cooperation with the Public affairs Office at the United States Consulate General in Jerusalem, has been organizing special roundtable discussions with Mrs. Micaela Schweitzer-Bluhm, Consul for Press and Cultural Affairs, for special briefs on United States elections, to Palestinian Civil Society activists, mainly targeting interested youth and women.

### Latest on Campaigns

**Swing States:** As the Election Day (4th of November) approaches, the campaigns of Democrat of Illinois, Barack Obama, and Republican of Arizona, John McCain, heat up to gain swing states, only 2 weeks from the elections. Obama targeted North Carolina, Virginia, and Missouri, states that have reliably voted for Republican presidential candidates in the last several election cycles.

John McCain has been focusing his campaign in states that could hold the balance of victory on Election Day, including Pennsylvania, Indiana, New Mexico, Nevada and Florida. In addition, McCain is defending a number of traditional Republican states that he must win in the state-by-state tally of electoral votes that determines who will be the next president.

**Campaign Financing:** Obama was able to collect millions of dollars during the months of September and early October, raising lots of small donations (average contributions of \$85) over the internet from around 632,000 grassroots donors, mainly individual supporters. This amount raised is double the amount McCain's campaign can spend from September until elections day, as he has accepted federal funding.

**Campaigning Strategies and Polling:** Obama's campaign has been media savvy, using the internet for advertisements on video games, for example, in key states such as

Missouri, Virginia, and North Carolina- states that have voted Republican for the last four elections, making these states particularly competitive for the McCain Campaign, who had to pull out from Minnesota. Lately, Obama has been receiving several endorsements, the most recent being that of Colin Powell. This is deemed significant, and would give his campaign much more credibility on foreign policy issues, and will resonate with undecided people and in the US military forces.

The Illinois Senator leads in all national opinion polls, and more crucially in all the remaining key battleground states that have swung decisively in his favor and away from Republican rival John McCain. Recent polls show that the Illinois Senator has a 10 point advantage. According to The New York Times, votes for Obama could reach 277 votes, where McCain is strong in states that would only add up to 185 votes. McCain will have to win by large the rural areas in order to win.

## **Discussion**

Representatives of Palestinian civil society organizations have been mainly interested in exploring how economy, race and character will influence the choice of the American people, and what implications will the new presidency, whether that is McCain or Obama, will have on the United States foreign policy and its involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Of course and due to the recent economic crisis, the major domestic concern of 55% of Americans is the economy, followed by health care. In this regard, the candidates do have some differences on implementation of foreign policy priorities, but have even larger differences in their approaches towards hard core domestic issues such as tax cuts. Still, foreign policy in the Middle East will continue to have momentum on the new President's agenda.

An Observer should also pay special attention to senate races in key states like Virginia who has historically voted republican, now the race is going on between Democrat Mark Warner and Rep. Former Governor Jim Gilmore. In North Carolina, the race goes on between Democrat Kay Hagan and Republican Elizabeth Dole, while in Alaska; Ted Stevens leads the senate race against Mark Begich. In Minnesota, Republican Norm Coleman is running against former comedian and talk radio host Al Franken, who has been doing surprisingly well according to polls. The results of the senate races will have a great impact on how the next President will function and what kind of support he will have.