

“Guarantees for holding local council elections on time and on one date in the West Bank (including Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip”

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Introduction

As part of its strategy for promoting dialogue to influence public policies formulation, advocate for the promotion of the democratic transition and the periodicity of the democratic process, MIFTAH hosted a public policy meeting on January 23, 2017 in partnership with GIZ. The aim was to push towards holding local council elections on time in accordance with Cabinet decision 07/121/17 and to ensure that the elections are held concurrently in all districts of the homeland. The session addressed the various positions regarding the development of the electoral system, including ensuring there are no new obstacles to holding the elections on time.

Discussion

The participants discussed guarantees for holding the elections on the specified date, stressing on the need to hold them concurrently in one day in all Palestinian governorates in West Bank(including east Jerusalem) and Gaza strip, in accordance with the enacted law of 2005 and without amendments, namely to the electoral system of “full proportional representation based on closed lists”. They also said the elections must be held before May 20; that is, before the month of Ramadan begins, rejecting any division of the elections into stages, which they said was in breach of the elections law.

The participants also broached the subject of the elections court. Before the policy meeting was held, President Abbas issued a decree regarding the formation of this court, the only amendment to the law, in order to hold the elections in all districts on time. This was a continuation of the dialogue initiated by civil society institutions with PLC members and other active parties where they stressed on securing guarantees that the elections would be held on time. They also stressed on the need to continue the dialogue with Hamas to persuade them to accept the President's decision to form the elections court and not to create any obstacles or

excuses to prevent the elections from taking place should they be announced by the Prime Ministry. The participants also called on Hamas to facilitate the work of the Central Elections Commission [CEC] in the Gaza Strip and safeguard the right of citizens to choose their representatives democratically.

During the policy meeting, a delegation of civil society organizations and PLC members went to meet with the Prime Minister in this regard and to request that the government postpone any amendments to the elections law. The participants also called for continuing the social dialogue after the upcoming election cycle 2017 in order to conduct the necessary amendments for the next elections round expected 2021.

The attendees reiterated their rejection of the idea to hold elections in stages or to conduct them in some areas while postponing them in others, saying this was contradictory to the elections law.

Meanwhile, a representative for the Ministry of Local Government offered the official stance, which he said was posed to the Cabinet in order to secure a set date for the upcoming elections cycle. He also said the social dialogue should continue after the elections to continue with the amendments demanded by civil society organizations and MIFTAH's recommendations regarding the proposed amendments.

The policy meeting concluded with the following recommendations:

- 1- The need for a Cabinet decision determining a date for local elections before mid-May, 2017 whereby elections are held on one day concurrently in the West Bank including Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.
- 2- The formation of an elections court according to the law, to guarantee the independence and integrity of its work.
- 3- Local council elections should constitute an effective opening for holding presidential, legislative and PNC elections and for ending the political division and enhance national reconciliation.
- 4- A call on all political and social forces and on civil society organizations to work together to remove any obstacles that could prevent broad participation in the elections.
- 5- A call on political parties and forces to ensure and secure women's representation of no less than 30% and in advanced positions on the list and to also promote youth representation in electoral lists.
- 6- Support for the Central Elections Commission-CEC
- 7- A call on the media to respect the law and regulations for campaigns and to promote citizens' participation in the elections.

- 8- The importance of starting a comprehensive national dialogue between all political components and civil society organizations and the CEC regarding the local council elections law after the upcoming elections.
- 9- The need to conduct electoral reforms, especially the 30% increase in women's representation, the lowering of the candidacy age to 21, lowering the threshold to 5% and initiating a dialogue and discussion on these and any other suggestions that contribute to developing the electoral system.