

“Possible ways of introducing amendments to the electoral system”

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Introduction:

The electoral system in Palestine has received much attention from Palestinian civil society institutions and bodies and from the various factions and forces. Recently, a series of debates and discussions pertaining to the electoral system and the space granted to women and youth in this system as voters and candidates have taken place, with the goal of guaranteeing that women and youth are represented in the decision making positions and therefore have an impact on the formulation of public policies. They were also aimed at supporting the political participation of women, all of which requires a closer look at the intricacies and procedures followed in the current electoral system in Palestine. It also requires serious consideration of the most significant challenges and gaps that hinder women and youth from reaching decision-making positions. In addition, the discussions were aimed at proposing implementable alternatives and amendments to be introduced to the electoral system, which guarantee the broadest and most comprehensive representation of women and youth in the Palestinian society.

General framework: the discussion

The attendees discussed the electoral law for legislative and local elections and the main legal pit stops this law has passed since 1996 along with the challenges of introducing amendments to the electoral system, including the Local Council Elections Law No. 10 of 2005, the participation of women and youth in these elections and the percentage of their representation in them. They confirmed that the best way for representation of these two sectors is to maintain the proportional representation system in full. They also called on the political echelon, factions and civil society institutions to support and empower women and youth in the elections in a way fitting to their size and influence. They said the quota system was positive but not enough and needed to be developed.

The participants' presentations pointed out that there was a difference and a margin between the legal eligibility age and the candidacy age. They indicated to several gaps in the system that must be addressed, such as lowering the candidacy age for legislative elections and public commissions so youths could actively participate in them; the need to achieve reconciliation; approving the elections system through an agreement between all forces and civil

society organizations as one of the most important political rights of any society's individuals; working towards its ratification by the PLC or by national consensus; and opening a societal dialogue on the elections laws with the participation of all parties involved.

The participants' presentations called for equal representation of women in running for elections and a demand to amend the elections law so it would allow youths to run at the age of 18 based on the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights. Another suggestion was to conduct a constitutional amendment proposing a quota for both youth and women, in addition to amending the unions' law whereby these two quotas would be imposed.

Furthermore, the presentations confirmed the importance of adopting the civil registry, given that it is obligatory for participating in upcoming elections, also calling for this registry to be founded on the basis of national consensus and according to proportional representation, which serves political pluralism and allows the entry of smaller blocs. The participants also called for a constituent council to write up the constitutional system pertaining to women's participation in elections, noting the need to change the social culture regarding women's participation in political life.

Recommendations

- The need to continue discussions on determining the shape of the electoral system which will guarantee a democratic climate of pluralism, justice and participation for Palestinians and which coincides with the elections atmosphere in Palestine.
- Working towards remedying the flaws in the elections' legal framework, including the absence of laws and procedures such as: the factions' law, private media and funding of factions and candidates.
- Showing real determination for the participation of various social sectors, including women, youth and special needs persons.
- Pressure towards restoring the democratic climate to the PLO and moving away from policies of partisan allocations
- Developing monitoring tools to deal with the media, social media, private companies, resignations and candidacies.
- Reconfirming the principle of equal representation for women in all elected councils; pressing to cancel restrictions on the candidacy age for youth, to guarantee broader representation and participation of youth and women in elections.
- Demanding the women's movement press for improving policies that will ensure practical equality and participation rather than considering the quota system as a goal.
- Promoting cooperation and networking among the components of civil society to form a means of pressure towards making the required amendments to the elections law in order to promote real representation for women and youth.