

Special session on the popular youth movement in Palestine

Attendees (without distinction): Mohammed Madani, Qays Abdul Karim, Ahmad Majdalani, Siham Barghouti, Azmi Shuaibi, Hanan Ashrawi, Fadi Qaraeen, Fajr Harb, Rami Mehdawi, Shireen Abu Fanuna, Huriyeh Ziadeh, Zaid Shuaibi.

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Introduction:

In line with the Arab revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and other Arab countries, Palestinian youths took to the streets on March 15 under the slogan of ending the political division and the occupation. Under this slogan, several sub-slogans were adopted including: formulating serious mechanisms to achieve national unity and ending the division; demanding Palestine National Council elections; reaffirming that the PLO is the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people; and reaffirming the importance of popular resistance in confronting the practices of the Israeli occupation.

In light of this popular movement and the youth initiatives taking place at the time, MIFTAH decided to hold a special session that brought together political and civil society leaders and youth leaders to discuss clear ways to move this popular trend forward and to identify motivations for expanding the platform for participation in this movement.

Main points of the discussion:

The attendees discussed ways of reaching a common and united goal for the current popular movement and discussed motivators by which to expand the foundation for popular participation. Representatives of the youth movement called on the political leaders to support them in attaining their goals and to trust in their capabilities which they believe could ultimately lead to freedom from the occupation and national unity.

On their part, the political and civil society leaders warned the youths of repeating the mistakes of others in the past such as calling for PNC elections, which will not achieve the desired result of ending the split. The leaders emphasized that they need attractive slogans that are achievable. They advised them not to adopt previous rhetoric and to develop their own ways of popular struggle to end the division. The participants all acknowledged that Palestine's case is different than those of the Arab countries that witnessed revolutions and so its popular movement must also be addressed differently.

The participants – especially the political leaders – questioned the level of awareness among the youths in terms of what they need to confront the occupation, end the division and restore national unity.

All the participants – youths and political leaders – agreed on the need for unified actions in order to achieve a common interest and the desired goals and to create a unified leadership, especially since most political factions are currently in crisis.

The youths also demanded protection for those demonstrating against attacks by security services. They pointed to the importance of taking the step of releasing political prisoners in West Bank and Gaza jails and halting incitement in the media in the respective places. The youths said they felt the political split had marginalized the Palestinian cause and the youth, which feels it has no one to represent it politically or hear their concerns. Instead, youths felt they were being held hostage by Fateh and Hamas in a sense and are being forced to accept what is imposed on them.

There was recognition of a lack of massive enthusiasm in the youth movement. There was also a lack of focus and no accumulative efforts by the youths. With this absence of a real strategy and mechanisms to end the division, they agreed on the need to look closer at the challenges facing the people and not allowing the movement to be taken advantage of by any movement or factions. Efforts should be consolidated on a popular basis and not a factional one.

Everyone agreed that the capabilities of the youth movement should be trusted but acknowledged that this movement needs an identification of goals and sound methods. It should also be taken into consideration that the current youth initiatives have been ongoing for some time in popular resistance against the occupation, the separation wall and settlements in areas that suffer daily from the occupation. Smarter and more efficient ways of dealing with Israel are needed, especially since the Palestinian popular struggle has been ongoing for decades.

The participants also agreed on the power of new age of technology and its role in mobilizing and influencing the masses.

The group also agreed that there was an absence in youth representation; the Palestinians' current political rhetoric is lacking in the demands of the youths. Therefore, it is time to give them a role in the decision making process and political participation since, until now, the youths have paid the price of the resistance without being part of the decisions. One way, the participants suggested, would be to lower the age for political candidacy.