

Policy Papers

The Political System and the Status of the
Women and Youth Leaders



Policy Papers

Supporting Young Palestinian Women Political Leaders 2012/2013

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MIFTAH Foreword

This year, the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, MIFTAH continued its dialogue on issues pertaining to the internal Palestinian situation at the general policy level and at the level of the role of youth in Palestinian factions. This was accomplished through focusing on the challenges that face young women leaders in political action.

In line with its strategic goals and through its “Supporting Young Palestinian Political Women Leaders” project [2012-2013], which focus on empowering leadership components in society through participation in promoting democracy, good governance and raising social awareness towards citizens’ rights and duties, MIFTAH strived to support and empower young women leaders . It also worked towards raising the level of representation among young Palestinian women in decision-making positions.

The series of policy meetings further contributed to integrating Palestinian youth (both male and female) in policy and dialogue meetings to discuss developments in current political issues linked to the Palestinian context. These sessions offered an opportunity to youth to pose their viewpoints within a progressive and dialogue-oriented framework. Moreover, through specialized policy meetings, MIFTAH was able to shed light on the political vacuum related to the role of young women leaders in organizations and parties designed for political action.

These policy meetings produced general policy papers, which are then presented to decision-makers and Palestinian leaders in order to translate their recommendations into national strategies. They are then reflected in actual and serious steps by official parties in the Palestinian society.

Policy Paper

Priorities of diplomatic action after Palestine's UN upgrade

December 27, 2012





Attendance (without distinction)

Nabil Kassis, Abdel Qader Hussein, Abdel Rahim Mallouh, Qays Abdel Karim, Abdel Karim Barghouti, Ahmad Majdalani, Maryam Saleh, Ayman Daraghmeh, Abdel Rahman Abu Arafah, Rima Kittaneh Nazzal, Rami Mehdawi, Azmi Shuabi, Hanan Ashrawi, Lily Feidy

MIFTAH Team: Ala' Karajeh



Introduction

After Palestine was granted a status upgrade at the UN to non-member observer state on November 29, 2012, it has become imperative to discuss the ramifications of this achievement from various aspects. This includes international relations, charters and covenants and Palestine's membership in international agencies. It also includes discussion at the political, legal and security level in addition to issues pertaining to organization and structure towards the realization of a Palestinian state, deterrence of Israeli occupation practices and holding Israel legally accountable.



Discussion

It has become necessary to take advantage of this diplomatic achievement and build on it. An overall framework is necessary to discuss what is needed in this context, including building up

diplomatic and political support for Palestine internationally so this can be the first step to gaining full membership. If this is not achieved, the achievement will become nothing more than a slogan and a commemoration date, thus losing its credibility.

As a result of this achievement, the importance of which lies in the international recognition of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, has been for Israel to step up its settlement activity in the West Bank, especially in Jerusalem. It rushed to approve the E1 settlement plan, which will ultimately separate Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, confiscated thousands of dunams of Palestinian land and gave free reign to its settlers to attack Palestinians and their properties under the protection of the army. This is not to mention Israel's decision to illegally withhold Palestinian tax returns which it collects on the PA's behalf.



Empowering the internal situation

In tandem with a diplomatic move, the internal structure must be rectified so that this move can be based on strong foundations that will also help the push towards reconciliation. This needs a political will demonstrated from all parties. The Central Committee must convene along with the higher leadership committee in order to discuss changes in the concept and role of the PA and to re-identify its functions, especially the external ones. An alternative credible program must also be set up if reconciliation is not reached.

Hence, joining international organizations, treaties and agencies must come within a framework agreed on by the PLO and in a matter that serves Palestine as a state. Furthermore, internal UN resolutions must also be put into effect, including Resolution 1325 stipulating the protection of women in areas of conflict, which we must ensure reach decision-making positions. The same applies for the CEDAW, the convention of the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.



Strategic balances

It is important to find practical steps in order to quickly take advantage of the momentum which accompanied the recognition of a Palestinian state; we must amend the balance of powers strategically and rectify the legal foundations for the political process, which can be achieved at two levels:

First: the negotiating foundations, and continuing to insist on the current terms for returning to negotiations while working on developing them further. These include a halt to settlement construction, the release of prisoners, especially long-serving ones and shifting the balances of power strategically on the ground. That is, the entire political process and its framework must be changed by conditioning negotiations with the implementation of international resolutions and not negotiating over them.

Second: Using tools of international law to hold Israel accountable and make it stand trial for war crimes it has committed in addition to its violation of international law; we must use these tools within a strategy of putting real pressure on Israel to end the occupation.

Security coordination with Israel must also be halted; rules of engagement with settlers must also be imposed within a security context in which Israel operates as well. This is through legal measures that focus on the illegitimacy of their presence in the West Bank.



Recommendations

1. Formulating a plan to join international organizations and finding the purpose each one can serve to the benefit of Palestinian interests in confronting the occupation on the ground and which will strengthen it internationally.
2. Using tools of international law to isolate Israel legally, including the Geneva Convention, the International convention against racial discrimination and the Rome Statute.
3. Expediting the reconciliation process and overcoming all of the negative signs in this regard, followed by a call for elections.
4. Ending security coordination with Israel; imposing the rules of engagement with settlers through legal measures that focus on the illegitimacy of their presence in the West Bank and their confiscation of Palestinian land and resources.

5. Pushing the international community into a battle of excluding Israel and isolating it internationally; bringing in women's movements, popular movements and organizations and civil society into the battle, whether through boycotting Israeli products or other forms of resistance.
6. Raising Palestine's representation in friendly countries and addressing countries that refrain to do so or those who opposed the vote in the UN General Assembly on a Palestinian state, aimed at supporting Palestinian positions in the future.
7. Convening the central committee and the higher leadership committee in order to discuss changing the concept and role of the PA and redefining its functions, especially the external ones.
8. Inevitably declaring the failure of the Oslo Accords and breaking away from them, especially since the agreement did not specify beforehand that it would end in a two-state solution; rather it indicated to an open transitional period.
9. Call for the convention of an international conference based on international legitimacy and law in order to implement international resolutions rather than negotiate over them.

Policy Session

The status of Palestinian women in political parties

February 14, 2013





Attendance (without distinction)

Abdel Qader Husseini, Rima Kittaneh-Nazzal, Samieh Bamieh, Saleh Ra'fat, Khaleda Jarrar, Zahira Kamal, Wafa' Al Qadi, Fadwa Al Shaer, Fajr Harb, Mohammed Madani, Azmi Shuaibi, Lily Feidy

MIFTAH Team: Ala' Karajeh, Bisan Abu Ruqti, Lamis Shuaibi, Najwa Yaghi



Introduction

Over the past two decades, Palestinian women have suffered a tangible setback in their political role in the Palestinian arena. This is in spite of their significant role in the resistance during the first Intifada. Palestinian women played a major role at the popular grassroots level. Therefore, it has become necessary to review their role in society, first and foremost with regards to political factions. It is also necessary to create a political and social framework through which practical steps can be made in order for women to take their natural place in political decision-making places.

MIFTAH's program targets young women leaders and is aimed at building their capacities in dialogue, debate and general political knowledge; it also seeks to provide opportunities for them to become involved in leadership positions. Through this program it became apparent that there was a lack of political knowledge

among women. This reflected on the retreat in women's roles inside political factions.



Discussion

Setback at the cultural and political level

A number of factors contributed to the limitations on the role of women in Palestinian society and their failure to reach decision-making positions. Most significantly is the lack of young men and women participating in political factions. This is due to the frustration felt in young women's circles, as they noticed a setback in the ideological mentality of factions, especially leftist ones. This resulted in the absence of any role for the elite at the popular level. In contrast were the Islamic factions such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which did find a popular basis. This explained their acceptance in much of society, something which was directly translated into election results.

It is clear that there is a lack of overall political knowledge among youths. Responsibility for this lies with civil society and political factions in addition to the individual responsibilities of the youths themselves. Therefore, it is imperative to find a way out of this muddled political and intellectual state and lack of information and knowledge, so we can confront the religious and fundamental practices and trends emerging in society and touch base with the more modern, contemporary issues of today. This will all bridge the intellectual gap between leaders and youths at the grassroots base.

In light of this setback, political factions are required to assume their role in raising awareness and preparing leaders in society. In the same context, officials and civil society must wage a battle to change school curricula. Likewise, the educational process in schools must be monitored in order to control the deterioration in culture and awareness occurring in Palestinian society.

Tools in the hands of the factions, and the national “laboratory”

The fact that political action is limited to leaders, far removed from the practical participation of young men and women, has contributed to the youth sector’s absence in the factions. Furthermore, factions did not develop tools and mechanisms that would help them tackle the requirements of various political stages. They also lost channels of communication with the youth sector in addition to the fact that political bodies, including women’s parties, are isolated from one another and have not developed one line of thinking. Women are physically present but their participation is far removed from decision-making positions at the political level, with the exception of a few cases.

At a time when the role of women was limited to small committees within the factions, males were competing over political leadership positions in the PLC and other forums. As a result of this, women’s participation suffered a setback, leaving her no space except in the context of the quota system. Hence, women were a minority in representation in spite of their broad presence on the ground. This prompted an urgent need to empower women in decision-

making positions and a need to revive the role played by factions in creating women leaders and promoting their right to run and reach leadership positions.

The status of women in political factions reflects the deteriorating state of these political factions; factions have been engrossed in their internal problems, with the role of most of their leaders shifting from mobilization of the masses to institutional work. Hence, neither the faction nor the goal remained unified, something which created a state of chaos where women and youths were the victims since they are the weakest link. This meant a collective discourse was needed for political factions and for empowering women at three levels: self-empowerment that would enable them to make decisions; social empowerment; and empowerment to enable them to reach higher positions.

At the popular level, there have been youth initiatives for national action and for resisting the occupation such as the Bab Al Shams, Bab Al Karamah and Manateer initiatives, which should be promoted in the future. The factions and all political forces should support these popular initiatives and highlight the role of youth and women through them.



Recommendations

1. The need to formulate a specific conceptual framework in order to revive the role played by factions in creating women leaders in decision-making positions.
2. Political factions need to create channels of communication with youths, embrace them and provide them with the space to carry out their role, through developing tools and mechanisms in a way that will go hand in hand with the current situation.
3. Unifying Palestinian discourse far from the confusion, which has affected all aspects of Palestinian life; pointing the compass in the right direction, out of the confusion in which the Palestinian people live.
4. Reviving the “national laboratory” as a space where youths can take on their natural role as active and effective members of society.
5. There must be a return to the masses and a revival of all forces in order to bridge the gap between leaders and the political elite in factions, and youths at the popular grassroots level.

Policy Session

**Role of youth and women leaders
in political parties –
mechanisms for action and influence**

May 8, 2013





Attendance (without distinction)

Jihad Harb, Rima Kittaneh Nazzal, Salah Ra'fat, Munib Rashid Al Masri, Tufeeda Jarbawi, Hanan Ashrawi, Lena Bakr, Majd Samhan, Jacqueline Khatib, Hadeel Ziada, Azmi Shuaibi, Lily Feidy

MIFTAH Team: Lamis Shuaibi Hantuli, Abeer Zghari



Introduction

This session is a continuation of the previous session and its resultant work with the youth sector in this context in order to look for mechanisms of action and influence that would allow youth and women leaders to reach decision-making positions in factions.

MIFTAH's programs target women and youth leaders and seek to build their capacities in the fields of dialogue, debate and the intellectual dimension of political action in addition to providing opportunities for them to take on leadership positions with preparedness and competency. Through field work with youths, it became clear that there was a setback in general political knowledge among them, coupled with their reluctance to participate in political factions. This is in addition to the growing gap of understanding between them and leaders at the grassroots level and the fact that factions have not produced young and able youth leaders to be at the forefront of political action.



Discussion

One of the most important recommendations that came out of the first part of the session was the need to formulate a specific conceptual framework to revive the role played by factions in creating youth and women leaders in decision-making positions. The recommendation also included formulating a clear vision with a political dimension for encompassing young men and women; there was also a suggestion to work towards reviving political factions in a bid to create new channels of communication with them and to give them the space to practice their role through developing the mechanisms at their disposal, which coincide with the requirements of the current circumstances.

Field work with the youth sector has highlighted a number of indicators, most importantly the setback in awareness of political culture. This was apparent in two workshops held on the women's rights and independence declarations. The youth had no idea about the contents of these documents. Furthermore, the youth sector is currently living in social crisis full of frustration and uncertainty; they lack motivation and encouragement because of the state of political uncertainty in the current phase and the lack of sense that there is no real leadership able to pull them out of this crisis. Additionally, the younger generation has not experienced the political work and thinking of former generations.

Furthermore, the role of progressive leftist factions has retreated, thus increasing the feeling of frustration and lack of confidence among women and youth circles, both of which have witnessed a setback in the ideological awareness of factions given the absence in the role of the elite at the popular level. This is in contrast to the factions with a religious ideology, which explains their broad popular acceptance, something translated in the election results.

Tools in the hands of the factions

It has become an urgent need to take advantage of new media and to use the virtual world and social network websites, given that they are considered an important tool for pressure and advocacy of youth issues. However, at the same time, they are not a goal in and of themselves and do not take the place of work on the ground, mobilization in the field and the real organization provided by political factions in support of the demands of youths or for confronting any force that seeks to take advantage of these youths' potentials and direct them towards their own purposes and agendas.

Youth, in their quest to escape the stereotypes of traditional societal norms and society's patriarchal nature, must take the reins of initiative into their hands in facing these norms, which exclude women and marginalize their role. They must also push towards creating a youth project that is clear and integrated with the national program and with political action.

There must be a departure from this state of political and intellectual confusion and a fight against the drop in the level of education and knowledge among youth and women in society. There must also be a push against the fundamental and religious practices in society in order to emerge with an enlightened perspective on contemporary issues having to do with modernity.



Recommendations

1. There must be a marriage between the old and new generations, which would allow for opportunities for youth to exercise their role and to work perpendicularly within a joint national framework.
2. Reviving the role of the progressive leftist approach in influencing educational and curriculum and practical approaches directed at Palestinian youths.
3. Use of social network to form support and advocacy for youth issues and to work in finding a balance on the ground.
4. The need to link political action with a factional and organizational framework, which would guarantee its sustainability.
5. There must be positive intervention in favor of women in factions; they need motivation and positive discrimination through laws and legislation.
6. Work on unifying a national program.

Policy Meeting

The new Palestinian government and the challenges it faces

June 25, 2013





Attendance (without distinction)

Sameer Abu Aisheh, Rima Nazzal, Saleh Ra'fat, Hisham Kuheil, Kameel Mansour, Abdel Rahim Malouh, Zahi Khoury, Ahmad Harb, Siham Barghouti, Anan Alateera

MIFTAH Team: Dr. Lily Feidy, Rula Muzaffar, Ala' Karajeh



Introduction

After President Mahmoud Abbas accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah on Sunday June 23, and in light of the crisis in the political and administrative system at the various levels, there is now a need to look into the nature of the challenges awaiting the caretaker government and how to address them. This is whether in terms of reforming the internal situation or finding practical steps to prepare an administrative structure capable of community development and revival of Palestinian citizenry.

In light of the absence of a monitoring role by the PLC, the continued crisis in the political system, the conflict of interests between the PA and the PLO and the absence of any prospect for an end to the split, it is important to formulate a clear strategic vision to face internal and external challenges and to operate according to this vision.



Discussion

The crisis of the political system

The crisis facing the new Palestinian government is a crisis basically linked to the present political system and one that was faced by consecutive former governments. Hence, the current government inherited the same crisis. This created an imbalance of sorts in the political system and thinking, meaning that no government can make any positive change or assume any effective role as a result of this structural and administrative dysfunction.

This situation meant that the work of this government was nothing more than “managing the crisis” instead of solving it, especially in the absence of the PLC and its monitoring role coupled with the people’s abandonment of their own monitoring role. What also contributed to reinforcing the chaos was the internal split and the absence of any sincere intentions to end it, not to mention the absence of regional circumstances that would allow for this to happen.

This all requires a restructuring of the PLO and a revival of the role of its factions – which have been absent from the political scene— in order to be part of the Palestinian decision-making process. The PLC has not convened and has not been restructured, either through elections or appointments for a long time.

Furthermore, the battle over authority and the overstepping of authorities belonging to the prime minister, who had deputies appointed to him by President Mahmoud Abbas in accordance with the Palestinian Basic Law, was the reason for the crisis. Dr. Hamdallah should have refused this from the start. Still, the reasons for the resignation remained speculation and rumors given that there was no specific source of information in spite of the crucial nature of the information not to mention the citizens' right to know it.

Focus on the internal front

In order for the caretaker government to be able to face the challenges that await it, first and foremost economic, political and social challenges, reformation of the internal front must begin and solutions found to other internal crises such as the education, health and development systems, as much as possible. We must also not use the occupation as an excuse even while recognizing its impact on the development, economic and social processes.

There is no dispute that the hindrances facing any government are the Palestinian split and the Israeli occupation, which continues to confiscate land to expand settlements in Area C. In order to confront this, there must be support for the people on the ground, especially in this region. This would be an investment in the land and a way to preserve a geographic presence.

At a different level, attention must be given to solidifying internal security and stability, which would guarantee social protection,

especially with the structural and societal dysfunction taking place. Economic matters should also be set straight and the mismanagement in national institutions and ministries should be addressed; in addition efforts must be bolstered towards meeting social requirements in addition to reconsidering the entire health and education system.



Vision

The absence of a clear-cut definition of the relationship between the PA and the PLO and the lack of vision and message among the various institutions at the political, administrative and strategic levels, ultimately created a state of chaos. This constituted a major barrier to the process of sustainable development and growth at both the individual and state levels. Furthermore, the absence of candidness and openness between the government and citizens undermined the PA's credibility and generated a liquidy and unclear relationship between them and between the various parties.

Without a doubt, this dysfunction in the political system reflected on the administrative and institutional system. Add to this the lack of vision from previous governments or in national and official institutions and the administrative system; this is over and above the adherence to old modes of operation which hinders creativity and obstructs the implementation of integral visions between the various ministries.

Therefore, real determination for change is imperative for facing crucial decisions in this stage, locally, regionally and internationally towards reform and a change of the status quo.



Recommendations

1. Making an end to the split a priority; stressing on the need to implement the Cairo agreement and the Doha declaration; pressuring towards forming a national unity government in spite of the lack of sincere intentions to achieve reconciliation and the absence of compatible regional circumstances.
2. Directing attention towards realizing internal security and stability, which would guarantee social protection in addition to solving any internal crisis possible such as the education, health and development systems.
3. The restructuring of the PLO is imperative in addition to reviving the role of its factions so they can participate in Palestinian decision making.
4. Giving attention to the development of agriculture, especially in the Jordan Valley and confronting the Israeli encroachment in that area; supporting Palestinian products.
5. Reactivating the PLC in order to revive its monitoring role; restoring the role of civil society institutions towards protecting public freedoms, citizens' rights and social development.

6. Confronting the settlement expansion in Area C and supporting the steadfastness of the people on this land as an investment in these areas in order to maintain geographic presence there.
7. The government must present a draft law for contemporary and progressive education in order to create a real change in the education system.
8. The legitimate Palestinian leadership must set up headquarters in the Gaza Strip so that it can work more efficiently and freely, far from the Israeli occupation; this way they would be the impacting party, not the effected one.
9. Devoting a general policy session in MIFTAH to discussing a strategic vision in the political and administrative system.

Policy Meeting

The role of youth in political parties

June 29, 2013




Laterna

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Laterna

حديقة



Attendance (without distinction)

Sana' Yousef, Mahasen Isam, Dua' Hadidi, Sally Abu Jabal, Latifa Imad, Insaf Mahmoud, Maha Abdullah, Khitam Sameer, Asmahan Khaled, Hala Imad, Hamda Hammad, Sami Amin, Manal Abu Ali, Sara Mohammed, Lamis Al Sardi, Haifa Al Bayumi, Wala' Qawasmi, Inas Abu Jame'

Speakers: Imad Abu Rahmeh, Shamekh Badra

MIFTAH Team: Shadia Al Ghul



Introduction

With the continued deterioration and lack of political and economic stability on the Palestinian scene, the crisis of Palestinian factions has heightened coupled by the lack of participation from Palestinian youth. This is besides the disregard for the role of youths in the resistance, which was prominent during the first and second Intifadas, especially at the grassroots and popular levels all the way up to political decision-making positions.

Based on this, it was imperative to delve into the reasons for this exclusion and setback, especially given the fact that youths were at the forefront of national action at various stages. However, after the achievements of the revolution turned into posts and honorary

positions, the persons assuming these posts held fast to their seats, completely ignoring the up-and-coming youth leaders.



Discussion

Setback in the cultural and political level

Palestinian society, like all Arab societies, is still first and foremost patriarchal and suffers from the problem of absolute power of those in senior positions over the younger generations. This reflects itself on the thinking and ideology of factions and their bylaws, which reinforced this reactionary principle. Their hierarchical authority was based on this patriarchal and centrist logic, which was clear from appointments and the age for candidacy.

In the past few years, youths began a movement in order to regain their true role in the political decision making process. However, this movement was aborted repeatedly, something which generated frustration among youth leaders and kept them from political participation. It also reinforced the gap between leaders and the youth and resulted in their role in society being confined to what it was in the past.

Still, the youth sector must exercise their role and regain their rights with their own hands, appreciating the importance of free will to escape from the feelings of failure and frustration. However, at the same time, there must also be a focus on promoting a culture of

true democracy and political, cultural and progressive awareness so they can be prepared to work and defend their rights in political action, public freedoms and social justice.

The question is where the problem actually lies. Is it in the leaders who have monopolized decision-making positions and distanced themselves from any participation at the grassroots level with their people? Or does it lie with the youth, who abandoned their revolutionary role of society-building only sit back and wait to be handed their right of participation? The answer to this question, based on experience, is that the responsibility lies with both sides. The setback in awareness among youth, their lack of confidence in themselves, fear of taking risks and their truncated role as tools used for factional agendas in addition to their limitations within parties, all contributed to their absence in the work of political factions. Likewise, the setback in ideological awareness of factions and the lack of allocating a part of supportive budgets to the youth sector or making them a priority, only deepened the crisis.

Executive tools among factions

In spite of all the political and social changes taking place in Palestinian society, Palestinian factions have never shifted their tools, programs and mechanisms in a way that is compatible with the requirements of each stage. This further excluded youths and confined political action in the hands of the leaders. This is in spite of the fact that youths were present in the various stages of the Palestinian struggle, whether after the Nakba of 1948 or the

Naksa of 1967 and during the two popular uprisings. However, this presence on the ground or in political factions fell to the side and diminished after national concepts turned into utilitarian ones.

No doubt, the political split also deepened the youth crisis and hindered any possible solutions for it. Furthermore, the failure of the leadership to embrace and direct the youth sector led to their setback and the failure of the national project.

Hence, it is imperative to deal with the changes taking place in society and confront the growing religious and fundamentalist tendencies in it so that we can come out with an enlightened view of these contemporary issues and address the degenerating level of knowledge and political awareness among youth.



Recommendations

1. Youths must take back their rights with their own hands and not ask for them from anyone; they must appreciate the importance of free will to escape the frustration they are in.
2. Youths – both male and female – must exercise their role at the national level, such as reviving the March 15 Palestinian youth movement for change to end the split, for example.
3. Youths need to be included and given space to exercise their natural role as effective and active members of society.

4. Reviving the role of student bodies and the general union of Palestinian students and also holding student council elections in universities and unions.
5. Developing the tools, programs and work mechanisms of factions in a way that will guarantee the participation of youth in political action in tandem with the requirements of the current circumstances.
6. Focusing on the promotion of a culture of true democracy and political and cultural awareness among the youth sector so that they are prepared to work and confront challenges and spread the principles of social justice and respect for liberties.
7. Dedicating a public policy session at MIFTAH to discussing ways and mechanisms to breathe life back into the youth sector.

