

# Memo

**Date: 10 August, 2009**

**Topic: Fateh 6<sup>th</sup> Convention (4-10 August, 2009)**

## **I. Introduction:**

Since the passing away of the late President Yasser Arafat (Abu Ammar), five years ago, Fateh movement became the political party governing the Palestine Authority (PA) with more than 160,000 civil servants. Fateh was defeated in the Palestinian Legislative Elections of January 2006, as well as all its institutions were collapsing, especially after the rise of Hamas and its taking over Gaza in June 2007. Fateh became more than ever labeled with corruption, chaos, confusion, crisis of leadership and crisis of vision.

The Central Committee of Fateh could not reach a decision for convening the 6<sup>th</sup> Fateh Convention throughout two years of consultations and meetings in Ramallah and Amman. The same applied to the Special Committee responsible for the agenda of the Convention, and finally the Revolutionary Council of Fateh that came short of consensus.

## **II. Leadership:**

President Mahmoud Abbas tried through Fateh high-ranking institutions to reach a compromise for convening the 20 years long-awaited convention with no success. However, in recent days we witnessed the President taking full personal responsibility (unlike him), a decisive decision with full confidence, calling for the meeting of the conference in terms of timing (4 August 2009), place (city of Bethlehem), conference membership (2,250 members) and finally its political agenda.

The first obstacle towards that direction came from his old colleague Farouq Al-Qaddoumi, who threw an empty political balloon accusing the President and his former National Security Advisor Mohammed Dahlan of conspiracy and plotting with Israel for the killing of Yasser Arafat.

Another obstacle was the reluctance of the “impotent cardinals” of Fateh to agree on hosting the Convention under the Israeli occupation and their preferable choice to have it in Amman, Cairo or Algeria. However, the Arab capitals were not receptive for the idea and advised the President to go ahead with convening it in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).

The third obstacle was that most of the Fateh members in the Arab countries and in the region were calling for a meeting outside the Territories to avoid Israeli policies, or

to become subject of Israeli “goodwill gesture” by allowing “wanted personalities” to enter the OPT.

President Abbas succeeded to overcome these obstacles, to swallow his personal insult by Qadoumi’s accusation and used all his contacts, regionally and internationally, to facilitate for most Fateh members to come to Bethlehem for the conference. He decided on the timing, place, membership as well as the political program with confidence and persistent manners unprecedented by him. He was not anymore politically sulky or reluctant or dependant on others, but carried on the mission and rose to the challenge as a leader.

Those who followed carefully his opening speech, the tone, the body language and the “teacher instructions” toward the participants – when he asked them to stand, to sit and to clap with cynical remarks, as well as his long detailed stories would come to a conclusion that Abbas had freed himself from Arafat’s ghost and filled the seat of presidency.

### **III. Political Agenda:**

The conference’s political agenda covered the question of negotiations, resistance, Jerusalem, refugees, Gaza – in terms of attendance of members and the fall of Gaza in the hands of Hamas, in addition to Arafat’s death and blaming Israel for his murder. The conference had a series of committees and heated debates but succeeded in finalizing Fateh’s political program based on the President’s opening speech and the five-point paper submitted by Mohammad Al-Aloul.

President Abbas’ speech, which lasted for more than two hours, covered nostalgic stories of his old days with Arafat and Fateh battles within the Arab house, and finally put forward his political pragmatic policy by declaring that the current Palestinian situation is merely autonomy only. He stressed that the Palestinian struggle should focus on transforming autonomy to a Palestinian state. Therefore, the following points were clear in the final statement of the Conference:

- a. Fateh is for a two state solution based on the borders of 1967 with Jerusalem as its capital, with a fair solution to the refugee problem through negotiations, and armed struggle.
- b. If negotiations will not lead to the above, Fateh should struggle towards a bi-national state on the historical land of Palestine from the sea to the river.
- c. If this struggle is not meeting the Palestinian aspirations, Fateh will struggle to declare unilaterally a Palestinian state under occupation on the borders of 1967.
- d. Jerusalem’s political dictionary carries many phrases and interpretations:
  1. East Jerusalem: means the ceasefire line of 1949, which was occupied in 1967 the size of 6.5 km<sup>2</sup> and has been an integral part of the occupied territories of 1967, which was applied to it the UN Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967.

2. Arab Jerusalem: referred to not in terms of Arab cultural heritage and identity but as part of President's Bill Clinton's 2001 parameters determining that "what is Arab should be Palestinian, and what is Jewish should be Israel" with regard to distinguishing between neighborhoods in Jerusalem.
3. Al-Quds Al-Sharif "Holy Jerusalem": referring to the holy places in the Old City of Jerusalem, i.e., limited to 1 km<sup>2</sup> and the religious dimension of the city.

However, the Fateh Convention concluded that Jerusalem should be considered East and West on the basis of the UN Partition Resolution of 1947, identifying Jerusalem as a *Corpus Separatum* with its borders of 1947 taking into consideration that almost no government, authority or international organization have ever recognized or legitimized Israel's sole control of the city nor its claim of Jerusalem as its sovereign independent capital. Israeli policies and practices have rather been condemned, criticized and rejected – in particular its discriminatory control of the city, Judaizing the Old City, as well as its annexation of the East part in 1967 and its subsequent cutting it off from the rest of the OPT.

#### IV. **Fateh Trends:**

During the last five days of the convention several political trends emerged among the more than 2,500 participants and the new chemistry between "inside" and "outside" members, especially those who came from Syria and Lebanon, and those who were denied direct participation from Gaza.

The first noticeable trend was headed by President Abbas followed by personalities such as Tayyeb Abdel-Rahim, Nabil Amr and Saeb Erekat who were calling for continuing negotiations for a two-state solution, implementing the Road Map, Annapolis Agenda and meeting the expectations of President Obama. This group's interpretation for the resistance is non-violence, unarmed national resistance as in the case of the two Palestinian villages Ni'lin and Bi'lin in the West Bank.

The second trend was led by Mohammad Dahlan and supported by the formal Head of Intelligence Department, Tawfik Terawi, Presidential Advisor, Hussein Ash-Sheikh, and others who defended their defeat in Gaza – putting the blame on the "old guards" of the PLO, preparing their agenda for succession in the leadership, and promoting the ideas of confronting Hamas with all tools available.

The third trend is headed by Marwan Barghouti jailed in Israel since April 2002, who represents a vast majority of the over 11,000 Palestinian prisoners and is supported by Jibril Al-Rajoub, Mahmoud Al-Aloul, Azzam Al-Ahmad and many other activists, mainly from among the "young guards," who were putting 14 reservations before endorsing any negotiations with Israel's current government. These included a demand for freezing all settlement construction, lifting the siege, releasing prisoners, recommending different methods of resisting the occupation, and a call for immediate reconciliation with Hamas in spite of the recent episode in Gaza.

The fourth trend is represented mostly by the field activists as well as some technocrats and professionals – headed by Ahmad Qrei'a (Abu Ala) – who are searching for a seat and a role in the Central Committee of Fateh. This group encouraged more than 30 of them to run for the Committee seats and 100 for the Revolutionary Council. However, by the end of the day, someone will find them close to Abbas' trend and living the nostalgia of the old days of Arafat, but with no seats in the Central Committee.

## **V. What Lies Ahead:**

Although it was neither Christmas Eve nor Eastern nor any Islamic holy occasion, the Fateh "carnival" filled all of Bethlehem's hotels, limited the movement of the city's residents, and even caused a water shortage crisis. The inhabitants were certainly relieved when the five days of hijacking their normal daily life was over. However, Palestinian society was very much glued to their seats watching and following up the unfolding of the events in Bethlehem.

Major regional and global actors and observers were very much interested in seeing the 6<sup>th</sup> Fateh Convention held successfully and able to deliver a new Fateh leadership under President Abbas.

Washington was interested in seeing a legitimate, elected Palestinian body headed by Abbas, empowered for negotiations and signing future agreements with Israel. It is worth mentioning that President Obama, once elected, had called President Abbas asking about Fateh 6<sup>th</sup> Conference.

Israel was interested in facilitating the access and travel of most members of the conference in order to deepen the separation between Fateh and Hamas politically, ideologically and geographically between Gaza and the West Bank. At the same time Israel is interested in containing Fateh within the PA political regime, which is a limited autonomy.

Arab capitals who endorsed the 2001 Arab Peace Initiative and were receptive to President's Obama speech in Cairo in April 2009 are very much interested in seeing President Abbas leading the Palestinian chapter in the negotiations and in finally reaching normalization, stability and security in the region.

This was reflected in the lengthy, powerful letter sent by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, calling upon the Convention to unite and end the Palestinian internal impasse.

Egypt sent a high ranking delegation to address the Conference with a similar message.

As for Hamas, there was an obvious division between its political bureau in Damascus (headed by Khaled Masha'al and Musa Abu Marzouk) and those who are governing Gaza on the ground (headed by Mahmoud Al-Zahhar and Mohammed A;-Ja'bari).

Masha'al was about to come for a press conference in support and encouragement for the convening of the Fateh Conference and its success by uniting its forces and reaching consensus on its political program without any interference in its domestic politics. On the contrary, Hamas in Gaza went through "a battle of biting fingers" and refused to allow any Fateh members to travel to Bethlehem and conditioned that with the release of Hamas members in the PA prisons in the West Bank. They also refused any scenarios from Cairo, Damascus or Doha and insisted that Fateh "should pay the bill for its conference". The fact that none of the Fateh members from Gaza managed to travel to the West Bank will have negative impacts on the future of Fateh-Hamas relations.

However, Mahmoud Al-Zahhar on the last day of the Convention left Gaza to Cairo and met with Egyptian officials and Arab League General Secretary Amr Musa, calling for Palestinian unity, resumption of national dialogue and accusing Fateh leaders in Gaza (Zakaria Al-Agha and Ibrahim Abu Naja) of following their personal agenda to boycott the Convention and return to Gaza. Al-Zahhar's mission to Cairo was also to discuss the issue of exchanging prisoners and Gilad Shalit.

## **VI. Elections:**

The new Central Committee elected members can be portrayed in a scheme of three groups:

The first group is made up of President Abbas' men, who were elected and are:

1. Abu Maher Ghneim
2. Salim Al-Za'noun
3. Saeb Erekat
4. Mohammad Shtayyeh
5. Abbas Zaki

The second group is headed by Marwan Barghouthi and includes:

1. Mahmoud Al-Aloul
2. Jibril Rajoub
3. Othman Abu Gharbieh
4. Nabil Shaath
5. Azzam Al-Ahmad
6. Jamal Muheissen
7. Nasser Qidwa

The third group is headed by Mohammed Dahlan and includes:

1. Tawfik Terawi
2. Hussein Al-Sheikh
3. Sultan Abu El-Eneen
4. Mohammed Madani

It is worth mentioning that according to the bylaws, those who lost in the elections (e.g., Tayyeb Abdel Rahim, who was short of three votes, or Ahmad Qrei'a, short of 37 votes) cannot be appointed to the Committee by the President, who is to appoint, with a 2/3<sup>rd</sup> majority of the elected Committee, four additional Central Committee members. These may include members from Gaza as well as female and Christian members.

In a final note it can be said that what worries people most at present is a possible stalemate among the three groups, acting without harmony or consensus on certain proposals – especially concerning the dialogue with Hamas and the formation of a coalition government. This would negatively effect the planned January 2010 Palestinian Legislative Council elections, which, if no reconciliation is reached by then, will be some sort of repetition of the Fateh carnival of Bethlehem and further widen the rift between Fateh and Hamas.

**Dr. Mahdi Abdel Hadi,  
PASSIA, Jerusalem**