



Uniting the People, Restoring the PLO

The Palestinian people share two common goals: to achieve their inalienable rights of liberation, self-determination and return, and to unify their people in a collective national struggle to realise these aims. Sixty four years after the Nakba, the next generation of Palestinians seek a mechanism to overcome the boundaries and borders that divide them in order to begin, once again, a national liberation movement.

This epic struggle for liberty has, in the Palestinian case, a long and rich history of collective commitment, resistance, and sacrifice. The Palestinian people still live divided under various forms of oppressive rule and daily injustices, whether under occupation in Palestine or as refugees living in forced exiled, in precarious and dangerous conditions.

Previous generations of Palestinians overcame these seemingly impossible obstacles through the dynamic force of the Palestinian revolution. When the revolution, with all its forces and factions, patriotic and progressive ideologies, independents and freedom fighters entered into the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1969, the Palestinian struggle was transformed into a national liberation movement. The PLO, set up in 1964 as a national framework to house Palestinian representation, became both popular and sovereign as a result of the support given to it by the Palestinian people, and to the factions, unions, and forces within it. The PLO's broad umbrella structure enabled it to represent Palestinians from across the political spectrum as well as across the vast geographic arena where the Palestinian people live, from the Gulf to Latin America.

Palestinians today are driven by the same immediate and urgent requirement to achieve national unity and representation. What is being demanded today is an overarching and mobilising structure that can advance national goals and represent the will, and the wishes, of the entire Palestinian people wherever they live.

The aim of infusing the PLO – recognised by the world since 1974 as the sole legitimate representative of the entire Palestinian people – with the spirit, the energies, and the talents of its people, so that all Palestinians can contribute equally to the whole, has now become the national consensus across the political and geographic spectrum. The call for direct elections to the Palestine National Council (PNC), the PLO's parliament and its supreme legislative body, is a commonly agreed principle and the direct result of more than a decade of concerted campaigning, organising, and mobilising by Palestinian right of return groups, associations, and activists both inside and outside Palestine.

Popular Mobilisation

Through calls and petitions, declarations, social media networks, popular rallies and educational events, Palestinians of every generation have demanded the democratic revival of the Palestinian national movement. This popular call has been reflected in official and party responses, who have affirmed the need for a democratically elected PNC: in the 2006 Prisoners' Document, the 2011 and 2012 Cairo declarations of the Higher National Reconciliation Committee, which includes all political parties, and in declarations by the PLO leadership in 2011 and 2012. The pressing need for national unity, through the route of PNC elections and a democratically revived PLO, now constitutes the national consensus amongst Palestinian factions and parties as well as Palestinian civil society inside historic Palestine and outside of it.

How can it be done?

It is the responsibility of the PLO to call for elections, and it is the PLO's role to convene them through the establishment of an electoral Commission at the time of elections. But the main role in this national work belongs to the Palestinian people themselves, as they have the ability to carry out their own political enfranchisement, and the right to do so.

Registering to vote is the first step in holding national elections, and until registration is accomplished, elections cannot take place. Without voter registration, the dream of a collective national movement, made up of all our people wherever they live and whatever their political affiliation, will remain a dream.

The quest for a mechanism that can connect our people in one body, as one people, equal in rights and voice, has found its answer in a simple voter registration. Voter registration can be carried out on a civic level, and registration in this way takes place in many countries across the world.

A voter registration system that can meet the challenging political conditions Palestinians live must be inclusive, simple, efficient, and secure. In response to these requirements, a safe internet-based voter registration system, designed by world-renowned experts in internet security protocols has been built by a team of Palestinian engineers, and is now ready for use. Registration opens in the spring of 2013, when Palestinian associations and volunteers - with facilitation from their Embassies where needed - can register all Palestinians of voting age in their area using a simple online form.*

More information about how the registration works and a FAQ can be found on the website of the Facilitation Office of the PNC registration drive:

www.PalestiniansRegister.org

What are the next steps?

The decline of Palestinian national institutions over the last decades has meant that for many Palestinians, especially the younger generation, the functioning of the PLO and its institutions remain a mystery. Collective discussions and decisions are needed about how these institutions should be run and how they can be reformed to truly embody the popular will of all Palestinians.

Palestinian associations, groups, and activists around the world are campaigning to raise awareness about the PNC, and assert the popular demand for PNC elections. The fundamental need for a unified representation is felt by all our people and it is their love for Palestine, and their steadfast desire for liberation and return, that advances our struggle and ensures its victory.

To participate in this collective work, go to the campaign website:

www.PNCRegCampaign.org

* Excluding the West Bank and Gaza where Palestinians already register to vote for the PNC through the Palestinian Legislative Council, itself a part of the Palestinian National Council.