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Palestinian unity, statehood and the importance of BDS

Providing a Voice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The two major Palestinian political parties - Fatah and Hamas – have announced that they will form a unified Palestinian government with elections within a year.

The surprise reconciliation comes in the wake of the Palestinian Authority's (PA) determination to press for full United Nations membership of a State of Palestine this September.

Israel's reaction, of course, has been predictable, with Prime Minister Netanyahu warning Abbas that this could spell the end of what many have long considered a defunct peace process. In response to Netanyahu's demand that the PA "choose between peace with Israel or peace with Hamas", a top Abbas aide, Nabil Abu Rdaineh said, "Netanyahu must choose between peace and settlements."

The news has been greeted with caution by Palestinian advocates all too aware of the continuing erosion of their people's rights after the heady days of Oslo. Twenty years of negotiations since that time has seen Israel pursuing its colonisation enterprise through an increase in illegal settlement building, intensifying its occupation, further entrenching discrimination against Palestinian citizens in Israel and refusing to consider the inalienable rights of 4.5 million Palestinian refugees.

"While the unity agreement is welcome and long overdue," said Australians for Palestine public advocate Samah Sabawi, "we must not let enthusiasm for peace and statehood override justice for all Palestinians."

Ms Sabawi pointed out that "a UN-recognised Palestinian state even with a unified government will not change the realities on the ground as long as Israel is allowed to continue its aggressive policies towards the Palestinians and ignore those whose homes and properties it usurped in 1948 and since then. Palestinians need both reconciliation and peace: the latter depends now on Israel and the US."

"In the meantime," Ms Sabawi continued, "Palestinians everywhere need to organise and work for their rights within the parameters of international law and legal conventions if they don't want to see those rights signed away permanently after more than six decades of struggle and sacrifice."

Australians for Palestine thus remains committed to Palestinian civil society's global call for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Apartheid Israel.

"BDS is a legitimate and nonviolent tactic," emphasised Ms Sabawi "that should not be subjected to the vitriolic attacks and scaremongering we have seen recently in Australia against institutions wishing to adopt a principled stance to hold Israel to account for its violations. Nor should it be seen as superfluous to this latest unity agreement between Fatah and Hamas and the push for self-determination, but rather as strengthening both to ensure the rights of Palestinians are not abandoned by the international community."

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