

Palestinians say U.S. 'Deal of Century' seeks to end their cause



Ramallah, June 3 (RHC)-- The United States blueprint to end the conflict between Israel and Palestine is seen by Palestinians, and by some Arab officials and politicians, as a plan to finish off the Palestinian cause.

The initiative, driven by Jared Kushner, Donald Trump's son-in-law, and White House adviser, was billed by the U.S. president as the "Deal of the Century." After several postponements, Washington plans a first formal outing of the economic components of the plan at a "Peace for Prosperity" workshop in June in Bahrain.

The plan faces possible delays due to political upheaval in Israel, where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is facing another election after failing to form a government. The draft outlined a plan for a two-state solution which includes the creation of "New Palestine." This new Palestine will not be allowed to have an army, share Jerusalem as the capital of both countries and all the illegal settlements in West Bank will be part of Israel.

Palestinians would be left with a smaller share of the West Bank and some areas on the outskirts of Jerusalem and no control over their borders. Western and Arab sources confirmed the outline of the plan. "What we're seeing from the plan is that it will blow up the Palestinians," one Palestinian official told Reuters. "The plan doesn't give justice to the Palestinians."

"The Palestinian cause is being liquidated -- no Jerusalem (as capital), no right of return for refugees, no sovereign state. That is why this American project is dangerous," one senior Palestinian leader said.

The deal as outlined so far has been dismissed by President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Abbas has boycotted political dealings with the Trump administration for 18 months. This followed Trump's decisions in 2017 to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move the U.S. embassy there from Tel Aviv.

Since then, the Trump administration has curtailed aid to the Palestinian Authority, shuttered the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) delegation in Washington and cut off finance to UNRWA, the U.N. agency supporting Palestinian refugees. Washington meanwhile endorsed Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

"In practice, they have already started implementing 'the deal of the century'," the senior Palestinian leader said, "on the ground, step by step." The deal has also been rejected by the Islamic Resistance Movement, known as Hamas. The PLO has dismissed the Kushner effort as an attempt to bribe Palestinians into accepting Israeli occupation of the West Bank, a prelude to Israel annexing about half their territory and leaving them with scattered cantons.

Hanan Ashrawi, a PLO leader, tweeted that the Kushner plan and the Bahrain conference were just "a handout to make our captivity palatable".

Palestinian businessmen have opposed the Bahrain gathering despite a plea by Washington to attend, saying their political demands must be addressed in any peace plan.

Qatar said economic prosperity cannot be achieved without political solutions acceptable to Palestinians. Oman said anything that precludes the establishment of a Palestinian state will not be acceptable.

Robert Satloff, executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, an influential think-tank, and supporter of Israel, wrote after interviewing Kushner this month that the deal is a political disaster that should be abandoned.

He said positive economic proposals could be lost by the attempt to skirt around Palestinian rights. "The only way to protect the long-term viability of the plan's best aspects is to kill it," he said.

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