

New Palestinian Unity Government Sworn In



Ramallah, June 2 (RHC)-- After seven years of a bitter and at times lethal rivalry between the two main Palestinian factions, Fatah and Hamas, a historic Palestinian unity government has been sworn in, ending years of division.

The ministers and prime minister of the new Palestinian Unity Government were sworn in Monday, in front of Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

Monday's signing ceremony, which analysts say will likely complicate relations with the Palestinian Authority's international aid donors in Europe and the US and increase tensions with Israel, was broadcast live in both Gaza and the West Bank.

The US indicated over the weekend that it would wait to see the policies of the new unity government before deciding whether to recognize it, because of Hamas's involvement.

Before the ceremony the U.S. secretary of state, John Kerry, telephoned the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, to express "concern about Hamas's role in any such government," the state department spokeswoman, Jen Psaki, told reporters.

Israel has threatened punitive sanctions against any government backed by Hamas.

Israel's security cabinet met overnight to discuss the new government, reconfirming an April decision to halt negotiations with any government backed by Hamas, newspapers reported on Monday.

In a sign of the potential difficulties ahead, Israel refused three Gaza-based ministers permission to travel to the West Bank for the swearing-in.

Abbas, who heads the mainstream Fatah movement, has said the 17-member cabinet would comprise unaffiliated ministers and would strive to pursue peace, despite Hamas's refusal to accept co-existence with Israel.

"Today, and after announcing the government of national unity, we declare the end of division that caused catastrophic harm to our cause," Abbas said.

The announcement of the new government, ending a long and debilitating political and territorial division in Palestinian affairs, opens the way for long-delayed Palestinian elections, slated for 2015.

The new government will reunite Gaza and the West Bank under a single political authority for the first time since 2007, when Hamas – which won Palestinian legislative elections in 2006 – asserted control over the Gaza Strip, forcing out Fatah.

Abbas has already pledged that the new administration will abide by the principles laid down by the Middle East peace quartet in that it will recognize Israel, reject violence and abide by all existing agreements.

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