

Hamas and Fatah, along with 12 other Palestinian factions, sign unity agreement in Beijing aimed at Gaza governance

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Beijing, July 23 (RHC)-- Palestinian factions have signed a "national unity" agreement aimed at maintaining Palestinian control over Gaza once Israel's war on the enclave concludes. The deal, finalized on Tuesday in China after three days of intensive talks, lays the groundwork for an "interim national reconciliation government" to rule post-war Gaza, said Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. The agreement was signed by long-term rivals Hamas and Fatah, as well as 12 other Palestinian groups.

"Today we sign an agreement for national unity and we say that the path to completing this journey is national unity," said senior Hamas official Mousa Abu Marzouk at a news conference in Beijing.

Blocking Israeli control of Gaza

Mustapha Barghouti, secretary-general of the Palestinian National Initiative, one of the 14 factions to sign the accord, told Al Jazeera the agreement goes "much further" than any other reached in recent years.

He said its four main elements are the establishment of an interim national unity government, the formation of unified Palestinian leadership ahead of future elections, the free election of a new Palestinian National Council, and a general declaration of unity in the face of ongoing Israeli attacks.

The move towards a unity government is especially important, he said, because it "blocks Israeli efforts to create some sort of collaborative structure against Palestinian interests".

Reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah would be a key turning point in internal Palestinian relations. The two main Palestinian political parties in the Palestinian territories have been bitter rivals since conflict arose in 2006, after which Hamas seized control of Gaza.

"We're at a historic junction," Abu Marzouk said, according to CNN. "Our people are rising up in their efforts to struggle."

Hamas, which led the October 7 attack on Israel, advocates for armed resistance against Israel's occupation. Fatah controls the Palestinian Authority, which has partial administrative control of the occupied West Bank. It favors peaceful negotiations in pursuit of a Palestinian state.

Several past reconciliation bids between the two factions have failed. However, calls have grown for them to come together as the war has dragged on and Israel and its allies, including the United States, have discussed who could govern the enclave after the fighting ends.

Barghouti said the war in Gaza was the "main factor" motivating the Palestinian sides to set aside their differences. "There is no other way now but for Palestinians to be unified and struggle together against this terrible injustice," he said.

"The most important thing now is to not only sign the agreement, but to implement it."

Watching from afar

Israel vehemently opposes any Hamas role in governing Gaza, and has suggested in the face of opposition even from Washington that it intends to maintain control of the enclave.

Tel Aviv was, therefore, quick to slam the announced deal.

Targeting Fatah chief and Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas for cooperating with Hamas, Minister of Foreign Affairs Israel Katz reasserted his government's stance that no one but Israel will control Gaza following the end of hostilities.

"Instead of rejecting terrorism, Mahmoud Abbas embraces the murderers and rapists of Hamas, revealing his true face," Katz claimed on X. "In reality, this won't happen because Hamas's rule will be crushed,

and Abbas will be watching Gaza from afar. Israel's security will remain solely in Israel's hands."

Internal matter

China, which has sought to play a mediating role in the conflict, previously hosted Fatah and Hamas in April. During those talks, the pair "expressed their political will to achieve reconciliation through dialogue and consultation" and made progress on "many specific issues", Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Lin Jian said at the time.

The latest round of talks featured Hamas's political leader Ismail Haniyeh and Fatah's deputy head Mahmoud al-Aloul.

Following the signing of what has been referred to as the "Beijing Declaration", China's Wang said: "Reconciliation is an internal matter for the Palestinian factions, but at the same time, it cannot be achieved without the support of the international community."

China has historically been sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and supportive of a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Chinese President Xi Jinping has called for an "international peace conference" to end the war.

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