

Press Conference

On August 8th, Dr. George Habash, General Secretary of the PFLP, held a press conference in Damascus. The following is his response to journalists' questions concerning the Jordanian regime's measures.

What is the PFLP's stand towards the latest Jordanian measures and towards a Palestinian government-in-exile?

These measures are welcome; in fact, we consider them as a positive result of the uprising and a victory. The uprising has cancelled the Jordanian option, but we should ask ourselves: What is the aim of the Jordanian regime in taking such measures? Is the regime's aim really an affirmation of the decisive victory which the uprising has achieved?

We must answer this question in the light of our historical experience with the Jordanian regime and its policies against the Palestinian cause, revolution and the PLO - the policies of annexation and the attempts to cancel the Palestinian role. In this light, we think that the Jordanian regime's aim with these measures is to cast new responsibilities on the PLO, so that it will sink under their weight. Accordingly, the PLO will be forced to return to the regime in order to seek a form of partnership with it in all things related to the Palestinian question.

We therefore demand that the PLO accept this challenge and take all the steps needed to respond to it, on the basis of the uprising's goal of freedom, independence and an independent Palestinian state.

We believe that the PLO can face the challenge, based on the potentials of the Palestinian masses in the homeland, the PLO's own capacity including its material resources, and support from the PLO's Arab and international allies, and also the UN institutions. Based on this, the PLO can say to the Jordanian regime: These measures are welcome and we are capable of responding to all the demands of this step.

Concerning a Palestinian national government, undoubtedly you remember the PFLP's stand when this question was raised in the first month of the uprising. We said then that we are not thinking of a government-in-exile, because we are not at the gates of victory, but at the gates of a new stage which requires hard and long struggle to change the balance of forces in a way which will facilitate a Palestinian state. We therefore rejected the establishment of a Palestinian government. However, the PFLP takes changes into consideration.

We cannot consider the establishment of a Palestinian government on the basis that we are at the gates of victory, because we still need a long stage to achieve victory. However, the Jordanian measures dissolved all legal and administrative relations with the Palestinian West Bank. Therefore, some Israeli circles demanded annexation of the Palestinian territories, and subjugating them to Israeli law, due to the legal vacuum which resulted from the latest step of the Jordanian regime.

What laws now govern our people's life in the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza Strip?

There is a new basis for thinking of a Palestinian government; it doesn't mean that we are at the gates of victory, but it is necessary to find laws to govern our people's life in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the light of this, in the last meeting of the Central Council held in Baghdad, the PLO decided to form a political-legal committee to answer the question: Who will fill the vacuum and how? A meeting of the PLO's leaders will be held at the end of this month to respond to this question. The PFLP will be ready to deal with all possibilities. Our interest is to succeed in responding to the present challenge. If we find that forming a Palestinian government is necessary to succeed in facing the challenge, we will not hesitate.

Of course, forming a government-in-exile is not the sole response to the measures of the Jordanian regime. Shortly, in the next meeting of the Palestinian leaders, we will discuss the subject of the presence of UN troops for an interim period, as a stage of transition which would enable us to convene an international conference in order to facilitate the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. This has been adopted a few months ago by the PLO's institutions. Our Arab and internationalist friends had questioned us about how we think to implement our concept of establishing a Palestinian state, and about the uprising's ability to achieve the slogan of freedom and independence. Our response was the following: The uprising continues in order to defeat the occupation; meanwhile, we demand the presence of UN troops; then, there will be a UN presence connected with the subject of an international conference, in which we see the mechanism to achieve the interim aim of the PLO.

The PFLP's response to this question is not enough. The response of the Palestinian leadership is required. We will be intent, in the next meeting, to attain a united response from the PLO's bodies concerning this subject. A Palestinian national government is not the sole possibility; there are others as well. I want to affirm that taking such a step requires a discussion with the Arab and internationalist forces who are supporting the Palestinians' national rights.

In the case of establishing a Palestinian national government-in-exile, will it take the place of the PLO?

The PLO will remain existent with its covenant and interim program. The PLO is the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. If there is a government, it will be one of the PLO's instruments.

What reaction do you expect from the Arab and non-aligned states to the establishment of a Palestinian government-in-exile?

Concerning the first part of the question, and based on the