

Interview with Dr. George Habash

At the conclusion of the PNC session, *Democratic Palestine* interviewed comrade George Habash, General Secretary of the PFLP, in Algeria.

How do you evaluate the results of the 19th session of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) and its resolutions?

The PNC discussed four basic issues: the declaration of independence, the formation of a provisional government, the uprising and the political report. As for the independence declaration, we consider this a big victory for the Palestinian people. As you know, this is a result of the intifada without which no one would have thought of declaring independence and it would not have been possible to do so. The intifada forced the Jordanian regime to sever the legal and administrative ties between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the West Bank. In this light, we had to answer the questions: To whom does this land belong? What is the future of this land? The answer was that on this land we establish a Palestinian state, on the way to fulfilling the historical rights of the Palestinian people.

Therefore, we evaluate this declaration positively, especially since it was based on the natural and historical rights of the Palestinian people. It has the positive political result of eliminating the Jordanian option. There are three proposed solutions to the Palestinian question: Camp David, the Jordanian option and national independence. The declaration of independence narrowed down these options to the only option through which the solution to the Palestine question can be materialized. We hope that this declaration will play an important role in our political and diplomatic struggle.

The second issue was the formation of a provisional government, including the basis on which such a government should be erected. The timing was left open until the circumstances are appropriate, and to give ourselves enough time to clarify the relationship between the PLO and this government, and other details. We are convinced that the declaration of a state necessitates a government. The PNC gave the Executive Committee of the PLO the authority to form this government. However we hope that there will be agreement in the Palestinian arena on the details of the formation of this government, so that it does not nullify or replace the PLO. Instead, it should be the political and diplomatic apparatus of the PLO.

The third issue is the resolutions for supporting, continuing, escalating and spreading the intifada and all of its aspects. These resolutions were very, very good, provided they are implemented. It is my duty to point out the difference between passing resolutions and implementing them. However, passing these resolutions gives us the opportunity to struggle within the framework of the PLO for their implementation.

The fourth issue is the political report. This is where we feel that there was a basic discrepancy. We in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine opposed a major point in the report which makes specific reference to UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, plus the (Palestinian) right of self-determination, as a basis for a peaceful solution. During the discussion, we explained our position and the reasons for our opposition. I am sorry to say that due to the composition of the

PNC, this resolution was passed. This poses the question of whether or not the PNC resolutions are consistent with Palestinian public opinion. I don't believe that the majority of the Palestinian people accept 242 and 338 as a basis for a peace conference, yet the PLO's highest body of authority (the PNC) passed this resolution. This indicates a contradiction in the composition of the PNC, which is not based on proportional representation of the political forces in reality.

In any case, our general evaluation of the 19th session of the PNC is positive. I realize the danger of resolution 242. However, the declaration of an independent Palestinian state outweighs the negative results of accepting resolutions 242 and 338.

The lesson to be drawn from this session is the need for rectifying the organizational relations in the PLO institutions. There is talk of the ideal Palestinian democracy. If we mean democracy as freedom of expression within the framework of these institutions, then it is correct. However, we realize that democracy is more than freedom of expression. We should evaluate our institutions, the way in which they function, and the basis on which they are built. It is not possible to have genuine democracy without giving proportional representation to every political trend in the Palestinian arena. I mentioned that the majority of the Palestinian people reject 242 as a basis for a settlement. If we constitute a minority in the PNC, we know without a shadow of a doubt, that our views enjoy majority support from the Palestinian public opinion. If there are some who disagree, then let's agree on a method of gauging the true size of every political trend.

You have always been known for consistently demanding democratic reforms in the PLO. What are the possibilities of achieving this during the uprising, and can this be achieved with the present composition of the PLO institutions?

We presented a program for democratic reform in 1983, in a booklet entitled «The Program of Unity and Reform». We spoke of it on many occasions within PLO institutions and in public. Now the intifada necessitates the speeding up of the process of reform. Our sincerity to the intifada demands the same level of diligence from us as our masses are showing in their determination to achieve freedom and independence. Therefore, it is necessary to rectify the internal situation of the PLO so that it will become a real tool for the liberation of Palestine. At the same time, the intifada forces us to limit our struggle within the PLO's institutions, so that this reform can take place without the danger of a split or serious problems. It is a very delicate balance: on one hand, the necessity of reform; and on the other, this process of reform taking place within the framework of the unity of the PLO.

It is very difficult to institute reforms during the present situation. It is our duty to struggle in a very serious manner, so that the composition of the next PNC is based on proportional representation. This is the start of the process of reform which should include many facets.