

# A PALESTINIAN STATE PROCLAIMED

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THE ALGIERS SESSION of the Palestine National Council held in November 1988 was the 19th in the history of the PLO<sup>1</sup>. Four of its sessions are of particular importance, each having marked a qualitatively new stage in the development of the Liberation Organisation.

At the 5th session (February 1969) new detachments of the Palestinian Resistance joined the PLO, turning it from the semi-official entity created by the 1st conference of Arab leaders in Alexandria into a broad patriotic front.

The 12th session of the PNC (June 1974), raising the question of national Palestinian sovereignty over the territories freed from Israeli occupation, initiated a realistic course for the PLO that ensured all its subsequent political victories.

The 18th session (April 1987)<sup>2</sup>, which has become known as the forum of the restoration of national unity, made PLO policy more realistic and worked out the formula for an international Mideast conference.

Finally, the "session of the *intifada*"<sup>3</sup>, which crowned all the previous moments of positive value in the movement, for the first time in the Palestinian Resistance's history brought the PLO's stand into line with international law, something that had earlier been present only in the PCP's views. International law and legality became a weapon of our people in their struggle for liberation and national independence. This session itself was an *intifada* in the political thinking of the Palestinians.

The forum took place against a backdrop of significant events, the most important of which was the almost year-old popular uprising in the occupied territories. The international climate had also had its impact, characterised as it was by reduced tensions in the world, the onward march of detente, and the first practical steps toward nuclear disarmament and

a peaceful resolution of regional conflicts. The Jordanian leadership's decision to sever administrative links with the occupied Palestinian territories has left its own special mark on the situation<sup>4</sup>.

The popular uprising, which flared up in December 1987, is the result of over 20 years of struggle by our people against the Israeli occupation. As an enduring revolt that encompasses broad social sections, is democratic and varies in mass-organisational forms, it has aroused the world sympathy and a powerful wave of solidarity with the Palestinians.

It is essential that this solidarity and sympathy should evolve into concrete, effective political demands for a full-fledged international conference on an all-embracing solution to the Middle East crisis, which centres on the Palestinian issue. As never before, the PLO has been required to clearly define its aims in line with the norms of international law and the well-known UN resolutions.

Our problem appears linked, perhaps more than any other regional conflict, to the global situation, the impetus of which is to strive for a peaceful settlement of local conflicts through a balancing of interests. Most of the world's disputes seem to be moving in this direction. The Palestinian question cannot strike a discordant note or be an exception to this general trend.

On the other hand, the Jordanian decisions, arguably a concession to pressure from the population of the occupied territories demanding independence, should be regarded as a new challenge to the Palestinian people and their leadership. It was now not just Jordan's administrative or financial commitments that were involved. The idea was to show the PLO's inability to assume full responsibility based on international law, and to question its powers. In other words, the Jordanian leadership did not abandon the hope of regaining its role as the Palestinians' representative in negotiations on a settlement.

Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 are the basis for a Mideast conference. However, some important aspects are absent from the UN recommendations although they are by no means directed against our national interests. In particular, these documents fail to mention the right of the Palestinian people to national self-determination. That was why PNC sessions (especially since the 12th in 1974) had not recognised these resolutions: the Palestinians figured in them only as refugees.

These decisions were left hanging until the appropriate changes took place in the regional balance of forces and pressure increased from international public opinion. The preceding period offered only two opportunities for their implementation—the first

<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1984.—Ed.

<sup>2</sup> See Mahmoud Shukeir, "Palestinians Serrying Ranks", *WMR*, No. 10, 1987.—Ed.

<sup>3</sup> *Intifada* means "uprising". See Naim Ashhab, "Uprising in the Occupied Territories", and "Stones Versus Bullets"; Yasser Arafat, "Victory Will Be Ours", *WMR*, Nos. 2, 7 and 10, 1988.—Ed.

<sup>4</sup> The decision was announced on June 31, 1988. See Salem Said, "What Is Behind the Royal Decision?", *WMR*, No. 11, 1988.—Ed.

was in 1969 when Egypt started a "war of attrition" and the Israelis together with the Americans felt its burden and possible consequences. But the initiative of William Rogers, the then US Secretary of State, neutralised the situation. The *second* came after the October war of 1973, yet its potential results were also nullified by the conclusion of the two agreements on troop disengagement in Sinai, whose architects were US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, which ultimately led to Camp David.

Today, with the *intifada* and its international repercussions, the advance of detente and other factors, which I have mentioned above, new circumstances have developed which permit the implementation of Resolutions 242 and 338 by means of an international conference. The conditions for it now exist. The PLO faced the need to recognise these resolutions provided there was a guaranteed right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, the liberation of their lands—the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Arab part of Jerusalem—and the creation of an independent Palestinian state. The "intifada session" defined this position.

The PNC political statement declared: "The Palestine National Council, responsible for our people and their rights, proceeding from its desire for peace, and the striving of mankind to further decrease international tension, to promote nuclear disarmament, and to solve regional conflicts by peaceful means, by having proclaimed an independent state on November 15, 1988, reaffirms its adherence to an all-embracing political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the heart of which is the Palestinian problem, within the framework of the United Nations Charter, and on the basis of the Security Council's latest Resolutions 605, 607 and 608 and the decisions of Arab summit conferences, which envisage the right of the Palestinian people to their return, self-determination, the creation of an independent national state on their soil, and the safeguarding of security and peace for all states in the region."

The Palestine National Council regards the convocation of a special international Middle East conference under UN auspices as the means of achieving these aims. It could be attended by the permanent Security Council members and all the parties to the conflict, including—on equal terms—the PLO as the sole lawful representative of the Palestinian people. Such a conference, acting on the basis of the Security Council's resolutions, would guarantee the legitimate national rights of the Palestinians—above all, to self-determination—in accordance with UN principles of the inadmissibility of acquiring foreign territories by force or through military invasion.

The second point of the statement highlights the need for Israel to withdraw from all the Palestinian lands occupied in 1967: Eastern Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Although the decision of

the UN General Assembly<sup>5</sup> on which the proclamation of an independent Palestinian state is based allotted it a much larger territory, the PNC has consented to the establishment of a state within the lands occupied in 1967. Thus, both the realities that have since developed and the balance of interests necessary for the settlement of regional conflicts have been taken into account. As for the problem of refugees, the PNC has declared that it should be solved with due consideration for UN resolutions, which have annually, from 1949 on, reaffirmed the Palestinians' right to return or to compensation (by choice).

To arrive at peace and security in our region, which has for over 4 decades now been living under a constant threat of war, is possible only *by way of an all-embracing political settlement based on mutual consent*. A genuine peace cannot be only for one side, at the expense of others' interests.

Israeli leaders, who have long practised a policy of state terrorism, have never tired of calling the PLO a terrorist organisation. The PNC session in its political statement has rejected and condemned terrorism. This document underscores that the PNC again declares its adherence to the UN resolutions that support peoples' right to resist foreign occupation, colonialism, racial discrimination, and to fight for independence; it reaffirms its renunciation of terror in all its manifestations, including state terrorism...

In this connection the National Council has reaffirmed the special character of relations between the fraternal peoples of Palestine and Jordan, which will be built on the principles of confederation, free choice, and the strengthening of established historical ties and vital interests.

The *proclamation of a Palestinian state* was the keynote of the "intifada session." In spite of the fact that this decision looks premature because it has been adopted before the liberation of the occupied territories, it shows that our people have but one understanding of the idea of national independence and state sovereignty. The decision becomes irrevocable in the light of the USA and Israel's attempts, aided by Arab reactionaries, to deny the Palestinians' right to self-determination or to interpret this concept in their own way.

The session has emphasised that, despite the oppression of the Palestinian people, the occupation of their land, and the usurpation of their right to self-determination, the UN General Assembly's resolution on the division of Palestine into two states (Arab and Jewish) remains a juridical instrument for ensuring the Palestinians' sovereignty and national independence.

For the first time in our liberation movement's history, this UN decision has been unanimously approved by all members of the National Council (for

<sup>5</sup> Resolution 181 of November 29, 1947.

40 years, only the Palestinian Communists had adhered to this stand). In other words, as a result of the session's work international law has been adopted by our people, and its leadership, represented by the PLO, and has reinforced the national liberation struggle. It is only natural that the world community has welcomed the proclamation of a Palestinian state, as evidenced by its wide international recognition.

The historic declaration of independence announces that the new state belongs to *all the Palestinians*, wherever they may be. It is a bulwark of their national and cultural identity, guaranteeing equal rights for all sons and daughters of the Palestinian people; freedom of opinions and convictions, of religion and of political views; the human dignity of everyone in a parliamentary democracy; the freedom to establish parties; and social justice. Any discrimination based on social origin, religion, race or sex is rejected on a constitutional basis, which recognises the sovereignty of law and judicial procedure, the national cultural heritage, and the peaceful coexistence of different religions.

We regard the creation of such a state as a weighty contribution to the advancement of the civilisation of the region's peoples. Unlike despotic regimes and unlike neighbouring Israel, where discrimination prevails, this state gives all Palestinians an opportunity to acquire a home and a national identity.

The decisions of the 19th session of the PNC are based on the following principles:

- no repetition of the national tragedy of 1948;
- sensitive treatment of the uprising in the occupied territories;
- respect for the advice of friends.

In the course of serious discussions on these principles, the enemies' hopes of splitting the national unity achieved in April 1987, and provoking new conflicts within the ranks of the Palestinian Resistance had been dashed. It should be noted that during the

session Jordan's royal press and the press of some other Arab regimes took up nihilistic, extremist positions, claiming that our forum would pass in an atmosphere of "passivity and capitulationism". But the development of democratisation in the ranks of the PLO had made it possible to refute these negative forecasts and adopt historic decisions. The parties and organisations represented in the PLO, and those that were independent, acted with responsibility, guided by the conviction that the internal differences needed to be overcome within the framework of preserving national unity.

The session has strengthened and developed the sovereign character of the Palestinian solution. Its results, prompted by the requirements of this stage of the liberation struggle, are distinguished by a spirit of responsibility for the fate of the nation, and help to strengthen the unity of all the Palestinians and to harmonise relations between the people and the PLO.

*The forum of the Palestine National Council* has marked a qualitative shift in Palestinian political thinking, and raised it to a higher level commensurate with the intensity of the mass uprising in the occupied territories. It has placed before the people realistic aims, helped to develop mass enthusiasm and to mobilise the people, and given our friends new stimuli and arguments for the support of the national cause and the establishment of a fair and lasting peace in the region. At the same time it has disarmed the enemies of the Palestinian people.

The PNC's decisions have been adopted during an unprecedented peace offensive and a warming of the international climate, which have alarmed the ruling circles of Israel and its Washington sponsors. Proof of this is the refusal by the State Department to issue an entry visa to Yasser Arafat so that he could speak at the UN General Assembly and acquaint the world community with the decisions of the "intifada session", which, as never before, bring our just cause nearer to victory.