

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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To: H
Subject: Fw: (Reuters) Egypt delays signing of Palestinian unity pact

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Cc: SWO; Bitter, Rena; Sullivan, Stephanie S; SES-O_Shift-II
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Subject: (Reuters) Egypt delays signing of Palestinian unity pact

Colleagues: Passing on this news item for your situational awareness.

Phillip T. Slattery
Senior Watch Officer

From: Snipes, Christopher K
Sent: Friday, October 16, 2009 8:16 AM
To: Slattery, Phillip T
Subject: Egypt delays signing of Palestinian unity pact

By Nidal al-Mughrabi

GAZA, Oct 16 (Reuters) - Egypt has delayed the signing of a deal to heal the rift between President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah movement and the rival Palestinian Islamist group Hamas because of "new complications", an Egyptian official said on Friday.

He cited the growing tension between Fatah and Hamas over the handling by Abbas of a U.N. report criticising the Israeli military offensive into Gaza in December and January.

Cairo had slated a signing ceremony for October 25. The agreement would resolve nothing immediately but would outline steps to restore Palestinian unity. Hamas runs the Gaza Strip and Fatah dominates in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

The official told Reuters no new date was set for signing.

"Egypt saw it was better to delay until there is a suitable atmosphere," he said.

Abbas admits his government erred in approving a U.N. decision in Geneva two weeks ago to delay action on the so-called Goldstone report, which is particularly critical of Israel for alleged war crimes during the Gaza offensive.

He has reversed course and the issue was being reconsidered on Friday at a special session of the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva, which Abbas requested.

"We are not going to let things collapse," said another Egyptian official of his country's lengthy mediation between the Palestinian factions which began over a year ago.

"We will wait until the dust settles and activate efforts again and I hope that will be very soon."

The deal would postpone Palestinian presidential and parliamentary elections until June 28, 2010.

Fatah has signed it and this week Abbas announced that if Hamas did not sign he would go ahead with elections in January as called for by the constitution.

It is unclear how Fatah would be able to hold a full election since Hamas has vowed to block voting in Gaza if the ballot was scheduled without its agreement.

Senior Fatah leader Azzam Al-Ahmed, who carried the signed document to Cairo, said the group would not seek to hold elections in the West Bank alone.

He said failure to reach an agreement could delay the vote "indefinitely", which would prolong the divisions and weaken Abbas's peace approach.

Hamas officials said they had asked Cairo for another three days to give a final response.

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Regards,

Chris Snipes

Watch Officer

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