

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, November 24, 2011 10:53 PM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Palestinians talk unity, no sign of progress (Reuters)

From: OpsNewsTicker
Sent: Thursday, November 24, 2011 02:04 PM
To: NEWS-NEA; NEWS-Mahogany
Cc: SES-O
Subject: Palestinians talk unity, no sign of progress (Reuters)

CAIRO, Nov 24 (Reuters) - Leaders of Fatah and Hamas met for the first time in six months and hailed progress toward ending a rift that has led to separate governments in the West Bank and Gaza, but there was no sign of a breakthrough.

Abbas, in comments carried by the Palestinian news agency Wafa, said after the Thursday talks there were "no differences between us now". Meshaal, who lives in exile in Damascus, said: "We have opened in a new page of partnership."

Azzam al-Ahmed, a senior Fatah official, said the leaders would hold another meeting to continue discussions.

ELECTIONS

Fatah and Hamas representatives said there was agreement that elections should happen in May as agreed in the deal. But analysts doubt whether the vote will happen if the sides have not formed a government by then.

In a sign of some tangible progress, the sides announced that an all-encompassing Palestinian leadership body tasked with reforming the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) would hold its first meeting on December 22. The body was first envisioned by a 2005 agreement among Palestinian factions.

"It's been a long wait but God willing it will finally happen," said Izzat al-Rishq, a Hamas official, referring to the Dec. 22 meeting.

"This is the start of the participation of Hamas in the PLO," said Hany al-Masri, a Palestinian political commentator based in Ramallah who has been involved in efforts to foster reconciliation. "It's not the end of the road, but it's a step."

A spokesman for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Palestinian unity moves were reducing the prospects for peace.

"The closer Abu Mazen gets to Hamas, the further he moves away from peace," Netanyahu spokesman Mark Regev said.

NewsTickers alert senior Department officials to breaking news. This item appears as it did in its original publication and does not contain analysis or commentary by Department sources.