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Palestinian Center for
POLICY and
SURVEY RESEARCH

The Oslo Agreement: The Difficult Road to Palestinian-Israeli Peace

Sustainable Peace Education



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Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR)

Irsal St., PO Box 76, Ramallah, Palestine

T: +970-2-2964933

F: +970-2-2964934

pcpsr@pcpsr.org

www.pcpsr.org

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A Lesson in History

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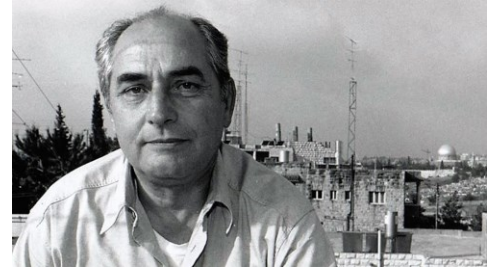
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In the beginning, there was the intifada

The Palestinian popular uprising, which began on December 9, 1987, brought about a qualitative shift in the size and nature of popular participation in civil disobedience. Protests and peaceful, popular demonstrations witnessed the participation of large sectors of the Palestinian people, continuing for six years in the face of the Israeli occupation. Political leaders and academics (male and female) were involved in the uprising. The Orient House in Jerusalem, led by Faisal Al-Husseini, emerged as a center for the political leadership of the uprising. Mr. Faisal Al-Husseini and Dr. Hanan Ashrawi actively participated in crystallizing the political goals of the uprising. This consisted of achieving the right to self-determination for the Palestinian people, and establishing a Palestinian state on the June 1967 borders. In support of the intifada, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat announced, at the PLO National Council's meeting in Algiers on November 15, 1988, the establishment of the State of Palestine in accordance with the Declaration of Independence. This was an important development in Palestinian politics, as it approved the UN Partition Resolution No. 181, which opened the door to the possibility of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.

"Given the historical injustice inflicted on the Palestinian Arab people, by displacing them and denying them the right to self-determination, after the passing of General Assembly Resolution No. 181 of 1947, which divided Palestine into two, Arab and Jewish states, this resolution still provides international legitimacy that guarantees the rights of the Palestinian Arab people to sovereignty and national independence."

Declaration of Independence, 1988



Faisal Al-Husseini: (17/7/1940 - 31/5/2001) was detained in the occupation's prisons in 1968. He founded the Arab Studies Society ("Orient House") in Jerusalem and headed the Authoritative Committee of the Palestinian Negotiating Delegation in Madrid and Washington in the early 1990s. He was responsible for the Jerusalem file in the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1996.

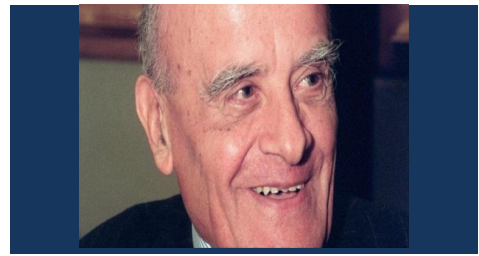


Dr. Hanan Ashrawi: (8/10/1946) is a Palestinian political activist and university professor who was a leader in the first intifada, and the official spokesperson of the Palestinian delegation at the Madrid Conference. She has been a member of the Legislative Council since 1996, and was elected to membership of the PLO's Executive Committee in 2009.

At the same time, regional transformations such as the second Gulf War, "the liberation of Kuwait," and the position of the PLO's leadership on the Iraqi occupation of the State of Kuwait, compounded with international transformations due to the collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of 1992, weakened the position and capacity of the PLO.

On the other hand, the Israeli political and military leadership reached the conviction that it could not continue to control the Palestinians by force forever, regardless of the level of oppression, punishment, and Israeli harassment tools used against Palestinians, including arrest, deportation, killing and wounding, demolishing homes, curfews, confiscating land and property, and closing schools and universities.

In an attempt by the international community to revive the Arab-Israeli peace process through negotiations, the “Madrid Peace Conference” was held from October 30 to November 1, 1991 in the Spanish capital, Madrid, under the auspices of the United States and the then Soviet Union. Attending delegations represented Israel, the Palestinians, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. The Conference was followed by bilateral negotiations between Israel and each of Lebanon, Syria, and the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. The Palestinian delegation was headed by Dr. Haider Abdel-Shafi. Subsequent bilateral meetings were held in Washington. In January 1992, multilateral negotiations on regional cooperation began in Moscow, attended by Israel, the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation and the international community.



Haider Abdel--Shafi: (10/7/1919 - 24/9/2007) was the head of the Palestinian delegation to the Madrid Peace Conference and the head of the Palestinian negotiating team. He was a physician from the Gaza Strip and was elected as a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council in 1996.

In parallel, secret negotiations took place in the Norwegian capital, Oslo, between representatives of the PLO headed by Ahmed Qurei (Abu ‘Ala) and representatives of the government of Israel, headed at the time by Yitzhak Rabin. This resulted in a declaration of principles and mutual recognition between the two parties in September 1993. The two agreements on the declaration of principles included holding Palestinian elections in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem; establishing the Palestinian Authority; transferring powers to it over population and land; and an Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian lands in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In a festive atmosphere, on the 13th of that month, the US government sponsored the signing ceremony of the Declaration of Principles.

Article 1 of the Oslo Agreement stipulated:

“The aim of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations within the current Middle East peace process is, among other things, to establish a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority, the elected Council (the "Council"), for the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, for a transitional period not exceeding five years, leading to a permanent settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).”

These steps were widely supported by the international community, seen as a breakthrough in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994, in recognition of their efforts in trying to bring peace to the Middle East region.

The transition period stipulated in the Oslo Agreement paved the way for the formation of the Palestinian Authority and the building of governmental institutions such as ministries and public bodies. Powers were gradually transferred to this Authority, starting with the Israeli army withdrawal from major Palestinian cities; holding general elections to elect members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the president of the Palestinian Authority, which took place at the beginning of 1996; and the transfer of limited civil and security powers over other Palestinian areas, such as Areas A, B, and C.

The peace process faced many obstacles on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides. The Israeli government did not commit to transferring powers in accordance with the deadlines stipulated in the agreement, and continued to sponsor settlement activity in the Palestinian territories. The process also faced strong opposition from internal Palestinian

parties, where some expressed their opposition by boycotting elections or refusing to participate in the PA authority. Others carried out bombing attacks against Israeli targets.

On the Israeli side, an Israeli settler committed a massacre in the Cave of the Patriarchs in 1994, while a Jewish extremist assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. Benjamin Netanyahu, who opposed the peace process, was elected prime minister in Israel in 1996, leading to the deterioration of the peace process between Palestinians and Israelis.

Negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis at Camp David in the US in the summer of 2000 resulted in a failure to reach a final peace agreement. This did not mean that the negotiations had collapsed, or that the Palestinians had given up on this option to achieve independence. It did mean that the implementation of the peace process was not as smooth as anticipated by those who contributed to drafting the Oslo Accords and signed them.



President Yasser Arafat, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994.

I Test myself

2) Explain how the first intifada pushed towards Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and the reaching of the Oslo Accords.

- a) Encouraging the Palestinians to declare independence, which opened the door to negotiations with Israel.
- b) Convincing Israel that it was impossible to maintain control over the Palestinian people in the occupied territories forever.

3) What was the outcome of the Oslo Accords?

- a) Mutual recognition.
- b) Declaration of Principles leading to Palestinian elections, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the withdrawal of Israel from occupied Palestinian territory, and the transfer of powers to an elected Palestinian council.

4) List the obstacles that prevented the success of the Oslo Accords.

- a) Israel's failure to abide by deadlines for withdrawal and the transfer of powers to the Palestinian side.
- b) Palestinian factions, opposed to the peace process, carried out bombing attacks.
- c) The assassination of Rabin.
- d) Israel's continued settlement activity.



EUROPEAN UNION

This lesson is part of a joint research project on sources of mutual distrust between Palestinians and Israelis, funded by the European Union. The content do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.