

INITIATIVE BY THE PRIVATE SECTOR FOR THE SAKE OF PALESTINE

We, the undersigned, representatives of the Palestinian private sector, chairmen and members of boards of directors of leading companies and institutions in the various fields of industry, finance, services, construction, information technology, agriculture and tourism; we, who have shouldered the responsibilities of Palestinian development and striven to build a Palestinian economy capable of assuring the continuing existence and steadfastness of the Palestinian people; we, the community of the private sector, which is proud of having been, and continuing to be, a fully-fledged partner in the battle to end occupation, to establish an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and to guarantee the right of return for the refugees, in accordance with the United Nations resolutions, set out our position on the current crisis as follows:

We express our deep concern over the current deterioration of our people's just cause, and over the dangers that threaten to undermine completely the important gains achieved by our people on different levels, especially those related to Palestinian identity, unanimous international acceptance of our people's right to establish an independent Palestinian state, the development of our national institutions, and the deepening of our democratic experience. This progress was witnessed during the presidential, municipal and parliamentary elections, which took place with large-scale participation of the Palestinian people and the political, financial and technical support of the international community. This experience was crowned by a peaceful transfer of power in a civilized manner.

To attain these achievements, our people have paid dearly with the lives of tens of thousands of martyrs, as well as with hundreds of thousands of people wounded and imprisoned. Millions of Palestinians have had to experience the bitterness of being refugees and of misery and persecution, while those who remained in their homeland have suffered the effects of siege, poverty and unemployment, and continue to suffer today from their egregious exclusion from their land and water resources by the expansionist apartheid wall. They are being confined to isolated cantons by the Israeli plan of unilateral demarcation of borders.

At a time when peoples and governments in most countries welcomed the faultlessly-conducted Palestinian elections and the exercise of democracy, we very much regret the boycott of the new government, the suspension

of aid to the Palestinian people, and the freezing of development projects previously agreed by donor states, because of the election results. The implementation of these measures will lead to total paralysis of the Authority's ability to pay the salaries of its employees, the suspension and disintegration of vital services, and complete economic collapse. Foreign assistance has become vital in order to alleviate the consequences of Israel's continuing occupation, the ensuing weakening and destruction of public and private facilities throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, and the removal of possibilities for employment and a decent standard of living for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. The private sector expresses its indignation at Israel's measures, especially the closure of borders and checkpoints in the Gaza Strip, the separation of the Strip from the West Bank, and the blocking of Palestinian customs revenues that are collected by the Israeli Ministry of Finance. We demand that the Israeli Government stop all these hostile measures, and transfer the clearance revenues to the Palestinian National Authority immediately.

We reject all pressure exerted against Arab and friendly foreign states seeking to discourage them from providing assistance to the Palestinian Authority and people. We reject all threats directed at banks to prevent them from transferring assistance funds. Such measures will further increase the impoverishment and hunger of the Palestinian people, and will create a fertile environment for tension and violence which will have serious consequences for the whole region.

An issue which has increased the concern and anger of the Palestinian private sector, as well as all citizens, is the unacceptable incidents of lawlessness witnessed in some Palestinian cities. Such practices harm the image of our people as well as the just nature of our cause. They are alien to our people's behaviour and dampen our spirit of solidarity. We refer particularly to the violation of the sanctity of public institutions, and the regrettable clashes which resulted in the death and injury of innocent people. In addition to the damage they cause to many national institutions and their facilities, such actions cause serious harm to national unity and negatively affect the morale of our people.

In the face of this situation, the Palestinian private sector deems it necessary to address its brothers: the President of the National Authority; the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Legislative Council; the heads of parliamentary blocs and all national and Islamic forces and parties; the representatives of civil society organisations; and all those who are intent on safeguarding the achievements of the Palestinian people and the future of our national cause. We call on them to respect higher national interests,

rather than narrow group or party-political concerns, and to focus all their efforts on confronting the big challenges that the Palestinian national liberation project is facing. These are embodied in the Israeli Government's policy of unilaterally setting the borders, isolating the Palestinian people, undermining national unity, destroying the social fabric, liquidating the Palestinian political system, and diverting international attention from the just cause of our people.

The Palestinian private sector is of the opinion that success in confronting those challenges requires all patriotic and Islamic forces to uphold the following principles:

- 1- Be armed with a comprehensive political programme which enjoys national support, is in conformity with UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, and which can serve as a foundation for Palestinian political action to end the occupation.
- 2- Respect the democratic choice of our people and the election results, and be committed to political pluralism and the use of democratic methods in the expression of opinions.
- 3- Respect the Basic Law, and rely on it for deciding and distributing powers.
- 4- Employ dialogue and discussion as a means to settle differences or problems, forbid the use of force among brothers, renounce the use of arms and violence, and avoid incitement and provocation in the media.
- 5- Respect the law and condemn all violations of human rights of Palestinians, regardless of the source.

We deem that the National Authority's programme should focus on the following priorities:

- 1- Confront the Israeli project of unilaterally setting the borders and imposing a settlement.
- 2- Confront the process of isolating the National Authority from its Arab environment and internationally, activate international solidarity, and work for a resumption of the flow of Arab and international aid.
- 3- Complete the reform process and improve transparency, accountability and the principles of good governance, above all the sovereignty of the law, activate and develop the role of an independent judiciary, and deal decisively with the problem of the absence of security and the chaos of arms.

- 4- Provide a suitable environment to nurture the private sector and enable it to play a leading role in development.
- 5- Safeguard personal security and civil society, and uphold the open and democratic nature of Palestinian society.
- 6- Fight poverty and unemployment, and develop a social security network for the families of martyrs.
- 7- Reform the Palestine Liberation Organization, and develop its representative character and structure in response to the nature and requirements of the current situation and future developments.

The realisation of the above-mentioned aims requires concerted efforts and unified action on three fronts, as follows:

First: On the Political Level

- 1- Request both the President of the National Authority and the Prime Minister, due to their joint responsibility, to facilitate Palestinian political action by taking the initiative to draw up a Palestinian peace plan, based on United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, and principled Palestinian positions and rights.
- 2- Address the United Nations and the Quartet, asking them to shoulder their responsibilities and work with all parties for the implementation of UN resolutions related to the Palestinian question.
- 3- Form official delegations, with the participation of the government, the private sector and civil society, to put into effect a large-scale plan of diplomatic action to explain the Palestinian initiative; hold meetings with donor governments and international organizations with the aim of obtaining the resumption of international aid and of reviving international solidarity with our people.

Second: On the Internal Front

- 1- Form a national coalition government with the active participation of Palestinian forces and parties, and experienced and capable individuals, which would be able to establish and deepen the application of modern methods of administration in government institutions.
- 2- Embark immediately on a national dialogue between parties represented in the Palestinian Legislative Council, in order to agree upon a Palestinian Government programme for the realisation of economic, social and security priorities.
- 3- Emphasise the participation of the Palestinian private sector in formulating the Government's programme, which should provide

an appropriate environment to cultivate the private sector and enable it to fulfil its leading role in development.

- 4- Agree upon a Charter of Honour among all national and Islamic contingents to assure the personal safety of citizens, protect institutions, and impose respect for the law.

Third: On the Level of the Palestine Liberation Organization

A national forum should be formed with the participation of all forces, parties and national personalities, with the aim of continuing and concluding the Cairo dialogue regarding the reform and restructuring of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the improvement of representation and participation in it. This is to be done through democratic methods, and the development of the capabilities and performance of the PLO to realise the objectives of the Palestinian people: ending occupation, fulfilling the Palestinian people's right to self-determination in an independent state in their homeland, and achieving the return of the refugees. The mechanisms for it to perform its role as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people wherever they may be should be developed. Its departments and administration should also be developed in a manner that improves its responsiveness to the needs of the Palestinian people in the various countries of their residence. Its role as a tool for uniting the Palestinian people and linking Palestinian communities abroad with citizens at home should also be enhanced.

In conclusion, the Palestinian private sector expresses its appreciation for all the initiatives seeking to unite all efforts to tackle the present crisis. It welcomes and blesses the call by the President to hold a national conference for this purpose. Proceeding from its crucial role as an engine of economic growth and development, and being a leading partner in all national and humanitarian activities, the private sector presents this initiative as an expression of its desire and willingness to contribute seriously and effectively to the success of the national dialogue, as a necessary prelude to overcoming the present crisis and proceeding with the Palestinian national liberation project until its victorious conclusion.

Signatures

Federation of Palestinian Chambers of Commerce
Palestine Trade Center - PalTrade
Palestinian Businessmen's Association/ Jerusalem
Palestinian Federation of Industries
Palestinian Chamber of Commerce/ Gaza
Palestinian Businessmen Association/ Gaza
Palestinian Contractors' Union
Palestinian Business Forum/ Hebron
Union of Insurance Companies
Association of Banks
Palestine Securities Exchange
Palestinian Information Technology Association
Union of Stone & Marble Industry
Palestinian Hotels Association/ Gaza
Palestinian Dairy Council
Metal Industries Union
Traditional Industries Union
Shoes and Leather Industries Union
Construction Industries Union
Carton & Paper Industries Association
Palestinian Food Industries Association
Furniture Industries Union
Textile Industries Association
Chemical Industries Association
Pharmaceutical Industries Association
Plastic Industries Association
Administrative Services for Tourism Association in Palestine
Palestinian Shippers Council
Palestine Development and Investment Ltd. (PADICO)
PALTEL GROUP
Palestinian Olive Oil Council