

## Reclaiming the PLO: an urgent call to unite all Palestinians

Written by Tayseer Nasrallah  
Sunday, 15 July 2012 10:43 -

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[The Electronic Intifada](#) [Nablus](#) 14 July 2012



Palestinians worldwide must mobilize together for a new generation of struggle.

( [Ryan Rodrick Beiler](#) )

A national call has just been publicly issued in the Palestinian press and news agencies urging Palestinians everywhere to participate in the civic registration drive for Palestinian National Council elections. This initiative is intended to reclaim Palestinians' national institution, the [Palestine Liberation Organization](#). The call and its publication is a landmark event for the Palestinian people in a number of ways.

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The extent of the national consensus reflected in this call cannot be overlooked. This in itself represents a historic step in the current struggle for regaining our institutions by establishing a democratic mechanism to reintegrate the voices of all our people for the core aims of liberation and return. All are represented in the call, from the prominent [Fatah](#) leader to the top [Hamas](#) official; from the veteran leftist activist and revolutionary to the symbols of our prisoners' movement in the occupied homeland; to those who remain steadfast in the countries of exile.

However, the significance of the call does not lie only in the distinguished and wide range of the signatories and the unprecedented consensus in this era of stifling division and stark separation. Its importance is embodied in its content, which cannot be described as anything less than revolutionary.

Palestinian representation has passed through its most dark and difficult stages over the past two decades. During that period, all inclusive national institutions were fatally weakened, the *shatat* (Palestinians in exile) was entirely excluded, and Palestinians living in 1948 Palestine (the territory which is referred to in colonial language as Israel) have been completely ignored.

Political institutions exclusive to the West Bank and [Gaza Strip](#) were established under the Oslo Accords, but without that land being liberated first. Therefore, a serious political distortion was created; one that destroyed the previous institutional unity, in principle, of our body politic.

A seriously flawed reality developed, whereby 40 percent of the people were voting in our national legislative institutions (those living in the West Bank and Gaza through the [Palestinian Legislative Council](#)), with the rest unable to practice their right to choose their representatives, and thus shape and direct the national agenda.

Many individual and collective attempts were launched to end this popular division and representational fragmentation that so weakened and damaged our people's unity. These initiatives called for reinvigorating the Palestinian National Council — the parliament of the people and its highest legislative authority — on a democratic basis.

Such calls were adopted in various national agreements, such as the Prisoners' Document of

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2006, drafted by Palestinian leaders from all factions in Israeli prisons; as well as the national reconciliation agreements of 2011 and 2012. Those agreements united all the political factions within a set of principles that called for the democratic renewal of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative for all Palestinians.

Yet our stifling political circumstances did not, until now, allow for translating this popular national will into a reality on the ground.

### **A national responsibility**

Nevertheless, signs of positive change began to appear over the past few years, embodied in the campaign for direct elections to the PNC — and, after that, the launch of the civic registration drive for PNC elections. The simple principle guiding these campaigns is the idea that registering to vote is a national responsibility that rests on the shoulders of all Palestinians. Progress towards the goal of unifying our people can only be achieved through a civic and combined popular effort shared by Palestinian organizations in all locations.

For at least a decade, [right of return](#) coalitions and other associations in many countries made countless annual declarations, statements and right of return activities highlighting the demand for direct PNC elections for all Palestinians. Now, and after much popular movement and substantial preparations, we can make use of the results of this previous collective work. The technical mechanisms for secure registration has been developed and built by leading Palestinian engineers from the fields of Internet technology and information security.

The practical steps for registration are being set up by our own registration experts and national institutions specializing in specific technical aspects so that a viable instrument of mobilization is ready. The funds come from a wide range of Palestinian business people across the homeland and in exile. Palestinian communities, refugee camp associations and other Palestinian exile groups have begun to organize towards reclaiming the PLO on a popular basis in order to unify our people and debate our national strategies collectively.

### **Engine for change is the people**

This national call has crowned these efforts, charting a path for implementing the work with unreserved national, party and popular support.

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Here, it is important to note that the call reflects the understanding of all major Palestinian forces: that the engine for change must be the people themselves, in their civic and popular strength.

This is especially so in the midst of the current context in which all national institutions are utterly frozen. The only way to guarantee forward motion towards a real and representative national movement is for citizens to take hold of the reins of the process.

### Controlling our destiny

Undoubtedly, in order for all sectors of the Palestinian people to organize without obstacles and divisions, especially in the Arab world where the majority of our people live, there must be official and party support for civic registration — and this important reality is reflected in the national call. However, registering to vote for the parliament of the PLO is a task for the organizations, clubs, camp associations and communities themselves with facilitation provided by Palestinian embassies wherever needed. This should keep the fairness and independence necessary to have the Palestinian people themselves in charge of their destiny, and to keep it.

### The frontier of a new beginning

The civic character of the registration process has opened the door for reviving and reactivating structures in the *shatat* and the homeland, and this purpose is as important — if not more so — than any elections themselves. How is desperate our need for a mechanism through which every son and daughter of Palestine has a direct role in shaping their national policy and bringing life, spirit and principle to their representative institutions?

History teaches us that the strength of any national movement or institution resides in the extent of popular interaction and ownership of them; they flourish when citizens are directly engaged, and atrophy whenever they acquire an elitist character and become distant from the people they were created to represent. Hundreds of examples illustrate this point, and even in the most established of democracies, registration is carried out by civic structures, while elections that follow are arranged by the more formal institutions.

But it is entirely in the demands and pressure of our people for the establishment of national institutions on a representative basis that have driven this collective work, as well as the emergence of a national call to support it. Both the demands and the collective work must continue.

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We stand at the frontier of a new beginning that has a revolutionary character, and although there are many obstacles ahead, this must not stop us from carrying out this serious and profound national work to unite our people, unity being the urgent desire of all Palestinians.

The time has come for our people from [Syria](#) to [Lebanon](#) , [Jordan](#) to the Gulf, and [Egypt](#) to Europe, from inside our homeland and from outside of it to mobilize together for a new generation of struggle.

This call promises us that by returning to the core of our cause and our struggle — our people — especially our expelled people in the camps and places of exile where the majority live, equal in representation and united in voice, can we overcome the borders and external pressures that are attempting to keep us divided.

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