

Palestinians reject U.S. call for resuming peace talks

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In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

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GAZA/RAMALLAH, Jan. 9 (Xinhua) — The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) on Saturday rejected a U.S. call for resuming the stalled peace talks with Israel without preconditions, demanding a full settlement freeze in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, Gaza Strip ruling Islamic Hamas movement warned the PNA against any resumption and cautioned that Israel will be the only beneficiary of the peace talks.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told Xinhua in a telephone interview that it is unacceptable, “since the U.S. administration’s calls don’t include a total freeze of settlements in the West Bank and occupied East Jerusalem, and don’t include a timetable for resuming the talks.”

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Friday said that the United States is working with Israeli and Palestinian authorities, as well as Arab states, namely Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, to resume the peace negotiations “as soon as possible and without preconditions.”

Clinton made the remarks after meeting Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Nasser Judeh, adding that Washington is to renew its commitment and increase efforts in persuading the parties to return to the talks.

The two officials called on the Palestinians and Israel to tackle the thorny issues of borders and the status of Jerusalem first, saying resolving the two issues would automatically resolve the dispute over Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, a major obstacle in the peace process.

But Erekat said that Clinton “neglected the Arab position” that Israel must halt the building of Jewish settlements all-over the West Bank as well as in the occupied East Jerusalem.” Clinton also failed to “endorse the principle of the two-state solution,” Erekat said.

“How should we negotiate on the Palestinian state’s boundaries while the Israeli bulldozers and settlements are eating up the land that we want to build our state on?” Erekat said. “The settlement expansions must stop to give a chance for the negotiations to succeed.”

Erekat stressed that the negotiations must restart from the point they stopped at during the era of former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

The peace talks came to a standstill when Israel launched a military offensive against the Gaza Strip in December 2008 and efforts to restart them have failed due to the continuation

of Jewish settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

On Friday, Israeli Ha'aretz daily reported that the United States studies the possibilities of holding indirect negotiations between Israel and the PNA.

"But (Palestinian) President Mahmoud Abbas still rejects the resumption of any talks before halting the Israeli settlements," the report said.

Erekat denied that the PNA has received such kind offers over resuming indirect peace talks with Israel, saying that, "So far we haven't received any official U.S. offers."

Last week, Abbas visited Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan and Turkey to express the Palestinian stance concerning the efforts to resume the peace talks.

"There are actually Arab efforts exerted by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Qatar to convince the U.S. Administration that it is time now that the United States present a comprehensive peace plan based on the establishment of a Palestinian state on the territories occupied by Israel in 1967," said Erekat.

The Palestinians insist the borders of their future statehood encompass all of the land Israel occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem as their capital, while Israel deems Jerusalem as its indivisible capital.

Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad has also called on the international community to urge Israel to stop settlement in the Palestinian territories and end the blockade that has been imposed on the Gaza Strip for three years "before resuming any peace negotiations."

Meanwhile, the Islamic Hamas movement, which has been ruling the Gaza Strip since June 2007, snubbed U.S. and Arab efforts to resume peace talks between the PNA and Israel.

Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri told reporters that the bids to revive the peace process "aim at saving the Arab regimes from their weakness and rescuing the U.S. administration's reputation which is biased towards the Israeli occupation."

"For Hamas, the only beneficiary of the resumption of the negotiations is Israel which will use it as a cover to continue building settlements and making Jerusalem Jewish," Abu Zuhri added.

Hamas basically rejects the Middle East peace process and also refuses to recognize Israel.

Also on Saturday, a coalition of eight Palestinian factions based in Damascus, which include Hamas, Islamic Jihad and radical left-wing groups, said that they reject recent American and Arab political efforts to resume the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

"The ongoing moves to re-track negotiations with Israel are part of a plan to subjugate the Palestinian people to Israeli conditions," said the eight groups in a statement.

"We call on all the Palestinians political factions and powers to be united to confront these plans that would harm the just Palestinian cause," the statement said.

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