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Meshaal calls Israeli government a "fascist" one Hamas leader calls for action to Obama's words



Khaled Meshaal, the exiled head of the Palestinian Hamas political bureau, speaks in Damascus

CAIRO (Marwa Awad)

Exiled Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal welcomed Thursday the change in tone from Washington towards his Islamist movement but said action was still needed as he hit out on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and called his right-wing government "fascist."

In a televised address from Damascus following United States President Barack Obama's speech in Cairo, Mashaal welcomed Obama's overtures to Hamas as "the first step towards direct talks," but stressed that action as well as unconditional direct talks with Palestinian resistance groups should be the outcome of any outreach.

"Working with Hamas and Palestinian resistance groups, has to be on the basis of respecting the will of the Palestinian people and their democratic choice and not on the basis of placing conditions like that of the Quartet, as imposing conditions on others, is a problematic matter and unsuitable for free nations," Meshaal said.

The Hamas chief added that Obama's stance on halting settlements and the right of Palestinian self-determination needed to move beyond words to concrete gains for Palestinians.

"America's talk today of freezing settlements and of a Palestinian state is not new. More important is the extent of their response to the rights of our people and the reality of the Palestinian state they talk about in terms of its sovereignty," Meshaal explained, adding "that is why our stance on the Obama administration is still under examination."

Hamas has "no illusions about the new policy... we want change on the ground that will bring about an end to the occupation," he said, adding that U.S. must begin to consider Hamas as a resistance movement elected by the will of the people and not an outlawed group.

In his Cairo speech earlier this month, Obama acknowledged the Palestinian support for Hamas but added that the Islamist movement must gain legitimacy by putting an end to violence and recognizing past agreements and "Israel's right to exist."

Israeli stance "fascist"

Underscoring Obama's need for concrete action on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict Meshaal noted that Netanyahu's Tel Aviv speech earlier last week defied U.S. demands for peace in the region by insisting on continuing settlement activity.

Hamas's first outreach move towards the new administration came during Obama's Cairo visit during which former Hamas advisor Yusuf Ahmed submitted a "Peace Letter" which was delivered to Obama by CODEPINK, an advocacy group supporting Palestinians, in hopes of opening dialogue with the world's super power.

Meshaal also slammed Netanyahu's right-wing government, saying that the conditions it placed on the Palestinian statehood were unacceptable and that its demand that Palestinians recognize it as an officially Jewish state is "fascist."

"We reject the position taken by Netanyahu... on east Jerusalem, settlement activity, the right of return of Palestinian refugees and his vision of a demilitarised Palestinian state deprived of sovereignty over its land, air space and territorial waters," Meshaal said.

Meshaal said Hamas opposed Israel as a Jewish state because that would amount to the denial of the rights of the six million Palestinian refugees.

"The enemy's leaders call for a so-called Jewish state is a racist demand that is no different from calls by Italian Fascists and Hitler's Nazism," Meshaal said.

Emad Gad, political analyst and expert on Palestinian-Israeli conflict said Meshaal's speech represented Hamas's official response to the two previous official speeches from Obama and Netanyahu.

"It certainly recaps Hamas's position on the Obama administration and the Israeli government's latest stance in an official response given from Damascus," Gad told Al Arabiya.

Unity Talks

Meshaal also announced the resumption of Palestinian unity talks in Cairo in the coming weeks, stressing the need for unity among Palestinian ranks to topple the occupation and achieve independence.

"Hamas will work swiftly to end the rifts in Palestinian ranks and achieve national reconciliation through talks being brokered by Egypt," Meshaal announced. "To this end, a delegation will travel to Cairo in the next two days to tackle the obstacles," he added.

Egyptian mediators set July 7 as the target date for a deal of reconciliation between Hamas and the West Bank-based leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas after months of irresolute negotiations to mend the rift sparked by Hamas's control of Gaza in 2007.

In recent years Hamas officials have signalled that they may be ready to accept a Palestinian state limited to the territories seized in the 1967 Middle East war despite a commitment in the movement's

charter to regaining the whole of historic Palestine.