

## **First speech of Palestinian National Authority President Mr. Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), January 15, 2005**

Palestinian Legislative Council – Presidential Headquarter Muqata' Ramallah

*In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful "my Lord! Let my entry be by the Gate of Truth and Honour, and likewise my exit by the Gate of Truth and Honour; and grant me from Thee an authority to aid (me)"*

President of the Palestinian National Council,  
Members of the PLO Executive Committee,  
Speaker and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council,  
Mr. Prime Minister, Members of the Cabinet,  
Mr. Chief Justice,  
Representatives of Arab and Foreign States,  
Representatives of International Organizations,  
Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I address you today, I am full of pride over the Palestinian people's exceptional democratic achievement. Our people have stood in the face of the occupation to say "first and foremost to our selves but also to the whole world" that no matter how great the challenges may be, we will not give up on our national project. That no matter how many obstacles may stand in our way; we will not be deterred from advancing our democratic process. The winner in these elections is the great Palestinian people who have created this democratic epic and who will safeguard it.

I dedicate this victory in the name of our whole people to the soul and memory of our eternal leader, the symbol of our cause, Yasser Arafat. It was he who planted the first seed of this democratic process, it was he who held its banner high, and it was he who consolidated its traditions. Our respect and gratitude go to your noble soul, Abu Ammar, on this day of Palestinian democracy.

This is historic day in our national process, and I say to all our people who voted: you have kept the flame of democracy alive; and all my thanks and gratitude go to you. I pledge to exert all of my efforts to implement the program according to which I was elected, and to continue on the path towards achieving our national goals.

My thanks and appreciation also go to all those who worked to make the election campaign a success, my brothers in the FATAH movement all over Palestine, and to all political forces, organizations, institutions, movements and individuals who spared no effort to defend our national democratic program. This program now has the widest public support.

To all the other candidates, I say: we highly appreciate your efforts in making the democratic process a success. You have my pledge to encourage and guarantee the active role of all of our political forces and strands, and to protect the freedom of expression in accordance with the law.

For even if our opinions may differ, we share one national cause; and even if our judgments may diverge, we defend one goal. We will make sure that we work together to achieve the national goals to which we all aspire.

Today, the results of the elections are final, and our great people have passed this important test. I stand before you as the President and representative of the whole Palestinian people to say: we will continue consolidating national unity. We will deepen dialogue with all the active forces in our nation, and we will remain devoted to strengthening the unity of our society and institutions. We will also continue on the path of Yasser Arafat to achieve just peace "the peace of the brave" for which he had always worked, and to which he dedicated all his life and efforts.

I would like to thank the management and team of my campaign for their great efforts. I also extend my appreciation and commendation to the Central Elections Committee, its president, members and the thousands of teachers who played an outstanding role to guarantee the success and fairness of the elections. I also extend my appreciations to the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian security services for their role: they have worked efficiently under extremely difficult circumstances to ensure that the elections are fair and free.

I would like to thank the governments, international organizations, international figures, and *monitors who oversaw the elections process* and who helped in achieving our goals for consolidating democracy in Palestine.

I would also like to thank my dear brother Rawhi Fattouh, who played an efficient and capable role as the President of the Palestinian National Authority during the period of transition. He created an exemplary environment for conducting the elections, and he enabled our national institutions to play their role and carry out their duties.

I would like to thank the Government, headed by my brother Abu Ala', and the PLC for all of their efforts during the period of transition, and for the spirit of cooperation and joint action in the face of demanding conditions.

And I salute all of our people, particularly the residents of Jerusalem " the capital of our independent state. You have proven to the whole world your national commitment, determination to move forward, and commitment to our national goals and democratic choice. Your turnout exceeded all expectations, and you overcame difficulties, obstacles, and hardships.

- The people have spoken for the end of occupation and the democratic choice, for the continuation and consolidation of development and reform,
- The people have voted for the rule of law, order, pluralism, the peaceful transfer of authority, and equality for all,
- The people have chosen just peace, ending the occupation, and coexistence based on equality and international legitimacy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year is the year of Palestinian elections presidential, legislative, and municipal elections. Let us muster our national efforts to further extend the election process to civil organizations, trade unions, and political forces and factions so as to rejuvenate our domestic political life.

The greatest challenge before us, and the fundamental task facing us is national liberation. The task of ending the occupation, establishing the Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital, and reaching a just and agreed solution to the refugee problem on the basis of international resolutions, first and foremost resolution 194 and the Beirut Arab Summit Resolution.

To achieve these national goals, we will remain committed to the PLO's strategic choice: the choice of achieving just peace and our national goals through negotiations. The path to these goals is what we and the world have agreed upon in the Road Map. We have repeatedly stated that we are committed to our responsibilities in the Road Map. We will implement our obligations as a matter of Palestinian national interest. In return, Israel has to implement its obligations.

In the last few days, a number of incidents took place. We condemn these actions, whether by the Israeli occupation forces or the reactions of some Palestinian factions. This does not help bring about the calm needed to enable a credible, serious peace process. We are seeking a mutual ceasefire to end this vicious circle.

Our hand is extended towards an Israeli partner for making peace. But partnership is not through words but rather deeds. It is through ending assassinations, the siege on our towns, arrests, land confiscations, settlement activity and the separation wall. Partnership cannot be achieved by dictation, and peace cannot be reached by partial or interim solutions. Peace can only be achieved by working together to reach a permanent status solution that deals with all of the outstanding issues, and which turns a new page on the basis of two neighbouring states.

I would like to stress here that we are fully prepared to resume permanent status negotiations, and that we are politically ready to reach a comprehensive agreement over all of the issues.

From this forum, and on this day, I say to the Israeli leadership and to the Israeli people: we are two peoples destined to live side by side, and to share this land between us. The only alternative to peace is the continuation of the occupation and the conflict. Let us start implementing the Road Map, and "in parallel" let us start discussing the permanent status issues so that we can end, once and for all, the historic conflict between us.

From this forum, I call upon all concerned international actors, particularly the Quartet, to play a direct role in guaranteeing the implementation of the Road Map. You must ensure that we do not re-enter the labyrinth of preconditions that preclude progress in implementation. You must ensure that we do not get stuck in the maze of long-term partial or interim solutions designed to delay reaching a full and comprehensive solution.

As we at the Palestinian Authority express our readiness to implement all of our Road Map obligations, we expect all other parties to implement theirs. It is not reasonable that only we are required to take action while settlements continue; or while the Wall expands within Palestinian land to separate Palestinian from Palestinian, and to destroy the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of our people; or while closures, the siege, arrests, and other violations continue against our people, spreading despair, frustration, and loss of hope.

Today, it is up to the world to give our people hope, and it is up to the world not to repeat the same mistakes that sabotaged many initiatives and positive efforts in the past. In particular, I direct this call to all of the leaders of the Quartet members, and to all those committed to re-launching the peace process, and particularly to the US as the main player in this context.

Welcoming Palestinian democracy and supporting it is important, but this support will remain deficient if it is not shored up with efforts to end all aspects of the occupation so that this democracy may continue and thrive.

I also call upon the international community to take the necessary measures to implement the decision of the International Court of Justice, this decision that condemned the racist separation wall as illegal and called for its removal.

Brothers and Sisters,

Palestinians at the Homeland and in the Diaspora,

Ending the occupation was and will remain at the top of our national Palestinian agenda, but it is not the only priority. I can find no justification for ignoring the rest of our national issues under the pretext that we are an occupied people. The same proud Palestinian spirit that has struggled to ensure recognition of our just cause must guide us in dealing with our domestic agenda.

For decades, Palestinians have been a beacon of creativity and achievement; a light that has shone with talent and skill over the whole world. It is our duty to continue faithfully working in the same spirit and with the same determination to build an enlightened, civilized society that will be " both in its official and civil parts " a democratic example to be followed, and a basis for a bright outlook for our future generations.

I believe that we all agree that the first step towards building our society lies in establishing the rule of law. Only then will our people enjoy safety and security; only then will we be able to truly develop our institutions of governance and our political system; and only then will we achieve development and economic prosperity and make progress in social, cultural, and other fields.

The rule of law is embodied in one authority and one legal weapon in the hands of this authority, within the framework of political pluralism and the peaceful periodic transfer of authority. We all have the right to differ, and we all have the right to present our case to the people through the ballot box, but no-one has the right to by-pass the will of the people or to take law into their own hand in the service of their own agenda. Let law and democracy remain the only method of dealing with all aspects of our domestic concerns.

We have started the process of reform, and we will "God willing" continue. Reforming and developing the judiciary, security and government agencies, and continuing the development of our financial and economic system, and establishing a new mechanism for cooperation between the public and private sectors are prerequisites for enabling the National Authority to play its role in serving the Palestinian people. But more than that, they are also a national duty so as to establish the foundations of the Palestinian state to which we aspire. It is our duty, whether in the Authority, opposition, or civil society not to allow the occupation to derail us from this path, or internal chaos to sabotage this process.

We will work to establish close cooperation between the various institutions of the Palestinian Authority " the legislative, judicial and executive authorities " while respecting their separation and distinct role in accordance with the Basic Law. This should become the solid foundation and the established tradition of our political life, so as to develop our political system and to preserve its vitality. We will exert all of our efforts to revitalize the PLO institutions and to activate its national role as the sole legitimate representative of our people. This will intensify our efforts to serve our people in the Diaspora. The PLO must assume its leading role in supporting the National Authority, in emphasizing the unity of Palestinian decision, and in protecting the National Program of 1988 and the Palestinian Declaration of Independence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
the way forward will not be easy. Our goals will not be achieved with dreams or miracles, but with constant tireless work. The challenges ahead are grave: the occupation is still strangling us, and there are those who wish the failure of our experience. But those who hope for it to succeed and flourishing, both among our people and our friends throughout the world, are the overwhelming majority. The road ahead is long, but it is a road that we will take and a challenge that we will accept. The alternative is stagnation and regression, and this is an alternative that we will never accept.

It was a great opportunity that women used their right to participate in local and presidential elections. This is an important step on the path of ensuring full equality for women, including the right to assume leading positions in the Authority and in society. The late Abu Ammar has left us a legacy that lights our path and shows us the way. His legacy will always be present to remind us that no matter how great the challenges may be, or how intricate the conspiracies may become, the will of the people, unwavering determination, and tireless work will lead to our goals. In the midst of our struggle for liberation and state-building, there is no place for despair or lethargy. Today, I address the families of our revered martyrs to assure you that we will remain faithful to their memory and committed to protecting the future of their children. We will continue to care for the injured and the handicapped, and all of those affected by the violations of the occupation, whether home demolitions, the destruction of agricultural facilities, and all other forms of collective punishment.

I also address my brothers the prisoners and detainees to assure them that their cause will remain at the forefront of our efforts and will figure high on all levels. Opening the path of freedom before them is a noble purpose that we will do our utmost to achieve. We will also protect our fugitives and deportees, and we will absorb them and guarantee their future.

I have been throughout my field visits to the refugee camps here in the homeland and in Syria, Lebanon, and the Arab World. I have met our people who have entrusted us with their national aspirations and daily concerns. These will remain a central part of our own concerns. While we reject involuntary settlement outside the homeland, we must guarantee that our people wherever they are enjoy the best standards of living, through cooperation with our brothers in the host countries. In this path, and in the face of every hurdle and difficulty, I will remain strong in the knowledge of the trust that you have bestowed upon me, steadfast in my unshakable belief in the maturity of the Palestinian people, in all of its sectors and segments, and with all of its diverse opinions and positions. I will draw my strength first and foremost from my faith in God, and from my belief in the justice of cause and the unwavering dedication of our historic leader Yasser Arafat second, and from your trust. I pledge today to do all that I can, and to exert all of my efforts and energies to put an end to the suffering of our great people. I would like to express my gratitude to the Arab states and their leaders who have assured us of their continued support for our people and National Authority at this time where their brotherly help is most needed. I would also like to express my gratitude for the support for the world leaders, leaders of European states, the United States, Russia, China, Japan, and Islamic, Asian, African, Latin American and Non-Aligned states, as well as to the Secretary General of the UN and the various Arab, Islamic and international organizations.

It is the time for work, so let us start it strong and unified for the sake of our people, our youth and future generations, and for the sake of freedom, independence, reform, and democratic development.

*In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful Lord! (they says) Let not our hearts deviate now after Thou hast guided us, but grant us mercy from Thee: For Thou art the Grantor of bounties without measure*