

Open Letter to Condoleezza Rice (from *The Palestine Chronicle*)

**By Dr. Ahmad Yousuf - Senior Political Advisor
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*The Honourable Secretary of State
Ms. Condoleezza Rice
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520*

Dear Secretary Rice,

I am writing to you in light of the conference in Annapolis to fulfill our obligations to the Palestinian voters who have overwhelmingly legitimized our governance. Your administration cannot want peace more than the Palestinian people want and need peace. However, peace initiatives and conferences are ineffectual if the basic ingredients for success are not present. Meaningful steps toward a resolution cannot take place while the legitimacy of the elected government in Palestine continues to be ignored by your administration. Not only is the policy to isolate Hamas unethical it is ineffectual as well. Your administration ignores the realities on the ground. The Change and Reform Party, the name of the new political party we formed for the Palestinian elections, won an overwhelming majority in the occupied territories. To pretend otherwise is not only futile but detrimental to US interests in the region for many years to come and likely to add to the anti-American sentiment throughout the Middle East and the Muslim world. You cannot preach about exporting democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan and ignore the democratic process in Palestine.

Many people make the mistake of presuming that we have some ideological aversion to making peace. Quite the opposite; we have consistently offered dialogue with the U.S. and the E.U. to try and resolve the very issues that you are trying to deal with in Annapolis. Our conflict with the Israelis is a grievance-based conflict. We want to end the occupation of our land and the systematic human rights abuses that our people suffer from daily. We do not have any ideological problems with living side by side with Christians and Jews. When we have not been occupied we have successfully done this for thousands of years. However, they can not live in peace and security in a land that was usurped. Indeed if you asked a Jewish person where they would have been safest to live over the last two millennia, with Arabs or Europeans, the answer would be obvious. Nor do we have any ideological arguments with the West. We are not anti-American, anti-European or anti-anyone. The root of the problem which neither Israel nor the US is willing to acknowledge, let alone address, is the dispossession of the Palestinian people upon the creation in their homeland of Israel in 1948.

It would come as no surprise to us if this letter were to be met with dismissal, in keeping with this administration's policy of not dealing with "terrorists", despite the fact that we entered the democratic process and held a unilateral ceasefire of our own for over two

years. But how do you think the Arab and Muslim worlds react to this American hypocrisy? Even our growing ranks of western supporters complain about U.S. narrow-mindedness and the bullying of its allies to tow the American line. The State of Department should be looking for new solutions instead of reinforcing old stereotypes. On a personal note we found it amusing that a black person empathizes with Israeli deaths on the one hand and Palestinian segregation on the other if media reports are accurate. It is a military occupation Ms. Rice. Their citizens face insecurity and death because that is the situation they have created for themselves. We do not beg you to recognize us. Our party is the legitimately elected party in the occupied territories. You owe it to your sense of fairness to engage meaningfully with all relevant parties to the conflict.

The conference is faulty in its inception. It was conceived in a vacuum and hastily announced for political expediency. In addition, it ignores the inherent weaknesses of the negotiating parties involved. Furthermore, despite your efforts the conference has not secured the key Arab support you were hoping for. Arab leaders are leery of committing to an American initiative that exhibits no fundamental change from the past. Annapolis' failure will have negative consequences for those Arab states that supported it further destabilizing the region.

Our skepticism is based on experience. You know that despite every call for restraint by the U.S. over the last twenty years the Israelis have continued to expand and develop their vast network of towns and roads on Palestinian land. While you sat and talked in Annapolis the sound of cranes and bulldozers were echoing across the West Bank as those networks continue to grow. It is therefore hard to imagine an Israeli government bent on a peaceful withdrawal from our land. We can only presume that they are paying lip-service to your request to participate, seeing it as a delaying tactic to talk about peace with no real intention to deliver.

Meanwhile the entire Palestinian people are being punished for having the temerity to hold a free and fair election and choosing us as their government. It is hard to get across the appalling level of privation that the Palestinian people and in particular the 1.3 million Palestinians who live in Gaza currently suffer from. Our isolation is complete, confining us in a ghetto (worse than the Jewish ghettos of Warsaw) where our sewage, power and water systems have been destroyed, all normal supplies constrained and even humanitarian aid withheld. Many people have not been paid for nearly two years, over 75% are unemployed and now the Israelis are threatening to cut off fuel and power supplies and to invade us once again.

You have made it a precondition to any engagement with us that we accept certain conditions. Yet you don't apply the same preconditions to the Israelis. You don't require of them recognition of Palestinian rights or a renunciation of the terrible violence that they daily invoke on us. Nor do you require that they comply with previous agreements or the settlement building would long since have stopped.

Your predecessor General Collin Powell stated that the U.S. has to find a way to engage

with Hamas because it won the Palestinian elections and it continues to enjoy support among a large portion of the Palestinian people. He did not make that statement because he is less of an American or less committed to the service of America. He simply practiced at home what you are preaching about democracy abroad.

If you were even-handed in this conflict, if you engaged with us openly then the chances of peace would dramatically increase. As it is, you are setting yourself up for failure and with that failure will come more pain and anguish for the Palestinian people, a further colonization of our lands and a blank space in history for the Bush administration's role in making peace in the Middle East.

In the meantime, the people will hold steadfast to their rights and national constants. The internationally sanctioned resistance will not be quashed until the occupier packs its bags and leaves. And the aspiration of a free and independent Palestinian state is realized.

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