

Thousands in Gaza, W. Bank Commemorate 13th Anniversary for Arafat



Gaza/Ramallah, November 11 (RHC) -- For the first time in 10 years, tens of thousands of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip commemorated on Saturday the 13th anniversary for the death of late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

The crowds, waving yellow Fatah and Palestinian flags and holding posters of Arafat, arrived on Saturday morning from all over the coastal enclave at al-Saraya Square in Gaza City's downtown to join the massive rally.

Over the past ten years, the coastal enclave has been under the control of Islamic Hamas movement, and Hamas has been barring Arafat's Fatah Party supporters from organizing a rally to commemorate his anniversary.

However, after Hamas and Fatah signed on an Egyptian-brokered reconciliation deal on Oct. 12, and Hamas handed over control to the Palestinian consensus government in Gaza, Fatah held the rally to commemorate the anniversary.

At the rally held in Gaza city on Saturday, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas addressed a speech to the crowds, saying that on the 13th anniversary, "we tell Arafat that our people are sticking to their national legitimate rights."

Abbas called on Britain "to apologize to the Palestinian people, compensate them and correct a historic mistake of giving the Jews a state in Palestine on Nov. 2, 1917 and keeping the Palestinians without a state until now."

He went on saying that he will never stop the efforts to gain the full membership of the state of Palestine in the United Nations, stressing that the Palestinians will carry on until internal Palestinian reconciliation is finalized.

In the West Bank, Palestinians from all over the territory and those living in Israel poured into the mausoleum of the late president paying respect and placing wreaths of flowers on his grave.

Arafat died on Nov. 11, 2004, at the age of 75, at a hospital in France due to an unknown illness, amidst Palestinian accusations to Israel of poisoning him. Israel denies such accusations.

Arafat's wife has resorted to the French judiciary to look into her husband's death, but no results were made public.

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