

Palestinian president says U.S. administration doesn't help establishment of regional peace and security



Ramallah, August 30 (RHC)-- Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has accused U.S. President Donald Trump's administration of unwillingness to help establishment of peace and security across the Middle East region.

Speaking at a joint conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin on Thursday, Abbas stated that U.S. officials have removed the fundamental issues of occupied al-Quds, Palestinian refugees, establishment of an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders and the Israeli regime's settlement expansion policies off the negotiating table.

He stressed that negotiations to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict must be placed under total international sponsorship, calling on all European states to recognize the State of Palestine.

Such recognition would boost hopes, help promotion of justice, support the Palestinian nation's right to self-determination and end the Israeli occupation, Abbas pointed out, adding that such a measure does not run contrary to negotiations between Palestinians and the Tel Aviv regime.

Abbas also underscored that he would brief Merkel on the obstacles placed by Israeli authorities as regards the so-called two-state solution, including ongoing settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territories, attempts to alter the character and status of East al-Quds, the crippling siege on the Gaza Strip, Tel Aviv's reneging on all signed agreements and withholding Palestinian tax revenues, which have had grave impacts on the lives of Palestinians.

He further noted that Palestinians would continue to build their own national institutions in accordance with the rule of law, propagate the culture of peace and confront terrorism.

The Palestinian president condemned the use of violence against civilians as well as all forms of racism and discrimination, and underlined his respect for all divine religions.

Merkel, for her part, said a so-called two-state solution is needed in order to resolve the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "We agreed with President Abbas that we are keen to work on a two-state solution even if it is very difficult and has big complications.... In the current phase where we see more speechlessness we believe that it is important to maintain the security partnership between the Israeli and Palestinian territories," she said.

"I have expressed my mind critically to the Israeli prime minister [Benjamin Netanyahu] many times that ... these settlement activities are counter-productive," she added.

Back in February, the United States ended all financial aid for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip.

Last year, Washington cut hundreds of millions of dollars of aid to Palestinians, which included funding of humanitarian projects such as health, education and infrastructure. The measure was widely viewed as a way of pressing Palestinian officials to restart peace talks with Israel.

The last round of Israeli-Palestinian talks collapsed in 2014. Among the major sticking points in those negotiations was Israel's continued settlement expansion on Palestinian territories.

President Donald Trump's administration has also ended all US funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). It had previously been the largest donor to the UN agency, giving more than \$360 million in 2017.

Moreover, the U.S. government has suspended scholarships awarded to Palestinian students, and hundreds of Palestinian and foreign workers working on U.S.-funded programs have lost their jobs as well.

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