

# *Palestinian Factions Reach Consensus Deal After 7-Year Rift*

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Ramallah, April 24 (RHC)-- The two leading Palestinian factions have announced a reconciliation deal aimed at healing a seven-year rift. The agreement between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas calls for the formation of a consensus government within five weeks followed by elections in six months.

Hamas Prime Minister Ismaiel Haniyeh helped unveil the deal in Gaza. He said: "This is good news to tell our Palestinian nation in the country and in the diaspora about the end of the era of division." He added that President Mahmoud Abbas "will start the discussions to form the unity government from today and he should announce it within the legal time, within five weeks."

The two sides have been at odds since Hamas thwarted a U.S.-backed coup attempt by the Palestinian Authority seven years ago. The Israeli government has denounced the agreement, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu saying that the Palestinian Authority needs to choose between peace talks and Hamas.

The U.S.-brokered talks have faltered over Israel's continued settlement building in the occupied West Bank. On Tuesday, the State Department criticized the Palestinian reconciliation effort, saying it would "seriously complicate" peace talks. The United States and Israel have long called on Hamas to renounce violence, recognize Israel's right to exist and follow preexisting agreements, but without asking Israel to reciprocate.

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