

From a liberation movement to a modern democratic party

**Alexandria Conference,
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From a liberation movement to a modern democratic party

At the Socialist international council meeting in Rome 2003 discussions were held between the Social Democratic Party of Sweden, ANC of South Africa and Al Fatah from Palestine. The starting point was the fact that Al Fatah had not had a democratic congress in 14 years, and it was affecting the notion of the party. The Israeli occupation made it difficult to hold a congress, but at the same time other organisations like ANC had managed to fulfil the internal democracy while fighting the racist regime. Could there be lessons to be learned and experiences to share between liberation movements in their transformation to modern political parties?

A liberation movement has to be centralised and secretive while a modern party has to be influenced from the members and transparent. This is not an easy transformation. We all know the disastrous result when this process is not successful, like in Zimbabwe.

The Swedish Social Democratic Party offered to, together with the Olof Palme International Center, organise and host seminars where these issues could be discussed. These seminars were held with ANC, Al Fatah and the Swedish hosts as participants:

Stockholm 2003: Seminar on peaceful conflict resolution, reconciliation, future cooperation with oppressors.

Johannesburg and Cape Town 2007: Internal democracy during oppression, party democracy when in government, congress preparation.

Johannesburg and Polokwane 2008: All aspects of a national party congress.

In bilateral discussions between PUK of Iraq and the Social Democratic Party of Sweden, PUK raised the same issues as we were already discussing with ANC and Al Fatah. Together we decided to enlarge the group and invite PUK to our next seminar, in Alexandria, February 2010.

This booklet is a report from that seminar. We sincerely hope that it could be an inspiration to other parties, movements and persons in their work.

Ann Linde
International secretary
Swedish Social Democratic Party

Olle Burell
Deputy Secretary General
Olof Palme International Center

The current situation of the parties

From 8 to 11 February 2010, representatives from three political parties - Palestinian Al-Fatah, Iraqi PUK and South African ANC- met in Alexandria, Egypt, to discuss their transformations from liberation movements to democratic parties. It was their fourth meeting arranged by the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the Olof Palme International Center. The conference started with an update about the movement's developments since the last meeting in South Africa in 2008.



*From the left:
Samia Bamieh,
Al Fatah;
Dr Nabeel Shaath,
Al Fatah;
Dr Salman
Salman, Al Fatah,
and Ann Linde,
Swedish Social
Democratic Party*

- We still see us as a liberation movement. It allows us to embrace anyone who wants to join ANC and the objective of our liberation struggle is not reached; to transform the society into a society that is engaged in itself, said Dumisani Job Sithole, former member of the South African parliament and chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Committee of ANC.

ANC (African National Congress) was one of three liberation movements that participated in the conference at the Swedish Institute in Alexandria. The other two were Al-Fatah from Palestine and PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) from Iraqi Kurdistan. All of them were formed as pure resistance/liberation movements that used armed struggle as one of the means to reach their goals. Today their guns have silenced. All of them are in governance positions, but still see themselves as liberation movements.

ANC – African National Congress

ANC started its non violent struggle in 1912 against the institutionalized racism and disfranchising of the black majority by the white minority of settlers in South Africa. The movements' objectives were set up in the 1955 Freedom Charter, and mainly revolved around ending the apartheid rule and create a democratic society free of racial discrimination. Following the banning of ANC in 1960 and a campaign of violent repression, its armed wing was formed. The four pillars of ANC's struggle; internal mass mobilisation; international

mobilization, underground work and military struggle, were combined with secret negotiations between the government and ANC in the end of the 1980s. ANC gained support for their cause by international sanctions against the apartheid regime. This, and ANC's unilaterally suspension of the armed struggle, led to the lifting of the ban of the movement in 1990. Further negotiations resulted in an interim constitution. The first democratic elections took place in April 1994. ANC won and have been in power ever since.

ANC has a structure of participatory democracy with branches serving as basic consultative units followed by regional, provincial and then national structures. Delegates to regional, provincial and national conferences are elected at branch level. Leadership is elected at these conferences.

*From the left:
Gunnar Stenarv,
Swedish Social
Democratic Party;
Olle Thorell, Swedish
Social Democratic Party,
and Dumisani Job
Sithole, ANC*



- ANC is still led by older generations, but has put in young people in the parliament to learn from the old. The problem is, that if you want to be a member of parliament it is the branch of your area who decides it and then the other branches of the province have to agree on it. You have to go through this process if you want to reach to power. 80 percent of the people in the parliament are directly nominated by the branches. This reduces the possibilities to reach the power, says Dumisani Job Sithole.

ANC's last victory was in the elections of April 2009.

- The new government has a lot of challenges to deal with, for example crime, corruption and the economy. We are concentrating on improving health, education, living conditions, job opportunities and the whole society, says Dumisani Job Sithole.

Al-Fatah

Al-Fatah is the main movement in PLO. It was founded in 1954 with the objective to liberate Palestine from the Israeli occupation and create a democratic, secular state based on equality between all religious and ethnic groups. The majority of Al-Fatah's leadership were based abroad. In 1965 it launched its armed struggle, which escalated after the Arab defeat in the 1967 war and the following Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. In December 1987 the first intifada broke out in Palestine. Four years later secret negotiations between PLO and Israel began, which resulted in the Oslo agreements 1993 and a peace process. A Palestinian National Authority (PNA) was established in the West Bank and Gaza. Fatah's leader Yasser

Arafat returned to Palestine where the PNA started to build national institutions. The failures of the negotiations to reach a permanent settlement lead to a stalemate in the peace process and to the eruption of a second intifada in year 2000. The Israelis intensified their siege of the Palestinian territories and settlements increased, while the Palestinian armed resistance stepped up. The Israelis reoccupied the West Bank and besieged Yasser Arafat. After the death of Yasser Arafat, in 2004, Mahmoud Abbas resumed the leadership of Fatah and was elected Palestinian president.

In 2006 legislative elections was held in the Palestinian Territories. The Islamic Hamas movement won in Gaza which led to international and Israeli sanctions against PNA. In early 2007 a national unity government was formed, but Hamas conducted a military coup in Gaza and took over the PNA institutions there.

- Since our last meeting in South Africa 2008 some important changes have taken place. Mostly negative in the environment, but many positive within Fatah, says Dr Nabeel Shaath from Fatah's Central Committee and Commissioner General of Foreign Relations.

He says that the deterioration of the peace process have left the Palestinian people with little hope that it will lead to any good.

- Some good changes have happened during the process. We have gained more international support and many in Israel accept the idea of a Palestinian state. We have started to build state institutions, 250 000 Palestinians have returned home and the Israeli deportations of people have stopped. But for now, there is a total Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Israel does not accept our self rule. We are strictly prevented from moving freely in our territory. Israeli laws are implemented on occupied land and people are arrested. The Palestinians are now divided between Palestine and Israel, and between Gaza and the West Bank. We are facing many challenges because of this in our state building and in the reconstruction of Fatah, say Dr Nabeel Shaath.

In August 2009 Fatah launched their 6th national congress in Bethlehem, the first one in 20 years. It was attended by more than 2 000 delegates.

- It was successful, but not in everything. Nobody from Gaza or Israel was able to attend. But it was the first Fatah-congress ever to be held in Palestine, continues Dr Nabeel Shaath.

He describes the result of the elections during the congress as a "shock of democracy". Two thirds of the old guard in the Central Committee were defeated by younger members. The Revolution Council was also rejuvenated.

- The congress adapted a full-fledged political program with many changes in Fatah's charter and a program of national construction outside Fatah. We can now move on in the democratic process. Also in the liberation struggle, because it is not completed. We have regained as freedom movement, for being reconstructed as a political party, but as a liberation movement that is not going back to armed struggle. We have put in young activists and will struggle to pursue Israel as an apartheid country by using international laws, explains Dr Nabeel Shaath.

PUK – Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

PUK is one of the main parties in the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in the Iraqi federation. Its General Secretary, Mr Jalal Talabani, is the president of Iraq.

- But we are in a similar situation as ANC and Fatah. We are not finished with the issue of Iraqi Kurdistan. So we can not abandon our goals as a liberation movement yet, says Abdul-Razzaq Mirza, former minister of Humanitarian Affairs in KRG, from PUK.

The issue is about areas in Iraq that PUK regards as parts of Kurdistan, but that are not under the authority of KRG. PUK was formed in 1975 by different Kurdish nationalist groupings inside

and outside Iraq with visions of change in Kurdistan, Iraq and the Middle East along revolutionary lines. It cooperated with leftist and democratically oriented political forces, in countries where Kurds live. During the 1980's, PUK started to glide from Marxism towards social democracy.

- Since the 1980's we have given up the idea of a Greater Kurdistan and are instead working for the establishment of democratic systems in the countries where the Kurds are living. We hope they will be federal states where the Kurds enjoy their cultural, economical and other rights, says Sheikmous Omar, former member of the Politburo of PUK. PUK is still committed to federalism in Iraq.

The Iraqi Kurdistan region as a political entity was established as a US and Allied protective "no-fly-zone" in 1991 after the first Gulf War. The region held the first democratic elections in May 1992 which resulted in a united Kurdish coalition government between PUK, KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) and some minor organisations. In 1994 fighting flared up between KDP and PUK and led to two parallel Kurdistan Regional Governments. The fighting continued intermittently until 1998. First in 2006 a united KRG was formed again.

- Since 2008 PUK has been going through a number of positive developments, but there has also been a split in our ranks. A fraction within PUK left us and formed the "Goran-Change movement", says Sheikmous Omar.

PUK formed an election alliance with KDP and some minor parties for the elections to the Kurdish Regional Assembly in July 2009. The alliance won more than 60 percent of the votes. A new Kurdistan Regional Government was formed in a power sharing agreement. In October 2009 the fourth Plenum of PUK was held.

- It was attended by 1 400 delegates. One third of the delegates were women and another third were delegates of youth, students and grass root organizations. The delegates spoke very openly and criticised the leadership, says Sheikmous Omar.

He says that PUK still suffer from many ills, like lack of transparency, corruption and low tolerance for the opposition.

- The positive thing is that we are aware of these shortcomings. There is a strong will to find solutions, says Sheikmous Omar.

During the Plenum it was decided that an independent anti-corruption and transparency commission should be established to investigate all the organs and leaders of PUK. A process of reform, renewal and change would continue to include more women and youth in PUK. The party organizations would stop interfering in the work of KRG and a democratic dialogue would be initiated with all the political movements in Iraqi Kurdistan for the formation of a united coalition in the general elections in Iraq on March 7, 2010. The General Secretary of PUK, Mr Jalal Talabani, has agreed to nominate himself for a new mandate as President of Iraq. The third General Congress of PUK will be held on 1 June in Sulaimania, Iraq.

Parties has to represent the wider population

A liberation movement that want to become a political party has to leave war time political tactics behind and develop new political strategies. This includes political campaigns to attract popular support in elections, but also organizing a party that represents the wider population.

In Al Fatah and PUK women are underrepresented in the organizational structures, but not in ANC.

- In all ANC structures there are 50 percent women and 50 percent men, says Dumisani Job Sithole from ANC.

This was reflected on ANC's candidate lists to the South African elections in 2009. The South African Municipal Structures Act specifies that every party must seek to ensure that fifty per cent of the candidates on the party list are women and that the women and men candidates are evenly distributed through the list. Today more than 45 percent of the seats in the South African National Congress are allocated to women, which has given South Africa a third place in the global ranking for women's representation in parliament.

No women in Al Fatah's Central Committee

Al Fatah's new Political Platform from 2009 declares a broadening and strengthening of the role of women in the movement and encourages their presence in leading positions. It also states that the results of the recent elections of the National Congress proved the need of developing the role of Al Fatah's female cadre. No women were elected to Al Fatah's 23-member Central Committee. It still keeps at least one position left to appoint a woman, but no decision has been taken yet in the nominees.

- We asked for a 30 percent female quota for the Revolutionary Council and the Central Committee, but it was dismissed, explains Samia Bamieh from Al Fatah and a member of the Foreign Relation Executive Council and advisor for Europe Affairs.

Thirteen women were elected to the 120-member Revolutionary Council.

- Now these women have brought up the issue about 30 percent quotas in all levels of Al Fatah, inclusive the branches. The Revolutionary Council has adopted an "at least 20 percent female quota", says Samia Bamieh.

High competition among men and conservatism leaves women out

Samia Bamieh thinks that one of the reasons to the dismissal of the quota was the high competition between men. The women were forgotten. She also suspects that it was influenced by conservative men.

- Fatah is a movement, not an ideological party, and the Palestinian society has become more conservative. There are a lot of democratic and progressive men in Al Fatah, but also conservatives. The attitude is "we already have so many problems; we don't need problems with women too", she says.

All the declarations of Al Fatah state that there shall be no discrimination in the movement, but according to Samia Bamieh there is no clear vision of women issues.

- We want a decision of what kind of vision Fatah should have about women in the party and in society. If women are underrepresented in the party there is no social platform that represents them. It affects women in society directly and indirectly, but also the structure of Al Fatah, its mind set etcetera, she says.

Samia Bamieh is a member of the General Union of Palestinian Women, a coalition of women organisations related to the PLO, which is working for increased gender equality within their parties and in the society.

- Regarding the society, we have more challenges than before because Hamas is doing the opposite. Within Al Fatah one thing is clear; we are not alone. There are many democratic men that are allied with us. We will use them more, she explains.

Kurdistan is a patriarchal society

Both Palestine and Kurdistan are patriarchal societies. Berivan Dosky, from PUK, is a diplomat at the Iraqi embassy in Syria. She explains that people in Kurdistan are not used to see women in high political positions.

- Therefore it is very important to create tools for women to gain posts in the party and the institutions, she says.



*From the left:
Berivan Dosky, PUK;
Abdul-Razzaq Mirza,
PUK and Sheikmous
Omar, PUK*

Within PUK 25 percent are women, but there are no women in the politburo.

- There is a need of reviewing the plans and programs of PUK regarding women. At the last PUK-plenum we had important talks about women's rights and many women participated. It resulted in a resolution of a "process of change" which will include more women, says Berivan Dosky. Regarding the governance of Iraqi Kurdistan she says that the old generation of men occupy most of the important positions.

- But Kurdish women are raising their voices and are very active. We have succeeded to make some changes in the laws to the advantages of women, she says.

There is a 25 percent quota for women in the regional Kurdish parliament and government.

- It is not enough and it is degrading for women to enter government by quota, but at this stage it is vital. Otherwise there would not be any female representation at all. Men would not vote on us. It is a way to prepare the society for the real representation of women, explains Berivan Dosky.

Dealing with the opposition

Another topic was how to deal with the opposition in nonviolent ways. Dumisani Job Sithole, from ANC, says that since South Africa was liberated, the battles with the opposition are limited to discussions in the parliament.

- We discuss the issues and always manage to deal with them, he says.

Three times groups have splintered from PUK, the last time in 2009. Until 1998 there were several armed clashes between the militias of PUK and other militias. Since 2006 there is a joint Kurdish regional government, based on elections, with all the Kurdish political movements, except two.

- PUK will never use military force again against any movement in Kurdistan. Our main problem is undemocratic movements in Iraq and Kurdistan. We had two examples in Kurdistan. Both of them were Islamic movements who now have been expelled after causing a lot of problems. We unfortunately had to handle them military, says Sheikhmous Omar.

The members of these groups will be given amnesty from time to time.

- Hopefully that will attract their followers. It is social roots that create this kind of groups. We are now dealing with these roots, corruption for example, and are mobilising public opinion against them through peaceful means, says Sheikhmous Omar.

PUK even helped the splinter group, Goran, financially.

- In Kurdistan KDP and PUK managed to get most of the money from the central government. If we do not help the smaller parties they will end up in a difficult situation. There is no complete split between us and Goran. We are in dialogue and they might join our ranks again. We are tired of splits and conflicts, that is why we have this moderate attitude, says Sheikhmous Omar.

In Palestine the issues between Al Fatah and Hamas are still unsolved.

- There have been struggles between Al Fatah and other Palestinian fractions from time to time, but with Marxists and other groups we always came together again under the PLO-umbrella. With Hamas it has turned to the worse. We disagree about so many things, says Dr Nabeel Shaath.

- Our goal is a National Unity Government with Hamas. It would help us in the preparation for the elections in June and to bring back the democratic life in Palestine, says Faraj Zayoud, from International Relations Office, Al Fatah.

Demilitarization of the movement

The development of a party organisation requires the demilitarization of the structure. The reintegration of ex-rebel fighters into the society has proved to be very difficult.

When the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan became more stable, tens of thousands of combatants from PUK and other Kurdish liberation movements, returned from their hideouts in the mountains.

- They were good fighters, but were not qualified to be integrated in the new administration or in the education system. They had very small resources to start a new life. In the beginning they were neglected. They were very irritated and became a social problem, so we started to think about programs and policies for them, says Sheikmous Omar, former member of the Politburo of PUK.

Welfare program for military veterans in Iraq

PUK studied how other countries had dealt with the issue and at the same time the ex-combatants organized themselves in associations, which pressured the Regional Kurdish Government (KRG). This led to the establishment of an authority of veterans' affairs.

- Since then pensions are guaranteed to older veterans. The homeless can get a piece of land and loans to build houses. They can apply for special scholarships for studies and we have made it easier for their children to continue their studies to higher levels or abroad. In 2003 an agreement was signed with the central government about a welfare program for all military veterans in the Iraqi Federation, says Sheikmous Omar.

During Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1970s and 1980s hundreds of thousands of persons disappeared or were executed in Kurdish villages. For the survivors of these families and those of combatants killed in battles there is a special institution where they can receive help. Many ex-combatants in Iraqi Kurdistan have been integrated into the police forces and the regular Iraqi army.

- The integration in the army was quite an easy task. We had already started the process in 1992 when the first Kurdish coalition government was formed. At that time Iraq was still ruled by Saddam Hussein, so we needed our freedom fighters, but founded a military academy. Former Kurdish officers from the Iraqi army trained them, explains Abdul-Razzaq Mirza from PUK and former minister of Humanitarian Affairs in KRG.

Ex-combatants in Palestine

A lot of Al Fatah's ex-combatants are still outside the Palestinian territories.

- They are prevented to return by Israel. Others are still in Israeli prisons, so we have not got a clear policy of how to deal with them. We are still in the procedure, says Dr Salman Salman from Fatah.

He says that ex-combatants who are committed to the peace process have fewer problems than those who are against it.

- If you agree on the peace process - your life is good. If you are against it - it will not be that good. If you stay on the old course you will suffer more, explains Dr Salman Salman.

According to Dr Salman Salman Al Fatah's ex-combatants in Palestine didn't end up outside the society. Rather the opposite.

- They used to be our leaders and get preference treatment. Many of the employees in the Palestinian Authorities are ex-combatants. They have never been a problem for our society and have two organisations represented in the league of old veterans. Prisoners that have been in jail for more than five years get regularly payments from the Ministry of Detainees, he says. Many ex-combatants have joined the police and security forces.

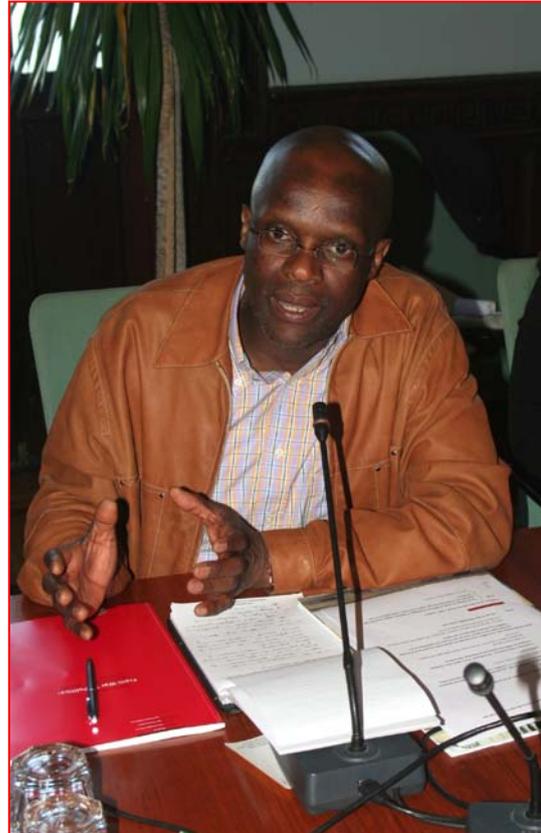
- And their salary is above the regular, but recently there has been a new trend to feed the security forces with new blood, says Dr Salman Salman.

Veterans in South Africa had to look for new jobs

After ANC won the elections in 1994, a new national army was formed by elements of the former liberation forces and the old apartheid state army. But far from all were integrated. Samson Phathakge Makwetla, deputy minister of Defence and Military Veterans, from ANC, says that the ex-combatants in general were neglected.

Many of our veterans were based outside South Africa where they received money during the struggle. When they returned they had to look for new jobs. They were not that kind of human resources we needed in South Africa at that time. We had to prove that we could run a state. To look after the ones who were not quick on their feet – the old guard that had been in the underground, jail or exile - was not a big priority. The memberships in ANC were mainly gained by young people who came to the political meetings and wanted to reach positions within ANC, he says.

ANC has studied how liberation movements in other countries dealt with the issue of ex-combatants.



Samson Phathakge Makwetla, ANC

- We have dealt with destitute among military veterans, but they are not included in the main stream policy of the governments' development of society. They can be resources, not just problems that have to be dealt with. Our policy to military veterans must be drafted with the broad policy of social development, not just in some projects or programs, he says.

In December, 2009, the Veterans League was established within the structure of ANC.

- So now the old guard has a constitutional place in ANC. What the Veterans League will be remains to be seen. It depends on how the veterans will fit into the organisation and how the current membership will respond to the inputs, says Samson Phathakge Makwetla.

Research on the transitions from liberation struggle to party politics

Research on the transformation of liberation movements to political parties is a growing academic field that different actors show an increased interest in.

- This will be personal useful for me. For the first time I have seen an integrated system based on facts and analyses that might help us to plan for the future, said Dr Nabeel Shaath from Al Fatah, after listening to the session “Transitions from liberation struggle to Party Politics – Lessons Learned”.

Dr Véronique Dudouet, researcher at The Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management in Berlin, was in charge of the session which was based on facts from the project “Resistance/Liberation Movements and Transitions to Politics”.



*Dr Véronique Dudouet,
The Berghof Research
Center for Constructive
Conflict Management,
Berlin*

- Resistance movements are in general misunderstood by the international community. We are trying to breach this gap by our research of how different liberation and resistance movements took the decisions and went through the process to become political parties. Lessons can be learned by bringing the actors together and have discussions, says Dr Véronique Dudouet.

Search for new ways to deal with liberation movements

Dr Véronique Dudouet thinks that it is a growing academic research field.

- There is also an increasing interest from states, institutions, parties and liberation movements. I think many governments have realised that counter insurgency is not a fruitful way to deal with liberation movements. They are searching after new ways to deal with them, like letting them in for talks, says Dr Véronique Dudouet.

The Berghof Research Center has a network of 15-20 former, or active, liberation movements.

- In the past we contacted them, now they contact us to be a part of the network. They want to gain insight from other liberation movements and learn from their experiences. I think our methodology, to bring all into one room and have constructive dialogues, attracts them, she says.

The project has been going on for three years and includes nine liberation movements. All of them, except one, are today in governing positions. Dr Véronique Dudouet presented factors which facilitate the transition from liberation movements to effective political parties. The first one is to formulate new goals and strategies. This includes adapting wartime revolutionary program to new context and set reasonable expectations.

- In the post-war period liberation movements often develop from radical leftist programs to more social democratic, explains Dr Véronique Dudouet.

Decentralised decision-making

Other factors are internal capacity-building for party politics and governance, and the development of intra-party democracy. The structures in many liberation movements are top-down. Often the executive authority rests with one person. This might be successful for military operations, but in a political party the decision making is decentralised and open to internal debate.

- The transition to a political party has proved to be much easier when a movement already is decentralised, says Dr Véronique Dudouet.

Nothing proves that the best guerrilla fighters also are the best party leaders or ministers.

- There might be a need of changing the leadership. It is important with a pragmatic and visionary leadership and to avoid fossilisation, says Dr Dudouet.

Other crucial factors are to maintain internal cohesion to avoid splits and fractions.

- To prevent this from happening it is very important to provide continued support to all the members, says Dr Véronique Dudouet.

It is also necessary to consolidate and broaden the movement's/party's support base. Dr Véronique Dudouet mentions the ANC as a successful example of an organisation that managed to create an inclusive program which cuts across racial and ideological party lines. There is also a need to diversify the political participation to local politics, civil society organisations and administration. To avoid ending up as a dictatorship, a democratisation of the political system has to take place by constitutional reforms, elections and power sharing provisions to accommodate groups formerly denied representation.

- And of course it is also important to get international recognition and support, like this conference, says Dr Véronique Dudouet.

Limitations of the research

Dr Véronique Dudouet admits that the research have some limitations.

- Al Fatah's situation has unique features because the Palestinians are still under occupation.

Our research is also limited to "nice" liberation movements. There are freedom movements that do not want to become political parties or do not even know their political goals. But they are out of the focus of our studies, explains Dr Véronique Dudouet.

For most of the participants it was the first time they heard about the research.

- I did not know that it existed. I found a lot of advice and ideas about how to deal with problems that occurs in the transformation process. Instead of experimenting and trying different strategies on our own, this study provides us with ideas, says Sheikmous Omar from PUK.

- I had no idea that it was of academic interest. It will be interesting to see what further research will find out. But for ANC, we don't worry if we are defined as a party or not. "Political party" is an academic term and we will not spend time on trying to be defined as it, says Dumisani Job Sithole from ANC.

Rule under occupation

In most cases the issues that ignited a liberation movement's struggle have been solved before it becomes a political party. This is not the case for Al Fatah.

The West Bank, where Al Fatah is the main party in the PNA, is still under Israeli occupation and the number of Israeli settlements is increasing. This leaves Al Fatah in a schizophrenic situation where it has to be a liberation movement at the same time as it is regarded as a party within an independent state.

- This combination is very hard to meet and it is certain to make huge failures, says Dr Salman Salman, member of Al Fatah's Foreign Relation Council and of the North America Committee.

Al Fatah has not officially cancelled their armed struggle.

- The Palestinian people do not think things will be settled. They see the opposite every day. It is important to them that we do not give up the concept of armed struggle officially, but it is just one of the means to resist the occupation. Now we have decided to put all priority on nonviolent means, like demonstrations, says Dr Salman Salman.

The occupation affects all democratic structures

He says the occupation affects both the democratic structure of Al Fatah, the PNA and the overall democratic process in the West Bank. Before the establishment of the PNA, Al Fatah operated underground in Palestine, but its leadership abroad could officially decide the direction of the movement's politics.

- When Arafat and the rest of the leadership returned to Palestine they became very restricted. The political elite in Palestine were established before the liberation and cannot make any free choices, says Dr Salman Salman.



*Dr Nabeel Shaath, Al Fatah,
and Dr Salman Salman, Al
Fatah*

Dr Salman Salman says that the transformation of the political power structure and its ranks within PNA, 1996 – 2000, was very influenced by corruption, but also by the occupation interfering.

- A new elite has been created that is controlled directly by the occupation. Within Al Fatah most of the hardcore types that were against the peace process have left the party. The independents that were in favour of the peace process stayed, but there was also a mass influx of people who had their own agenda, not Al Fatah's agenda. I would say that they are

influenced by Israel - Israel can make a person's life a hell if they want to. If you are accommodated to the occupation it will be easier for you. If you are very much against it, you can easily get paralyzed – look what happened to Mr Arafat, says Dr Salman Salman.

He says that the transitional role of the PLO and the PNA from liberation to serving the daily life has been disrupted on many occasions by direct interference of the Israeli security or military forces.

- We do not want to claim that occupation prevents the growth of internal democratic structures of the parties, but we can say with certainty that we cannot establish a governing democratic structure for the people when we are under occupation.

Checkpoints constrain community services

Dr Nabeel Shaath describes how the Israeli security checkpoints, that divide most of the Palestinian cities and interconnections between cities, make it very difficult to provide different kinds of community services, like garbage management.

- We cannot even take out the garbage from some areas, everything is in the hands of the Israelis to allow us or not. How is it possible to develop any community if it is not possible to travel between its different areas, he asks.

The participants from Al Fatah do not think that suggested solutions like concentrating on the political party role and rely on the international power's support for the final independence will work.

- In ANC' s case, the international community gave strong support at a certain point of their struggle. But Israel is above international law, says Samia Bamieh.

- Either the occupation ends and then the transformation from struggle of liberation to the governance can be handled, or the struggle will continue either in a one bi-national state or just keep going on as before, concludes Dr Salman Salman.

Central government stops reforms

PUK also see interference in their political work as a problem.

- There are still several limits for PUK to become a real political party which forms a government and delivers what it has promised to the people. The final decisions still have to come from the central government in Baghdad. For example, there are several laws in the criminal and punishment laws that we want to change, but cannot because the central government has to approve it first. It is the same with the education system which we want to reform because it is stereotypic and gender discriminatory. The policy of PUK and KRG is to govern in cooperation with the central government, but very often we feel handcuffed, says Berivan Dosky from PUK.

Questions to the participants

DR NABEEL A.R SHAATH, Member of Fatah Central Committee and Commissioner General of Foreign Relations



*** WHERE IS FATAH IN THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS FROM A LIBERATION MOVEMENT TO A POLITICAL PARTY?**

- We are going in two different directions. We are a party with a structure, organisation and elections to the Revolutionary Council and Central Committee. But at the same time we are moving more back to a liberation movement in terms of struggling against the Israeli occupation, but with nonviolent means.

*** WHAT IS THE MAIN OBSTACLE WITHIN AL FATAH FOR A SMOOTH TRANSFORMATION?**

- The separation of Gaza and the West Bank. The Al Fatah members in Gaza could not travel to our Congress in Bethlehem. They had to vote by telephone. This separation limits us and Al Fatah-members in Gaza are persecuted by Hamas. I hope – and work for – a peaceful solution so that we can rebuild the unity between Gaza and the West Bank.

*** ARE ANY RECENT STEPS TAKEN WITHIN AL FATAH FOR A SMOOTH TRANSFORMATION TO BECOME A POLITICAL PARTY?**

- We were able to cover all areas in the West Bank and Gaza in the preparation for the Congress. We have elected a new Revolutionary Council and Central Committee, which gave us the opportunity to rebuild the organisation from bottom up. A younger generation now have the ability to prove itself in the Central Committee. In the Revolutionary Council around 80 percent are under the age of 35, but there are also members from the older generation. We have the chance to rebuild the image of Al Fatah through our adoption of a nonviolent struggle against the occupation.

*** AL FATAH IS THE MAIN PARTY IN THE PNA - ARE THERE ANY POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE PNA?**

- We have an opportunity to work towards democracy, build our institutions, fight the occupation with nonviolent means and regain the trust of the Palestinian people. We have also made reforms in the security apparatus. The officers are retired after the age of 44. The new security force is disciplined and well trained; we even have traffic controls for the first time. This also means that some see it as we are protecting Israel since the security forces prevent attacks on Israel and the settlements. And the Israeli incursions on our territory are humiliating for the security forces. There is a building boom on the West Bank and the economy is a bit

better. But in Gaza the situation is terrible in all sectors. In Jerusalem we have no jurisdiction, which means that the Israelis are moving very fast forward with new settlements and house demolishing.

*** WHICH OF THE MOVEMENTS AT THIS CONFERENCE DO YOU REGARD AS MOST SIMILAR TO AL FATAH?**

- ANC. They also struggled against a government with racist overtones. The difference is that the blacks were in majority in South Africa and that they had reached a solution of how to live together with the white people before the liberation. And of course, we have different kinds of neighbours. We have Israel which Jewish identity is the most important protector for international pressure. We also have different grounds to start from. South Africa has many natural resources which gave them a rich ground to stand on. Historically Palestine has always been poor; our only resource is our people. The literacy is around 96 percent and the health is good, but because of the occupation our human resources are now restricted.

*** DO YOU FIND THIS KIND OF CONFERENCE FRUITFUL?**

- Yes, it is very fruitful. It is an opportunity to think and re-think in a friendly and open atmosphere. When you are in the middle of a struggle, you sometimes cannot see the forest for the trees. The networks that are created here will last for a long time.

ABDUL-RAZZAQ MIRZA, Former minister of Humanitarian Affairs in KRG (Kurdish Regional Government) in Iraq, PUK



*** IN WHAT STAGE IS PUK IN THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS FROM A LIBERATION MOVEMENT TO A POLITICAL PARTY?**

- We act and are organised like a civil political party, but in some aspects we are still a liberation movement. There are still Kurdish areas in Iraq that have not been reintegrated with the rest of Iraqi Kurdistan. We are negotiating with the central government in Baghdad about this.

*** WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES WITHIN PUK FOR A SMOOTH TRANSFORMATION?**

- There are no obstacles in the meaning that we cannot go on with the transformation, but like in any processes there are some problems. For example, we need support to build up a good cadre in PUK and Kurdistan. Regarding the disputed Kurdish areas, there will be a referendum in Iraq about their reintegration with Kurdistan. The problem is that the central government is delaying it.

*** WHAT KIND OF POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT HAVE OCCURRED AFTER PUK ENTERED THE ROAD TO A POLITICAL PARTY?**

- First of all, we do not lose our sons to the mountains or in the armed struggle anymore. They grow up in front of us. The stability in Iraqi Kurdistan that has followed after the formation of a regional government, has led to a big reconstruction boom, a lot of foreign investment and better economy. I am so happy to see how the civil life is flourishing, universities are opening, and we have the power of our own determination. This is what we hoped for when we entered the process.

*** DO YOU FIND THIS KIND OF CONFERENCE FRUITFUL?**

- Yes, we have the chance to discuss the problems in our country. Our brothers and sisters from South Africa and Palestine have given us a lot of ideas.

*** WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ABOUT THE ACADEMIC RESEARCH OF HOW LIBERATION MOVEMENTS BECOME POLITICAL PARTIES?**

- It is very important. It shows different kinds of means to develop a liberation movement to a political party. On the other hand, a movement like ANC had their own land after their objectives had been achieved. We, and the Palestinians, still have to deal with the “other side” - that is the main factor why we cannot develop directly into civil political parties. The research does not take into consideration that if the dialogues and discussions with the other side do not give results, the society will yield us for another liberation movement that put us outside. This is also a problem that has to be tackled. Hamas, for an example, emerged out of this.

DUMISANI JOB SITHOLE, Former member of Parliament and chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Committee, ANC



*** IN WHAT STAGE IS THE ANC IN THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS FROM A LIBERATION MOVEMENT TO A POLITICAL PARTY?**

- We go to elections as a political party, but we are still a liberation movement which struggle is not finished. We need to change the society and provide all people with clean water, electricity, decent houses, jobs and a lot of other things. We are mass driven and do not have a party leader that forms the policy – ANC forms the policy. We are not a political party with a few leaders who rule the country - ANC rules the country. While political party leaders travel around in their countries and promise things to the people to get their votes, ANC's president asks people in South Africa what they need – then we decide how we can help them. We recruit people if they accept the principles and constitution of the ANC, not because of their ideologies. Everyone can join ANC – marxists, conservatives, liberals, socialist, religious people and so on.

*** IS THE GOAL OF THE ANC TO BECOME A POLITICAL PARTY?**

- At some point maybe we will become a party, but the priority now is to create a national democratic state and that is long process. The environment does not allow us to become a political party because of poverty and a lot of other problems in our society. At our last congress we agreed upon that we still are a liberation movement. Our goal is not to be a party; it is to develop our movement. We do not come in and go out. We come in and stay with our people.

*** DO YOU FIND THIS KIND OF CONFERENCE FRUITFUL?**

- It is mutual beneficial. It is important for us to understand the difficulties for people in other areas of the world and their struggles. It is not enough to know that the Palestinians are struggling; you must meet them to understand. The Kurds, for example, I did not know much about their struggle. Parties that do not listen to others will have big problems. We can point at a certain experience and say “we did this; do not make the same mistake”. We do not believe we have the answers for all situations, we are a learning organisation and these conferences help us to deal with our own mistakes. In the future I would appreciate if not just senior party representatives attend the conferences. It would be more fruitful for the movements if they brought two seniors to interact with the other participants and one young to learn from it. If you are locked in your own country you think that life is all about you, but when you go abroad you realize that this is not the case. The young cadre must be introduced to the high levels of debates and of the world.

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