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dear doctor hisham

thank you for given me some of your time to make this article, i hope you will enjoy it and please if you have any remarks on it send it to me

yours student ahmad sub laban

**Legislators, analysts debate Arafat speech**

by Ahmad Sub Laban

WHILE MOST of President Yasser Arafat's speech to the Legislative Council on August 18 focused on the level of damage done by Israel to the infrastructure of PA institutions, his own commitment to a return to negotiations for peace and Israel shirking such negotiations, as well as on the prisoners' hunger strike, most commentary afterward focused on his remarks on reform.

Arafat acknowledged that mistakes had been made at the leadership level. "Not enough effort," he said, "was exerted into furthering the rule of law and the activation of the judicial system and into consecrating the principle of accountability."

He accused "some people" of abusing their positions and said the process of building institutions had not been "followed up as should be." He even said certain institutions had engaged in "wrong and detested practices."

His remarks caused a wave of commentary, with loyalists saying the remarks showed that Arafat was serious about reform and that the process had started, and critics, meanwhile, arguing his remarks did not broker anything new and were not specific enough.

"The President's speech was a good diagnosis of the Palestinian case," said Legislative Council Deputy Speaker Hasan Khreisheh, an often outspoken advocate of reform. "He sent various messages to various parties. He addressed the prisoner movement, the Israeli government and the international community. And for the first time, the president talked about mistakes carried out by officials in the Palestinian Authority against the people."

"It was a sound diagnosis and we could see the good intentions. But what we want is for these good intentions to be turned into real steps on the ground. Unfortunately until now, there has been no real change," Khreisheh told the Palestine Report.

"The occupation will end sooner or later but corruption will remain. If we do not fight it now, it will turn to steel – it will be almost impossible to shatter in the future," he added. "What we need is a political decision to conduct changes that will satisfy the Palestinian people."

After Arafat's speech, Legislative Council Speaker Rawhi Fatouh called on the president to issue a presidential decree to the security services, obliging them to heed the instructions of the prime and interior ministers.

According to the transcript of the PLC session, Fatouh told Arafat that, "your speech includes very important points. However, all the central forces will not commit themselves unless there is a presidential decree...so we need your signature on everything your speech included in the form of a decree." Arafat, however, refused, saying his stated intentions were enough and there was no need for a written decree.

The lack of specifics in the speech and the refusal to sign any decision into effect was what had critics most exercised. PLC member Abdel Jawad Saleh, in an August 19 interview with London-based Al Quds Al Arabi newspaper said, "This is not what we expected. We expected that the speech would include decisions and measures towards reaching reform."

Saleh also told the newspaper that Arafat's speech did not broach any details of reform, and criticized it for being general and full of slogans. "We did not detect any serious intentions towards real reform. It was a repetition of slogans with no real substance."

"What President Arafat said during his speech is not enough on its own," agreed Khreisheh. "We want real measures on the ground. Without these measures these statements will remain only good intentions."

Khreisheh also warned that the failure to adopt specific reform measures could lead some PLC members to call for the suspension of sessions of the legislature in protest.

Hisham Ahmed, professor of political science at Birzeit University, was also critical of the speech, though he laid the blame at the door of Arafat's advisors.

"In this speech, Abu Ammar [Arafat] was not the Abu Ammar the Palestinian people all know and love," Ahmed said. "It is time for him to realize that this is the time to ensure and protect his symbolic status. It is easy for those who followed the speech to tell that whoever wrote it planned on creating a gap between the leader and the people and to widen that gap as much as possible in order to make any attack on the president easier. This is where the true danger lies."

Ahmad sees the speech within the context of a series of steps, mainly advocated by Tel Aviv and Washington, to portray Arafat as an obstacle to progress. Tangible reform, believes Ahmed, can only occur through functional, structural and radical changes of those around Arafat, not, as the Americans and Israelis want, by replacing him.

"Abu Ammar should start with the inner circle around him. Remedy of the [wider] problem could then move forward from here."

As for Arafat's refusal to sign a presidential decree, Ahmad also attributed this to bad advice. "I would not be surprised if those behind Arafat's speech were also behind the president's refusal to sign decrees on the reform document, to politically assassinate him before his people at a time when his actual assassination by the Israelis has failed. The goal behind this could be to portray Abu Ammar as an obstacle to everything."

Meanwhile, Palestinians are ready for a new government free of the taint of corruption, said Khreishah. "We accept Ahmad Qrei' as our prime minister but with conditions. We want an accountable judicial authority and we want a unification of the security services under the leadership of people different from the present leaders. We also want real institution! al reform and proper representation of the Council's authority from which the government takes its legitimacy." -  
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