

UPDATE: HAMAS SINCE 2015

When this booklet on Hamas was first printed in 2015, Hamas and the Palestinian Authority had instituted a technocratic unified government. President Abbas in 2015 reshuffled the ministers in the cabinet without consulting Hamas, and Hamas reshuffled its vice-ministers in 2016 without consulting President Abbas. Subsequently, Hamas again governed Gaza alone.

Partially due to the fact that the U.S. continues to maintain that Hamas is a terrorist organization, and Israel continues to follow the lead of the U.S. in this matter, Hamas has never been able to take its position as the true winner of the majority vote in that previous election.

Although in 2020, Fatah and Hamas agreed to hold an election in all of Palestine and have a unified Palestine again, President Abbas in 2021 cancelled the election allegedly on the grounds that Israel would not allow East Jerusalem to participate in the election. Hamas was angry about the cancellation, and currently Palestine is still divided, the West Bank governed by the PLO and Gaza by Hamas.

In 2017, Hamas changed its Charter to comply with its agreement to accept the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This was a precondition for the U.S. to remove Hamas from the list of groups classed as terrorists.

From March 29, 2018, to December 27, 2019, the people of Gaza carried out demonstrations every Friday, near the border with Israel in what was called The Great March of Return. The people demanded that they be allowed to return to their homes in what is now Israel and that the blockade on Gaza, begun in 2007

when Hamas took over, be lifted. Hamas supported the demonstrations, although it did not initiate them. Israeli snipers and soldiers fired into the crowds and killed 489 people.

The UN Human Rights Commission found that perhaps two of the killings might have been justified, because the activities of these persons endangered Israelis. At least 9,204 demonstrators were shot, many with life-altering wounds. The Human Rights Commission recommended that Israel investigate whether war crimes or crimes against humanity had been committed by Israeli snipers and, if so, the soldiers should be brought to trial. Israel did not act upon that recommendation.

In 2009, the Palestinian Authority opened a case at the International Criminal Court against Israel for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Israel against Palestinians since 2002. The case was delayed, however, until January 2, 2019, when the government of Palestine joined the Rome Statute of the ICC following the UN General Assembly's granting Palestine "non-member observer state status." Subsequently, on April 30, 2020, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, ruled that "the Prosecution has carefully considered the observations of the participants and remains of the view that the Court has jurisdiction over the Occupied Palestine Territory." Bensouda thereby validated proceeding with the Palestinian case against Israel for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed since 2014. The case against Israel is expected to proceed, although Israel has not acceded to the court's jurisdiction.

In May of 2021, following Israeli aggressions against Palestinian refugees in Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in an attempt to evict them, and an assault on Palestinian worshipers at the Al Aqsa Mosque, as well as sporadic aerial

assaults on the Gaza Strip over several months, Hamas launched rockets into Israel, reaching as far as Tel Aviv. Although Israel was able to deflect most of these rockets, they were used as justification for a massive air campaign against Gaza, aimed primarily at destroying Hamas, but which saw the leveling of many large buildings, as well as residential areas, and included the bombing of hospitals, schools, clinics, and refugee camps. At least half of the victims were civilian women and children.

The Middle East Peace and Justice Action Committee of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom is troubled by the continued exclusion of Hamas from any discussions of peace. Although there are currently no peace talks under way, we believe that it is necessary for those talks to begin anew, and that representatives of Hamas should be allowed to take part in the talks, because their voice as the representative of a significant portion of the Palestinian population needs to be included. We believe that peace talks must be inclusive so that all voices will be heard. Without that taking place, decisions made would ring hollow, and a true peace could not take place.

We are calling upon U.S. governmental officials and institutions to learn about Hamas and help us in our quest to remove Hamas from the U.S. terrorist list and to help to reconvene peace talks that will include all parties. We offer this booklet, now updated with the information in this document, as a source to help in your decision-making.

For peace,

Barb Taft (co-author)