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Press releases

The European Union and Central Elections Commission Sign Partnership Agreement

Today, the European Union and the Central Elections Committee (CEC) signed, at the CEC headquarters in Ramallah, a partnership agreement to launch the EU funded project to support the CEC in strengthening the civic engagement and electoral participation of Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The partnership agreement was signed by the Chairman of the CEC, Dr Hanna Nasir and the Acting European Union Representative in Jerusalem Tomas Niklasson. Representatives from political parties and civil society organisations were also present.

The Chairman of the CEC, Dr Hanna Nasir, said during the ceremony that *"this agreement reflects the close partnership between the Commission and the European Union. The EU is a key partner to the CEC since its establishment. We are hopeful that the activities under this agreement will contribute to empowering democratic practices in Palestine. The Commission is ready to run elections as soon as requested by the political level. Although all political parties have informed us of their consent to participate in elections, however, the obstacle remaining is the participation of Jerusalemites, as holding elections in Jerusalem requires for the Israeli side to implement the signed agreements. The Israeli side have not expressed yet any interest in implementing those agreements"*.

For his part, the Acting European Union Representative Tomas Niklasson said: *"Palestinians face growing and serious challenges. The Israeli occupation comes at the top; however the absence of Palestinian national unity strikes as a major obstacle against achieving Palestinian goals and aspirations. This unity can only be achieved through free, fair and transparent elections. We are aware of the difficulties in that respect, whether in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank, and particularly in East Jerusalem; nevertheless we must not allow any obstacle to deprive the Palestinians from this basic human right. There are international agreements that must be respected and a right that must be preserved. In this context, the European Union urges all relevant parties to take the necessary decisions and steps in order to hold elections in all of the occupied Palestinian territory."*

The aims of the agreement are to maintain the readiness of the CEC for upcoming elections, to buttress its institutional capacity and to strengthen its civic engagement with election stakeholders. The agreement amounts to €2.1 million, of which the European Union is contributing €1.5 million.

The activities to be implemented in the West Bank and Gaza, as part of the agreement include enhancing the institutional capacity of the CEC, increasing Palestinian's participation in electoral and democratic processes, upgrading of CEC's new Headquarters and district offices, enabling political and electoral participation of persons with disabilities, and providing electoral awareness funds in partnership with Palestinian Civil Society Organizations.

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