

Islamic Resistance Movement

Hammas

Studies of
Thought & Experience

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Chapter Seven

Hamas's Vision for Political and Social Reform in Palestine

Dr. Hafez al-Karmi

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Introduction

The Hamas movement, according to its literature,¹ considers itself a jihadi movement in the broad sense of the term jihad. It is part of the Islamic revival movement aiming to reform various aspects of the nation, especially politically and socially, as it believes that revival and reform are the essential gateways to the liberation of Palestine.

Hamas frequently emphasizes its vision aimed at building a developed Palestinian civil society, and reform its social and political systems. It wants to fulfill the Palestinian national rights, taking into account the Israeli occupation of the land and its oppression of the people, and its direct meddling in all the details of Palestinians' life.

The researcher investigating this topic must dig deep into a number of important sources, to gain a clear image of Hamas's reformist vision. Perhaps one of the most important of these sources that realistically and honestly express this vision is the movement's Charter, in addition to various other Hamas documents and statements. The experience of the movement in union elections, municipal elections, and parliamentary elections, and then in forming the cabinet after its victory in the 2006 general elections—and what it published in this regard, including the electoral programs and practical policies—all constitute a rich source to shed light on all pieces of the puzzle. However, one must also not forget that Hamas is part of the global MB movement, as stated in its Charter.² Therefore, it

¹ See *Charter of Hamas*.

² *Ibid.*, Article 2, which states, "The Islamic Resistance Movement is one of the wings of Moslem Brotherhood in Palestine. Moslem Brotherhood Movement is a universal organization, which constitutes the largest Islamic movement in modern times. It is characterised by its deep understanding, accurate comprehension and its complete embrace of all Islamic concepts of all aspects of life, culture, creed, politics, economics, education, society, justice and judgment, the spreading of Islam, education, art, information, science of the occult and conversion to Islam," and the rest of life's ways.

ultimately draws inspiration for its reformist vision on political and social affairs from the movement's thought and approach.

First: Hamas's Vision for Political Reform

1. Hamas's Vision of the Concept of Political Action

Defining Hamas's vision of the concept of political action first requires: Determining the meaning of this term, because politics (*Siyasah*) in Arabic means linguistically: "Overseeing an affair in a matter that befits it."³ As a term politics means "The art of practicing leadership and power, and science of authority... which regulates public life, safeguards security, and maintains balance and harmony, through the power of legitimacy and sovereignty among individuals and groups..."⁴

Hamás does not deviate in its vision of political work from this definition. Indeed, in addition to being a national liberation movement, it is also an Islamic political movement: "The Movement's programme is Islam. From it, it draws its ideas, ways of thinking and understanding of the universe, life and man. It resorts to it for judgement in all its conduct, and it is inspired by it for guidance of its steps."⁵

Hamás, since its inception, has not overlooked or steered away from political action. Hamás is an offshoot of the MB movement in Palestine. In addition to its advocacy work, educational projects, and resistance activities, Hamás engaged in political work in different ways, moving smoothly from holding political seminars and rallies, to issuing statements and publications expressing its political views, to organizing demonstrations, strikes, and other forms of protests. Hamás became involved in student, syndicate, and various youth elections, which were another

³ See Murtada al-Zubaidi, *Taj al-'Arous fi Madat Sous* (Bride's Tiara in a Liquorice Material) (Beirut: Dar Sader, 1980), vol. 4, p. 164.

⁴ 'Alial-Sawwa, "The Movement and Political Work," in Jawad al-Hamad and Iyyad al-Barghouthi (eds.), *Dirasah fi al-Fikr al-Siyasi li Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah: Hamas: 1987-1996* (A Study on the Political Thought of the Islamic Resistance Movement: Hamas: 1987-1996) (Amman: MESC, 1997), pp. 185-186.

⁵ *Charter of Hamas*, Article 1.

facet of political action, amid Israeli prohibition and repression of Palestinian movements in general and Hamas in particular.⁶

To express its political views, Hamas relied on issuing statements, publications, and internal memos, which were the most important political means to Hamas for mass mobilization. This has also contributed significantly in raising awareness, education, mentoring, and developing the spirit of resistance, and was established as an indispensable bridge between the resistance movement and the masses, boosting confidence between the two sides.⁷ Hamas also sought to gain popular support for its vision of the Palestinian issue, and thus took part in syndicate elections in various sectors, where its position there became one of Hamas's most important means for political action in the WB and GS.

Rapid political developments imposed different modes of political action, according to circumstances and needs. The 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, led Hamas to build a political alliance comprising several Palestinian factions, which was a striking development in Hamas's political work. For it was able to come out into the open, from exclusively addressing its supporters in the Palestinian arena, to addressing the outside sphere and build local, regional, and international political relations.⁸ Hamas also emerged from the mentality of declaring its attitudes and political vision in statements and publications, to establishing an overt political bureau and going public with political symbols who spoke on behalf of Hamas, and who dealt in a daily manner with successive Palestinian developments.

Hamas has realized early on, that its work in resistance must be backed and furthered by political action and a strategic vision. It needs intellectual, social, cultural, educational, and civil institutions to support resistance activities and ensure their continuity and endurance... not to mention the need to show the size and political weight of the movement.⁹

⁶ See interview with Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, *Annahar*, Jerusalem, 30/4/1989.

⁷ Shaul Mishal and Reuben Aharoni, "Stones Are Not Everything," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 1, issue 1, Winter 1990, p. 137, <http://bit.ly/2ny4ijp> (in Arabic)

⁸ Mohsen Mohammad Saleh (ed.), *Qira'at Naqdiyyah fi Tajruba Hamas wa Hukumatih: 2006–2007* (Critical Assessments of the Experience of Hamas & its Government 2006–2007) (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations 2007), pp. 85–86.

⁹ Badr al-Din Mdawwakh, *Hamas's Experience in Power... Pairing Political Action with Resistance, Felesteen*, 1/1/2011.

Hence, we found Hamas, in subsequent periods, as it was proceeding in accordance with this vision, quickening the pace of its strides in political action until it began contending in municipal and legislative elections. This is how Hamas took a decision to participate in elections in all domains, for it saw this as one of the most important means to achieve its political vision,¹⁰ maintain its presence, and propose its vision for political reform.

2. The Determinants of Hamas's Political Work

Hamas, as it delved into this arena fraught with pitfalls and since it is involved in a complex issue like the Palestinian issue, has put for itself a set of determinants. It works, within its own vision, for the interest of its people. It believes that its work must take into account the concept of "legitimacy" while accommodating priorities, so that it neither gets politically isolated, nor falls into plans that are not consistent with its policy and ideology. In its electoral program in 2006, Hamas expressed this idea by stating that the absence of national fundamentals, or their ambiguity, lead our people into polarization and contradiction, consume their energy and efforts, squander their opportunities and time, damage their compass, and entice their enemies... It added that Hamas is governed by a number of specific fundamentals, that not only most of the Palestinian people agree on, but also the Arab and Muslim nation.¹¹

Hamas abides by a set of principles for its political action. It is well aware of the need to fully cling on to Islamic fundamentals based on the notions of "halal and haram," or what is prohibited and what is permissible.¹² This was expressed within the electoral program of the Change and Reform bloc affiliated to Hamas, which stated that Islam and its cultural achievements is its reference and way of life, with all its political, economic, social, and legal components.¹³ The movement

¹⁰ Mohammed Barhoma, "The Movement's Objectives and Methods," in Jawad al-Hamad and Iyyad al-Barghouthi (eds.), *Dirasah fi al-Fikr al-Siyasi li Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah: Hamas: 1987-1996* (A Study on the Political Thought of the Islamic Resistance Movement: Hamas: 1987-1996) (Amman: MESC, 1997), pp. 85-87; and see Moataz Samir Debs, *Internal Developments and Their Impact on the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) 2000-2009*, Master Thesis, School of Economics and Political Science, Al-Azhar University, Gaza, Palestine, 2010, pp. 10-12. (in Arabic)

¹¹ Change and Reform bloc, *Electoral Program for the 2nd legislative elections of 2006*.

¹² See 'Ali al-Sawwa, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

¹³ Change and Reform bloc, *Electoral Program for the 2nd legislative elections of 2006*.

was aware of the possibility of accepting partial goals that do not conflict with or detract from Islamic fundamentals. One example of this is that Hamas believes that Palestine is a land that should never be compromised in any part of it, and considers this one of the fundamentals, or core principles. In its electoral program, we read that historic Palestine is part of the Arab and Muslim land, the right of Palestinian people to their land has no statute of limitation, and that no military or so-called legal measures can change this.¹⁴ Furthermore, moving in accordance with what is unequivocally obligatory in Islamic law does not prevent balancing priorities.¹⁵

Hamas has believed in political freedoms for all, and stressed the principle of pluralism and resorting to the ballot box and peaceful power transfer. Hamas considered this the best framework to govern Palestinian political action, guarantee reform and fight corruption, and build a developed Palestinian civil society.¹⁶ Since resistance against the occupation is essential in Hamas's methodology, consenting to a temporary truce in order to hold political elections does not mean abandoning that methodology. For this reason, Hamas stated in its Charter:

The Islamic Resistance Movement is one of the links in the chain of the struggle against the Zionist invaders. It goes back to 1936, to the emergence of the martyr Izz al-Din al Qassam [al-Qassam] and his brethren the fighters, members of Moslem Brotherhood. It goes on to reach out and become one with another chain that includes the struggle of the Palestinians and Moslem Brotherhood in the 1948 war and the Jihad operations of the Moslem Brotherhood in 1968 and after.¹⁷

Hence, Hamas decided to rely on its previous principles in making its decisions. However, it is considered flexible when balancing its interests and priorities with the internal and external political equation, making what's best for the project of liberation.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ 'Ali al-Sawwa, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

¹⁶ Change and Reform bloc, Electoral Program for the 2nd legislative elections of 2006.

¹⁷ *Charter of Hamas*, Article 7.

¹⁸ See Ibrahim Abu al-Haija, Hamas's Political Thought... Approaches to the Constant and Variable, site of OnIslam, 19/3/2007, <http://www.onislam.net/arabic/newsanalysis/analysis-opinions/palestine/89271-2007-03-19%2017-08-42.html> (in Arabic)

Hence, Hamas's concept of political reform falls within the parameters set in its Charter and in the 2006 electoral program of the Change and Reform bloc, and it is implemented directly and indirectly. Hamas sought by all possible means to take its reformist vision to all political institutions that influence Palestinian political work.

3. Hamas's Vision of Political Reform Through the Political Institutions in the WB and GS

Hamas set out by participating in civil society elections, including syndicates, municipal, student, and youth elections a long time ago as we mentioned earlier, because elections are an important means for political reform in Hamas's political thinking. Hamas's leaders and figures often refer to the role undertaken by Hamas's student bodies since the 1970s and 1980s and until the eruption of the first *Intifadah* in 1987 in founding and shaping the political action of the movement, as these student bodies represented the early vessel for the political presence of the Islamic movement in Palestine. These elections took on special significance after that, amid the intense competition with the PLO¹⁹ over gaining supporters in the Palestinian arena. Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, founder of the movement, had explained the importance of elections by saying:

One of the issues being debated on the Palestinian arena today is the issue of elections, which the Islamists are hesitant about, between those who approve of participating in them and those who oppose. But I believe that participating in elections is better than not participating, because we object to what is happening in the street, so why not object at the heart of the legislative institution?²⁰

This shows that Hamas's vision of an effective political reform in the Palestinian arena focuses on working within the institutions. Nevertheless, a closer look at Hamas's ideology and its participation in these elections shows that it has different stances according to the type of elections. While it participated enthusiastically in student, union, and municipal elections, to demonstrate its weight in the street, it was clearly cautious about the legislative ones. For they are linked to peace settlement projects such as the autonomous rule or the Oslo Accords, which Hamas considered against the interests of the Palestinian people.²¹

¹⁹ Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Al-Fikr wa al-Mumarasah al-Siyasiyyah*, p. 239.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

Hamas refrained from contending in the 1996 elections, and the presidential elections in 2005. When subjective and objective circumstances were deemed suitable by Hamas, the movement participated in the PLC elections in 2006. It announced that its goal behind the move was

to fight corruption that has spread among the people, and which has become a major phenomenon that needs to be addressed quickly and effectively, because all our people in the WB and GS are harmed by these corrupt practices. The fight against corruption is the duty of the movement, and ending wastage in public funds, reinforcing the principle of accountability and transparency, and helping those who have been wronged are all part of the movement's missions.²²

For this reason, Hamas engaged itself in the Palestinian political project from its official and internationally recognized inlets, contending in four local and municipal elections in WB and GS in 2005. It stated, "It is the right of our people to live a decent life, and not to see their rights squandered, and to have equal opportunities; the movement will seek for the Legislative Council to become a platform for protecting people and their rights, and expose the corrupt and their corruption."²³

It won seats in the important populous municipalities, which demonstrated that Hamas is an important partner, if not the most important partner in the Palestinian arena. Hamas proved flexibility when it formed joint and alliance-type lists with other forces, even those that differ with it ideologically, but not with its reformist vision for Palestinian political institutions. These alliances gave Hamas an important wide popularity that extended beyond its own ranks.²⁴

The municipal elections did not force Hamas to pay political prices, while legislative and presidential elections that take place on political bases could push

²² *Al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah li Sanat 2006*, Document no. 4, p. 34.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ 'Adnan Abu 'Amer, *Qira'at fi Fawz Hamas fi al-Intikhabat al-Tashri'iyyah* (Overview Over Hamas's Victory in the Legislative Elections) (Gaza: Al-Yaman for Information and Training, 2006), vol. 1, press excerpts on the successes of the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas in the municipal elections, p. 2.

for offering these kinds of prices to serve Palestinian society, especially in what regards compulsory relations with the Israeli authorities in the daily dealings related to a people under occupation.²⁵

The popular support obtained by Hamas in syndicate and municipal elections since the 1980s was a motive for Hamas to participate in the PLC elections in 2006. It comes as a result of a strategy based on research and effective and gradual participation in power.

Entering the realm of direct political action with a great momentum was not easy for Hamas, because its supporters were clearly mobilized against the Oslo Accords and all their outcomes (the PLC and the Palestinian government). Hamas's reformist vision for the Palestinian establishment was important, but not as important as protecting its ranks against fragmentation and collapse, if its participation were to take place in an unsound and rushed manner. Thus, Hamas was keen on having its decision to enter legislative elections reflect the opinion of the majority of its institutions, leaders, and cadres on the ground. Hamas therefore worked on expanding its consultations at all levels and everywhere; in the WB, GS, and the Diaspora. It lobbied for the prisoners and detainees in Israeli jails to have their say and express their opinion. Hamas backed this with in-depth Islamic law and political studies, balancing the pros and cons of participating in the elections.²⁶ The opinion of the majority was clearly in favor of participating in PLC elections held on 25/1/2006.

Thus, after Hamas fortified its internal ranks and completed its internal preparations, it began reassuring its national partners to the fact that its reformist vision for Palestinian political action did not mean the marginalization or exclusion of the other. Hamas considered the responsibility is great and hence emphasized the principle of true and effective political partnership to maintain national unity and put the Palestinian house in order. Thus, holding on to the aspirations, goals, and concerns of the Palestinian people. Isma'il Haniyyah elaborated on this by saying that no person or faction, no matter how powerful and influential, has the right to monopolize managing the conflict or the project for liberation. The

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁶ See Islamic Movement, Ruling on Participation in the Palestinian Legislative Council (Islamic law study), PIC, it was published and distributed by Hamas to its cadres and members before the legislative elections in 2006. (in Arabic)

movement would remain faithful to Jerusalem and the right of return for Palestine refugees, and to liberating all prisoners from Israeli jails who are a great “symbol of jihad.”²⁷

It was clear that the movement's history of resistance operations against Israeli occupation had given Hamas great popularity, but political action does not live only on history. There must be a reform program to convince people to hand over the helm of political leadership to Hamas. For this reason, Hamas advanced the slogan “Change and Reform” in its campaign for the 2006 PLC elections.²⁸ Hamas pledged to crack down on corruption, an issue supported by the Palestinian public, who had long suffered from endemic corruption and its dangerous repercussions on the society. For Israel uses it to dominate and control the Palestinian people, undermine their unity, corrupt their resistance, and shatter their dreams of liberty and independence. This was the right time — in Hamas's view — to be by the people, through political and legislative work, in order to confront these challenges. Hamas also adopted a special slogan for the elections, “One Hand Builds and the Other Resists,”²⁹ which reached deeply into the consciousness of the Palestinian people and carried a lot of meanings and connotations.

By entering the political game, Hamas sought to reform the Palestinian political situation, protect the resistance program and implement it. Particularly so when the movement has suffered the PA's ill treatment, arresting Hamas cadres, seeking to disarm them, and labeling the movement a terrorist group, especially after the 11/9/2001 attacks.³⁰ Hamas also sought to advance the Palestinian society, achieve its aspirations, and preserve its fundamentals,³¹ and also reform the institutions. Hamas thus bore this slogan to combat corruption³² and express dissatisfaction with the internal Palestinian situation, which was mired in lawlessness, political stalemate, and weak government, and the failure of the security forces. This

²⁷ Press statement by Isma'il Haniyyah, at the press conference declaring the launch of Hamas's electoral campaign, *Al-Risalah*, 5/1/2006.

²⁸ Change and Reform bloc, Electoral Program for the 2nd legislative elections of 2006.

²⁹ Hamas PLC electoral campaign slogan on 25/1/2006. See *Ibid.*

³⁰ Interview with Ahmad Bahr, Hamas leader, *Al-Risalah*, 5/1/2006.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Interview with Mohammad Abdul-Hadi Shehab, Hamas leader, *Al-Risalah*, 5/1/2006.

prompted Hamas to participate in the elections with the aim of bringing about comprehensive reform in various aspects of Palestinian life.³³

If we delve directly into Hamas's vision of political reform by entering the PLC, we will find that the electoral program of Hamas's Change and Reform bloc focuses directly on combatting corruption in all its forms, and considering it a main cause behind weakening the internal Palestinian front and undermining the foundations of national unity.³⁴

This was repeated in the program of the 11th government dubbed the National Unity Government. It called for combatting corruption and promoting the values of integrity and transparency and preventing the misappropriation of public funds, in addition to formulating a strategy for administrative development.³⁵ To be sure, Hamas along with a large part of the Palestinian people believe that corruption in the PA institutions had reached a stage that threatens the entire Palestinian national project. Hence, it focused in its program on the need to "enhance transparency, oversight, and accountability..."³⁶ This required urgently "to update legislation and administrative systems to increase the effectiveness of administrative bodies, and contribute to the provision of services with ease at all levels." Since Hamas and other factions were marginalized over appointments to public posts, which were mainly monopolized by Fatah, the program focused on the need to "re-formulate the policy of public employment to ensure equal opportunities for all Palestinians on the basis of competence, and to prevent the use of office to serve private interests." It was thus necessary for Hamas to emphasize the need to "crackdown on favoritism, nepotism, and factionalism in appointments and promotions in all public institutions." This corruption was also manifested in the presence of an army of employees who were crammed into ministries without having actual work. The program thus called for "restructuring ministries and public institutions in proportion to the size of the public sector." The program also stressed the indispensability of "fighting idleness in the government and wastage of public money, and working to strengthen the sense of responsibility among all civil servants..."³⁷

³³ Interview with Ghazi Hamad, Hamas leader, *Al-Risalah*, 5/1/2006.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah li Sanat 2007*, Document no. 81, p. 173.

³⁶ Change and Reform bloc, Electoral Program for the 2nd legislative elections of 2006.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

The Change and Reform bloc campaign focused on the average Palestinian, to hear about his opinions, suffering, and complaints. It adopted a clear policy that cares for the human element through the development of the workforce, achieving job security, and psychological stability for employees. In order to advance this goal in a systematic way, the program emphasized, “guaranteeing the right of citizens to lodge complaints with the concerned private or public bodies.”³⁸

This ambitious program, which the Palestinian people in WB and GS have been anxiously waiting for, could not be achieved in the framework of Hamas's vision of reform except by it entering the PLC, in order to enact legislation that would initiate a promising project for political reform.

The bloc thus affirmed in its program that *Shari'ah*-based laws had to be enacted, calling for having *Shari'ah* the main source of legislation in Palestine. This is consistent with Hamas's Charter that clearly expresses the movement's ideological and operational attitudes and its Islamic frame of reference. The bloc's program affirmed that change and reform need “the separation of the three branches of powers, legislative, executive, and judicial, and the activation of the Constitutional Court.” In turn, the separation of the three branches requires, according to the program, “radical constitutional reforms, which would be a gateway for further reforms and comprehensive political development.” It requires also “putting an end to the executive authority's breaches of the Constitution, which issues provisional laws or frequent amendments, and delays the enforcement of laws, in addition to other infringements.”³⁹

Hamas believes that the peaceful transfer of power is the real guarantee to maintain stability, fight occupation, and avert devastating internal conflict. Therefore, it emphasized the strengthening of *shura* [consultation] and perpetuating it in various fields and posts, while achieving effective participation, the adoption of the principle of rotation of power in practice, and the involvement of all Palestinian human resources in the comprehensive development program. However, this requires directly enacting legislation and laws that enables it. Therefore it was necessary “to seek to enact a new electoral law, to achieve justice and ensure producing a Council representing our people in the WB and the GS a truly and

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

honestly.” To ensure this, it was necessary to “fully reform the judicial system, to improve its impartiality, independence, effectiveness, and development.”⁴⁰

Hamas reckoned that no real political reforms could be made without safeguarding the public freedoms of the people, being the prerequisite of well-developed political institutions. Hamas thus called for “fulfilling the principle of equality of citizens before the law, and equality in regard to rights and duties.” This right requires “protection and providing security for every citizen, who should not be subjected to arbitrary arrest, torture, or reprisals.” In turn, this requires “protecting the public freedoms of citizens, and the citizen’s right to the freedom of expression.” Furthermore, “the principle of justice and equal opportunities for all citizens in hiring, employment, and promotion” should be the basis that must be emphasized and ensured.

Therefore, it was necessary “to stop interventions by the security forces in the granting of licenses for publishing, research centers, publications, and polling companies,” and to “establish a culture of dialogue and respect for all opinions, in a way that does not contradict with the beliefs of the people and their cultural heritage.” It was also necessary to build “a media policy based on the principles of freedom of thought and expression, integrity, respect for diversity and pluralism, and the right of choice.”⁴¹ All these public rights should be protected by specialized human rights organizations, under the supervision of the media, while ensuring freedoms for syndicates. Political forces must be recognized and encouraged, while taking advantage of their role to support the institutions of civil society. Thus, Hamas focused in its electoral platform on these principles.

The electoral program of the Change and Reform bloc, the program of the 10th government formed by Hamas in 2006, and the program of the National Unity Government led by Hamas in 2007, all emphasized these ideas, which together formed the foundations of Hamas’s vision of political reform in WB and GS. The Palestinian people expected Hamas to implement them, after giving the movement a vote of confidence in the legislative elections in 2006 and with Hamas’s formation of the cabinet. However, there existed some internal circumstances, Fatah, the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

rival faction, cling on to its position by not handing over power to Hamas, Israel arrested MPs and ministers in WB, and the Quartet imposed conditions for dealing with Hamas. These led to successive internal frictions and tensions culminating with a political split between WB and GS, on 14/6/2007. Clearly, it prevented a reasonable verdict on Hamas's implementation of its vision, as it took the internal situation in Palestine into the dark tunnel of schism.

4. Hamas's Vision of Political Reform in Foreign Relations

Hamas's vision of political reform was not limited to institutions in the Palestinian interior. Hamas also put forward a project to reform Palestinian foreign policy, especially as regards the Arab and Muslim world. The electoral program thus focused on "improving relations with the Arab and Muslim world in all areas, being the strategic depth of Palestine, and opening up to the rest of the world..."

Given the fact that Hamas is essentially a popular movement, it also focused on the peoples. It called in its program for "enhancing the role of Arab and Islamic masses to support our people's resistance against the occupation, and rejection of normalization with it..." Furthermore, Hamas has always aspired for the unity of the *Ummah*, something that is part of its ideology and attitudes. For this reason, Hamas "encourages any endeavor for unity between any two or more Arab or Muslim countries, up to total unity..." and "rejecting ethnic, regionalist, or sectarian calls seeking to fragment the nation."⁴²

As regards international policy, Hamas decided that it did not mind establishing balanced political relations with all countries, pledging to "build balanced political relations with the international community, maintain the nation's unity and its progress, and safeguard its rights, protect its cause, and repel aggression against it..." These relations aim essentially to "emphasize, on all international levels and in all international forums, the illegality of the occupation and all its outcomes..."

The matter went beyond the governments of the countries in question to calling their peoples to promote world peace that does not protect injustice. Hamas thus called "on all people and the forces of good in the world to unite to achieve a just world, based on eliminating all kinds of occupation and colonialism, and preventing foreign intervention in internal affairs..."

⁴² Ibid.

As regards international institutions such as the UN Security Council, the UN, and its subordinate bodies, Hamas believes in the need to “uphold Palestinian rights in Arab and international forums, especially liberation from occupation, the return of refugees, the establishment of a full sovereign Palestinian state, and securing stances and resolutions that support them.”⁴³

Hamas has been put under siege regionally and locally. Its ministers were barred from movement, and Quartet conditions were imposed on it. Local and regional parties colluded to thwart Hamas’s. This makes a verdict on the implementation of the ideas and visions of Hamas, and its electoral program, extremely difficult if not impossible.

5. Hamas’s Vision of Reforming the PLO

The PLO is considered the most important vessel for the Palestinian political movement. The PLO gained considerable momentum as it was officially deemed the representative of the Palestinian people before regional and international institutions and organizations. Although Hamas and other factions did not join the PLO for various reasons, it has always proposed its own vision to reform the organization, on the basis that its representation of the Palestinian people is not full, because it does not represent all popular factions nor does it represent the various spectra of the people.

There were many references in Hamas’s Charter alluding to the PLO, including some that sought to reassure the latter that Hamas did not intend to undermine its representation or clash with it. In Article 27, Hamas states:

The PLO is the closest to the heart of the Islamic Resistance Movement. It contains the father and the brother, the next of kin and the friend. The Moslem does not estrange himself from his father, brother, next of kin or friend. Our homeland is one, our situation is one, our fate is one and the enemy is a joint enemy to all of us.⁴⁴

However, it reproached the PLO for its secularism and its adoption of a non-Islamic approach.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ *Charter of Hamas*, Article 27.

Hamás raised early on the issue of developing the PLO. The Charter states:

with all our appreciation for The Palestinian Liberation Organization— and what it can develop into—and without belittling its role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, we are unable to exchange the present or future Islamic Palestine with the secular idea. The Islamic nature of Palestine is part of our religion.⁴⁵

Indeed, the secularism adopted by the PLO contradicts with the Islamic ideals adopted by Hamás, something that the latter noted by stating, “The Organization adopted the idea of the secular state. And that is how we view it. Secularism completely contradicts religious ideology. Attitudes, conduct and decisions stem from ideologies.”⁴⁶

For this reason, Hamás did not recognize the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, sparking fears among the organization’s leadership that Hamás could become a real competitor to the PLO. The PLO invited Hamás several times to join its ranks, but Hamás sent a memo in April 1990 to the PNC President, setting several conditions to accept joining the PLO. They include: For the PNC members to be instated on the basis of election rather than appointment, or if this is not possible, then representation should reflect the proportional size of the factions in the PLO in Palestinian society. Hamás asked 40–45% of the total number of the council’s seats, and to be given its share in appointments in the PLO institutions and agencies. Hamás also asked the PLO to withdraw its recognition of Israel, and to reject UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.⁴⁷ These conditions were referenced in Hamás’s Charter, stating that the day the PLO adopts “Islam as its way of life, we will become its soldiers, and fuel for its fire that will burn the enemies.”⁴⁸

Since 1990, various attempts were made so Hamás joins the PLO, but the relationship between Hamás and the PLO took on multiple forms of rivalry in their proposals and visions. After many years with the PLO and its leading party Fatah monopolizing the Palestinian political scene without a rival to speak of, a political

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Article 27.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Article 27.

⁴⁷ Khaled Hroub, *Hamás: Al-Fikr wa al-Mumarasah al-Siyasiyyah*, pp. 318–321.

⁴⁸ *Charter of Hamás*, Article 27.

movement with an Islamist project emerged, threatening the PLO's monopoly over representation of the Palestinian street. With the increased popularity of the movement in the street, it was necessary to recognize its existence and its strength. Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyyad), one of the most prominent leaders of Fatah, was even prompted to acknowledge, "Hamis is an Islamic movement strongly present in the occupied territories, and it has one of the most sincere fighting bases at large."⁴⁹ But this does not mean that voices calling for excluding, besieging, and snubbing Hamas in the PLO became completely absent.

The best possible option for Hamas was to seek to correct the path of the PLO, and to accede to the organization after reaching an agreement among its main factions to rebuild and reactivate it. This direction appeared early in the official statements and documents issued by Hamas.

In a memorandum issued by the movement in 1993, Hamas stated:

Hamis is not a substitute for anyone, and believes that the PLO is a national achievement that should be maintained. [Hamis] does not mind acceding to the PLO framework on the basis of the PLO's commitment to the liberation of Palestine, and the non-recognition of the Zionist enemy or giving it legitimacy to exist on any part of Palestine.⁵⁰

It is clear that Hamas's vision of PLO reform is that it is based on the need to be built on political, institutional, and democratic bases, where everyone would be involved, and no one would be excluded. No party should be given the right to refuse the participation of any other Palestinian party in the rebuilding process, while selecting the representatives of the Palestinian people in this organization must take place through direct elections. The freedom of choice and of exercising oversight should belong to the Palestinian people, and the PLO should not become a hotbed for securing quotas and engaging in one-upmanship, which previously led to the spread of corruption and the subsequent collapse in the institutions of the organization...⁵¹

Accordingly, Hamas's demand was not to accede to the PLO in its present form, but to first restructure it, reform it, and rebuild it. Usamah Hamdan said, that after

⁴⁹ Hamas and the PLO, site of Islam Story, 11/2/2008, www.islamstory.com

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Press statement by Usamah Hamdan, Quds Press, 7/5/2007.

the abolition of the Palestinian National Charter in 1998, a new one would require an agreement and must be adopted by the elected PNC. The political program of the PLO should stem from this Charter, and must be also approved by the PNC, which will be concerned with monitoring the implementation of this program.⁵²

Hamas also came out with a clear vision of reforming the PLO Executive Committee. Hamdan said:

The Executive Committee, which represents the executive pyramid in the organization, is lacking a legal quorum, as most of its elected members have either died or resigned, which means that most of its decisions are not lawful. This means that we need to fully rebuild the institutions of the PLO...⁵³

On March 2005, the Hamas and PLO leaders agreed in Cairo to rebuild the PLO. But the agreement suffered a serious blow when the PLO leadership backtracked on its commitment to its provisions, when Hamas achieved stellar results in the PLC elections on 25/1/2006.

Today, it seems that Palestinian reconciliation focuses mainly on rebuilding the organization on a new basis. But in spite of the signing of an agreement on 3/5/2011,⁵⁴ the agreement has not been implemented as of the time of print. This indicates that many actors in the region and the world do not want the Palestinians to unite under one strong institution that represents them, and carries their national and political project, to achieve their aspirations to liberty, dignity, and freedom from occupation.

Thus, it is clear to us that Hamas, in order to achieve its vision for political reform in Palestine, trod all political means possible. It began by mobilizing the masses to inform them of its vision through statements and publications. Then, it got engaged in advocacy in universities and syndicates, before entering into political alliances to resist certain policies and directions that the PLO leadership adopted. It participated in municipal elections, making considerable gains. Then the biggest event happened when Hamas entered the PLC elections winning a majority, and went on to form the Palestinian government in WB and GS. It tried repeatedly to join the PLO and reform it from the inside according to its political

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ See document no. 17 in the appendix of this book, p. 656.

vision. Hamas sometimes succeeded in achieving some of its objectives, and failed at other times amid various internal and external circumstances and obstacles.

Second: Hamas's Vision of Social Reform

1. Hamas's Vision of the Concept of Social Reform

Hamas considers Islam its ideological and intellectual reference point for its understanding of social reform. This concept has been defined through the verses of the Holy Quran,⁵⁵ which called for the adoption of this approach explicitly, and focused on the furtherance of this concept, in order to achieve for people a happy life based on tolerance and coexistence, progress, nobleness, pride, and greatness. This would in turn lead to a strong cohesive society able to confront challenges.

Hamas adopted in its Charter this concept, focusing on the need for a cohesive and tolerant society, away from hatred and social frivolity. Hamas thus stressed the need to

follow Islamic orientation in educating the Islamic generations in our region by teaching the religious duties, comprehensive study of the Koran, the study of the Prophet's Sunna (his sayings and doings), and learning about Islamic history and heritage from their authentic sources...⁵⁶

The spread of bookstores specializing in Islamic thought in Palestine helped achieve these goals, as the sale of books related to other subjects declined, which made Islamic books more popular as booksellers themselves confirm.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See the following verses in the Holy Quran:

"If two parties among the Believers fall into a quarrel, make ye peace between them." Surat al-Hujurat (The Inner Apartments): 9.

"The Believers are but a single Brotherhood: So make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and fear Allah, that ye may receive Mercy." Surat al-Hujurat (The Inner Apartments): 10.

"So fear Allah, and keep straight the relations between yourselves: Obey Allah and His Messenger, if ye do believe." Surat al-Anfal (Spoils Of War): 1.

In general, if a person wants reform sincerely, Allah will help him make this real among people.

"if they wish for peace, Allah will cause their reconciliation." Surat al-Nisa' (Women): 35.

⁵⁶ Charter of Hamas, Article 16.

⁵⁷ Iyyad al-Barghouthi, *Al-Aslamah wa al-Siyasah fi al-Arabi al-Filastiniyyah al-Muhtallah*, p. 99; and see Mohammed Barhoma, *op. cit.*, pp. 65–66.

But what is striking is the extent of focus Hamas placed on the role of women as stated in Article 17 of the Charter, which reads, “The Moslem woman has a role no less important than that of the Moslem man in the battle of liberation. She is the maker of men. Her role in guiding and educating the new generations is great...”⁵⁸

In order for women to undertake this role, they must be armed with awareness and understanding of their vital role in the family and society. The Charter stated:

They have to be of sufficient knowledge and understanding where the performance of housekeeping matters are concerned, because economy and avoidance of waste of the family budget, is one of the requirements for the ability to continue moving forward in the difficult conditions surrounding us. She should put before her eyes the fact that the money available to her is just like blood which should never flow except through the veins so that both children and grown-ups could continue to live.⁵⁹

Hamas's vision for social reform focuses as well on the Palestinian society, which must be cooperative. The Charter reads, “Moslem society is a mutually responsible society.”⁶⁰ The Charter quoted the Prophet (SAAWS) as saying, “When the Ash`ariyun run short of food in the Jihad or when they are at home in Al-Madinah, they collect all the provisions they have in a sheet and then divide it equally among themselves.”⁶¹ This solidarity is a “guarantee to achieve political and economic stability and strengthen the elements of steadfastness.”⁶² Hamas's electoral program for 2006 stated that it is imperative to “maintain the social fabric of the Palestinian people and public morality, ensure that no violation of social fundamentals takes place, and preclude any actions or legislation that undermine them.”⁶³

⁵⁸ *Charter of Hamas*, Article 17.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Article 18.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Article 20.

⁶¹ Abu Musa (May *Allah* be pleased with him) reported: The Prophet (SAAWS) said, “When the Ash`ariyun run short of food in the Jihad or when they are at home in Al-Madinah, they collect all the provisions they have in a sheet and then divide it equally among themselves. They are of me and I am of them.” (Al-Bukhari and Muslim), site of Muslim Ummah of North America (MUNA), <http://www.muslimummah.org/hadith/displyAllhadith.php?caption=Riyad-us-Saliheen%C2%A0568&&HadithNo=568%20&&hadithBookID=1003&&itemno=653&&hadithBookID2=1003&&subjectcode=sesy>

⁶² Change and Reform bloc, Electoral Program for the 2nd legislative elections of 2006.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Given the special character of the Palestinian society that lives under occupation, these meanings were reaffirmed clearly. The society in Palestine must have these qualities, because it “confronts a vicious enemy which acts in a way similar to Nazism, making no differentiation between man and woman, between children and old people, such a society is entitled to this Islamic spirit.”⁶⁴ It is a society that is subjected to oppressive tactics by the Israeli occupier who uses “methods of collective punishment. He has deprived people of their homeland and properties, pursued them in their places of exile and gathering.”⁶⁵

Because of the brutality of the enemy in dealing with the Palestinian people, sparing no one, the enemy must be confronted by a society that behaves like a single body, when one of its organs falls ill, the rest of the body responds with fever and sleeplessness. The Charter identified some aspects of this solidarity, and stated, “extending assistance, financial or moral, to all those who are in need and joining in the execution of some of the work.” Hamas called on its members to “consider the interests of the masses as their own personal interests. They must spare no effort in achieving and preserving them. They must prevent any foul play with the future of the upcoming generations and anything that could cause loss to society.”⁶⁶

Hamis strategic vision of social work is based on the fact that it is not just a relief to the needy, or to gain reward (*Ajr*) from *Allah*, but also as being an effort to reach out to people and interact with their concerns. “The masses are part of them and they are part of the masses. Their strength is theirs, and their future is theirs.” Therefore, it was required of Hamas members to “share the people’s joy and grief, adopt the demands of the public and whatever means by which they could be realized.” Then, to fulfill the ultimate goal of its vision, namely, “the day that such a spirit prevails, brotherliness would deepen, cooperation, sympathy and unity will be enhanced and the ranks will be solidified to confront the enemies.”⁶⁷

Hamis stressed this several times; in a statement declaring its intention to participate in the legislative elections, Hamas said:

⁶⁴ *Charter of Hamas*, Article 20.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Article 20.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Article 21.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Article 21.

It is the right of our people to live a decent life, not to lose their rights, and to have access to equal opportunities... It [Hamás] adopts a comprehensive program for the renaissance of the Palestinian people. Caring for and serving the interests of the people, and alleviating their suffering, is one of its most important programs.⁶⁸

Hamás's literature, early on, consistently made references to its vision for social reform in various areas. In its statements during the first *Intifadah*, Hamás addressed social affairs. Its fifth statement issued in January 1988 spoke of some of its social goals, including: "Rejecting the spread of vice, corruption, and traps that lead to collaboration with Zionist intelligence."⁶⁹ Hamás sought to achieve its vision of reform in several areas that the Palestinian people needed urgently, considering it a prelude for the main battle with the occupation to obtain freedom and restore the dignity, land and holy places.

2. Hamás's Vision of Social Reform in Various Fields

Hamás's vision of social reform focused on the need to combat poverty as an entry point for development and comprehensive reform. Hamás election manifesto emphasized "combatting poverty by imposing justice and redistributing wealth, encouraging charities and lifting restrictions on them, and allowing them to contribute to community building and poverty alleviation."⁷⁰

The program of the Hamás-led 10th government re-emphasized the poverty issue when it stated that "the rights of the poor and the weak must be protected, the rights of people with disabilities should be cared for, and the institutions that care for them must be supported."⁷¹ The program stressed the need to "work to improve the living conditions of citizens, promote social solidarity, encourage the social, healthcare, and educational safety net, and develop various kinds of services provided to the citizens."⁷² Hamás was keen on extending help to the needy, those with disabilities, the families of the killed and wounded, prisoners, the poor, and

⁶⁸ *Al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah li Sanat 2006*, Document no. 4, p. 34.

⁶⁹ Statement by Hamás, no. 5, issued during the first *Intifadah* 1987–1992, 5/1/1988. See Media Office – Hamás, Hamás Documents, Hamás Statements, first year of the *Intifadah*.

⁷⁰ Change and Reform bloc, Electoral Program for the 2nd legislative elections of 2006.

⁷¹ *Al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah li Sanat 2006*, Document no. 69, p. 162.

⁷² *Ibid.*

those with social needs, and alleviate their burdens against the Israeli occupation, which seeks to subjugate them, and break their will.

Hamas considers social work, volunteering, and helping the needy are fundamental pillars in building up the Palestinian community, with its special circumstances under occupation and sustained aggression. The harsh conditions of the Palestinian society bolstered the concept of volunteer work, and brought together groups of people, regardless of their religious, sectarian, ideological, political, or social backgrounds. Consequently, the sense of belonging and loyalty to the Palestinian society in general was enhanced.

Accordingly, Hamas proceeded to build social institutions through which it wanted to fulfill its vision for social reform, and influence large segments of the Palestinian people, creating charities, sports clubs, Zakat committees, and libraries. For example, the Islamic Complex (*al-Mujamma' al-Islami*) established by Sheikh Ahmad Yasin in GS, became one of the most important Islamic centers of social activity.⁷³ The movement's social institutions sponsored tens of thousands of needy families, giving Hamas a heavy presence among segments of society that no other organization was able to rival it over.

These institutions had a significant impact after the first *Intifadah*. The broad network built by Hamas, an offshoot of the MB movement in Palestine, helped entrench the movement and win it many supporters. Hamas's institutions were characterized by "low costs on the one hand, and the good manners of those working in them on the other hand compared to others, which have greatly impacted the spread of the movement and its approach to reforming society."⁷⁴

Mobilization and guidance in mosques were another means pursued by Hamas for fulfilling its vision for social reform. Mosques became a place for social networking and distribution of aid. Indeed, for Hamas, the mosque "is the most important mechanism to achieve the movement's reformist vision socially and

⁷³ Abdul Sattar Qassem and Usama Abu Irshaid, "Preface," in Jawad al-Hamad and Iyyad al-Barghouthi (eds.), *Dirasah fi al-Fikr al-Siyasi li Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah: Hamas: 1987–1996* (A Study on the Political Thought of the Islamic Resistance Movement: Hamas: 1987–1996) (Amman: Middle East Studies Center (MESC), 1997), p. 37.

⁷⁴ See *Ibid.*; and 'Ali al-Jarbawi, "Hamis, the Muslim Brotherhood's Gateway to Political Legitimacy," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, issue 13, 1993, p. 94. (in Arabic)

politically. It provided a meeting point and a regular mechanism for various forms of activities, in addition to being a house of worship..."⁷⁵

For a national liberation movement, the mosques have an imperative role, because performing religious duties in mosques provides the generations with a jihadi education. Indeed they were and continue to be

the starting point for Hamas to gain the sympathy of the Palestinian street, being the incubator of revolutions against all types of occupation since the beginning of the century [i.e., the 20th century], and one of the most important pillars of the independence of the Palestinian civil society.⁷⁶

Hamás-affiliated preachers, scholars, and advocates undertook this role through the mosques, becoming the most important symbols of community reform. Islamic weddings⁷⁷ were also another mechanism that supported mosques in mass mobilization. This social occasion represented a fertile ground to advance Hamas's vision and ideology, gaining new supporters and mobilizing another sector of the Palestinian people including some who do not attend mosques.

Hamás also focused in its vision on education and educational institutions. It established a number of schools and kindergartens, in different parts of GS and WB, and even in the refugee camps in the Diaspora. For one thing, Hamas's vision is based on the premise that the movement has a responsibility towards building its society languishing under the occupation, especially since "occupation and neglect are twins."⁷⁸ Hamas placed all the institutions established by the MB movement in the service of its reformist project. These proved to be "high-standard and effective organizations... giving a vivid example of how ideas can be translated into awareness and committed action. They were able to be dynamically and actively present in Palestinian society and influence wide sectors."⁷⁹

Hamás expanded its educational efforts by founding higher education institutions, such as universities and specialized educational institutes, including

⁷⁵ Mohammed Barhoma, *op. cit.*, pp. 80–81.

⁷⁶ See *Ibid.*, p. 79; and *Alrai*, Amman, 8/6/1992.

⁷⁷ Ziad Abu 'Amr, Hamas: A Historical Background, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, issue 13, 1993, p. 95 (in Arabic); and see 'Ali al-Sawwa, *op. cit.*, pp. 192–193.

⁷⁸ Abdul Jabbar al-'Idwan, This Peace is Destroying Palestinian Society, *Asharq Alawsat*, 17/4/1995.

⁷⁹ 'Ali al-Jarbawi, "Hamás, the Muslim Brotherhood's Gateway to Political Legitimacy," p. 80.

the Islamic University-Gaza, the University College of Applied Sciences, and other cultural institutions. It also pledged to establish more of these institutions in case it took power and formed a government, and called for the “creation and development of educational, training, and qualifying centers...”⁸⁰ The 10th government’s program focused on education, too. It urged

the promotion of the role of education, higher education, and the development and diversification of their institutions, as well as improving quality and efficiency, encouraging and supporting scientific research, taking advantage of its outcomes, caring for graduates, and taking interest in vocational education and applied research.⁸¹

Islamic student groups affiliated to Hamas were established at other Palestinian universities and institutes, becoming an important advocacy medium for Islamists to move through. The first time an Islamist bloc was established in Palestinian universities dates back to the end of the 1978/1979 academic year in Birzeit University.⁸² This gave Hamas a new platform to present its vision and influence a broad segment of educated and active Palestinian youths, whom Hamas depends on for carrying the future resistance program of the movement and influencing various segments of Palestinian society.

Hamas’s reformist vision included the establishment of health institutions, such as hospitals and mobile and fixed clinics. Thus a number of health centers and mobile clinics were built in the cities, villages, and refugee camps that provide quasi-free services for the Palestinian people. The electoral program of the Change and Reform bloc stated, “social services [education, healthcare, and social security] and other public services are a right for all, without discrimination or favoritism or partisanship...”⁸³ The tenth government committed itself to “developing healthcare facilities and their public and specialist services...”⁸⁴

Hamas interests also included the establishment of institutions that focused on the education, awareness and care of women and children. The 2006 electoral

⁸⁰ Change and Reform bloc, Electoral Program for the 2nd legislative elections of 2006.

⁸¹ *Al-Watha’iq al-Filastiniyyah li Sanat 2006*, Document no. 69, p. 163.

⁸² See Dalal Bajes, *Al-Harakah al-Tullabiyyah al-Islamiyyah fi Filastin: Al-Kutlah al-Islamiyyah Namudhajan* (The Islamic Student Movement in Palestine: The Islamic Bloc: A Case Study) (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2012), p. 19.

⁸³ Change and Reform bloc, Electoral Program for the 2nd legislative elections of 2006.

⁸⁴ *Al-Watha’iq al-Filastiniyyah li Sanat 2006*, Document no. 69, p. 163.

program promised Hamas voters it would safeguard “the Palestinian family and its cohesion...,” because it is “the solid foundation that preserves our social values and ethical ideals.” It also promised to support social institutions that sponsor women, children, orphans, the poor and those with disabilities. It would protect and take care of children, while supporting their right to education, nutrition, and mental and physical guidance. For Hamas considers Palestinian women “partners in the jihad, resistance, and construction and development; and their civil and legal rights are guaranteed.” For this reason, it was important to “guarantee the rights of women, and complete the legislative framework that promotes their rights, and to work to enable them to contribute to social, economic, and political development.” This is achieved by “empowering women through Islamic education, making them aware of their legal rights, and confirming their identity based on chastity, modesty, and commitment.”⁸⁵

Hamas's vision for social reform, and attention to Palestinian women, goes together hand in hand, because reforming women's affairs is the key to reforming society in its view. Thus, Hamas's interest was genuine and not contingent or a reaction, and was linked to its efforts to reinvigorate Islamic advocacy after the Israeli occupation of the WB and GS.

Huda Na'im, women's rights activist in Hamas, said, “Sheikh Yasin, May *Allah* have mercy on him, continued in the early years to personally follow up this nucleus, educationally and in terms of advocacy, and did not accept to entrust this task to someone else, despite his huge problems and health condition.”⁸⁶ Na'im noted that it was Sheikh Yasin who created a good seed for true Islamic upbringing, dedicating a lot of effort for women activism to which he assigned special care and which he followed up on an almost daily basis.⁸⁷ Na'im added, “Hamas's vision for women and their participation in its program was based on the premise that any community work has to have women as part of it, and that any building that excludes women is incomplete, because society is based on men and women equally.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Change and Reform bloc, Electoral Program for the 2nd legislative elections of 2006.

⁸⁶ Women and Women's Agenda in Hamas, Muslim Brothers Movement Wikipedia, 16/12/2009, <http://www.ikhwanwiki.com> (in Arabic)

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Hamas, as part of its vision for social reform, proceeded to create local reconciliation committees (especially after the Hamas takeover of GS in 2007) to help resolve disputes and rivalries between members of the community. This fell under the category of maintaining the cohesion of society, and strengthening its unity to remain steadfast in front of the Israeli plans aimed at dismantling it, by feeding differences between its members to weaken and undermine its foundations. Hamas created these committees that “people turn to, to try to resolve disputes—of all kinds—because it would otherwise take a long time in regular courts because of their lengthy proceedings.” These committees worked on solving “many complex issues and problems with the help of the police and the Ministry of the Interior [of the Hamas government in Gaza] using to achieve solutions procedures from *Shari‘ah* and [civil] law...”⁸⁹

These committees were characterized as being quick to resolve problems, and as being credible and impartial. Head of the Reconciliation Department of the Palestine Scholars League Nasim Yasin said that the reconciliation committees were set up by the Palestine Scholars League after careful selection and according to specific standards for the arbitrators. They are appointed to committees distributed across all GS governorates, numbering 34, and employing more than 500 arbitrators. They are chosen after inquiries about their persons, their moral qualities, their behavior, the extent of their commitment, and their ability to moderate dialogue and engage others.⁹⁰

These arbitrators should enjoy the following qualities: “patience, forbearance, powerful logic, persuasion skills, and wisdom to be able to reconcile people to produce decisions on a sound footing, as stipulated in Islamic law...” Subsequently, the arbitrators must have “Islamic culture, and be prominent figures in their areas of residence.”⁹¹

This conflict-resolution system, explained by ‘Abdul ‘Aziz al-Kojok (a prominent arbitrator in GS) is divided into two parts, a *Shari‘ah*-based one and a tribal one. Arbitration according to *Shari‘ah* is undertaken by scholars who have knowledge of the provisions of the Islamic *Shari‘ah*, while tribal elders implement

⁸⁹ Asmaa Sarsour, Reconciliation Committees Use Shari‘ah to Close Rifts, Felesteen Online, 12/9/2011, <http://www.felesteen.ps>

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

tribal arbitration, under the umbrella of the Ministry of Interior. This, al-Kojok said, does not contradict the work of the court system but complements it. He also pointed out that many cases are considered over several hearings without reaching a verdict, and these are then referred to tribal arbitration, because tribal law focuses on bringing divergent views together and usually ends a case by mutual consent between the two parties. Al-Kojok said that tribal reconciliation committees deal with intractable cases and disputes, especially those related to bloodshed and clashes...⁹²

This clear focus on social reform and the establishment of institutions that enable this goal is no stranger to Hamas and its approach. To be sure, the MB movement in Palestine, since its beginnings, focused on change through social reform and prioritized it.

Hamas believes that social reform leads to social change and political reform, helping in the resistance against the occupiers and the preservation of society.⁹³ It argues that without social institutions that deal with people's concerns and needs under the occupation, hardship on them would increase. Consequently, political reform would be more difficult, because feeding the needy and the poor, and caring for the children of the "martyrs" and detainees are much more important in people's view than political posturing.

Hamas's interest in Palestinian people and in qualifying them educationally, ideologically, and religiously, created—according to Hamas's vision—a strong basis for the steadfastness of the people, and gave a vivid example of putting thought into action. Hamas was able thus to influence various events and confront the Israeli occupation, prompting the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (WB and GS) Unit (COGAT) to say that the assistance provided by Hamas to the Palestinians of the occupied territories since 1991–1994 outweigh the assistance provided by the PLO. Hamas has replaced the PLO as a primary provider of assistance to the population, he added.⁹⁴

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ See an interview with Muhammad Nazzal, Amman, 8/12/1995, in Abdul Sattar Qassem and Usama Abu Irshaid, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁹⁴ See News Report, *Qadaya Duwaleyah* magazine, issue 238, 25/7/1994 (in Arabic); and see Mohammed Barhoma, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

After winning the elections and forming the government, Hamas sought to apply its reform program that it promised its people, but was faced by obstacles and a tight siege. In its statements, it frequently and bitterly referred to these obstacles, including a one issued a year after being elected, in which Hamas said that it “still insists on the implementation of the reform program in Palestinian society, despite the stifling siege and the huge obstacles...”⁹⁵ It added that it had indeed tried to implement its vision and promises, but “many programs and goals, which the movement proceeded to implement, were obstructed and thwarted through the external blockade... and attempts to block them and forestall them internally, with political and media incitement and deliberate security incidents...”⁹⁶ But Hamas insisted on its program and vision, because, despite everything, Hamas saw that its program was still feasible while the various complications forced it to implement it gradually and gently. In its statement, Hamas said:

The reform program that [Hamas] proposed and promoted remains on top of the agenda of the movement’s government... and it is subject to the considerations of gradual application, and objective solution, which is based on the special circumstances, sensitivity, and complexity of Palestinian reality.⁹⁷

After Hamas settled matters to its advantage in GS on 14/6/2007, taking over all institutions, the social activities of the movement gained a strong new momentum that had a positive impact in gaining new popular bases of support. All what Hamas called for through its various reform programs and statements now became within reach. It took several practical measures in this context.⁹⁸ A report issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) stated that the GS economy was in continuous collapse with unemployment sometimes exceeding 60%, in addition to higher poverty rates among families that live on less than \$1⁹⁹ per day per person.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ *Al-Watha’iq al-Filastiniyyah li Sanat 2007*, Document no. 22, p. 73.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁹⁸ See Sara Roy, *Hamis and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamists Social Sector* (US: Princeton University press, 2011).

⁹⁹ US Dollar.

¹⁰⁰ See Palestinian National Authority (PA), Presidency of the Council of Ministers, General Directorate for the Quality Government Performance, “Report of the Achievements of the 11th Palestinian government During the First Quarter 2012,” June 2012, site of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the General Secretariat, Gaza, http://www.pmo.gov.ps/images/stories/qgp/2012_1.pdf (in Arabic)

Within its limited capabilities, the Hamas-led government made financial allocations for the needy, unemployed, and the families of the “martyrs,” and travel allocations for the treatment of incurable disease cases, educational aid, and other aid. The Hamas-led government also provided in-kind assistance and food and medical supplies to the needy, providing aid to purchase medicines, and aid rations as part of the World Food Program. The government also provided quick relief in emergencies such as the flood mitigation campaign, and also provided assistance for support and rehabilitation such as electric wheelchairs for those with special needs. Employment opportunities were also offered to disabled individuals in the category of temporarily employment to non-beneficiaries of Social Affairs, for different periods of time.¹⁰¹

One of most important features of social reform implemented by Hamas in GS was attention to the working class and fishermen. Sustaining more than two-thirds of the population, this the largest social group is most affected by the occupation measures and the brutal blockade. Hamas distributed financial allocations to a large number of them, especially to those who Hamas was not able to provide jobs to.¹⁰²

Given how important the issues of detainees and liberated prisoners are for the Palestinian people, Hamas sought to embrace these issues and get the detainees released from Israeli jails.¹⁰³ It held meetings with foreign solidarity activists to stage campaigns to put pressure on public opinion to embrace their cause, contacted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to discuss the issue of prisoners and organizing visits to their relatives, especially those from GS, and communicated with Doctors of the World to visit ill prisoners held by the occupation. In addition, it communicated with foreign institutions and dignitaries,

¹⁰¹ See Ibid.

See also Ahmad Muhammad al-Sa'ati, *The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) 1987–1994* (20), Felesteen Online, 14/1/2013. (in Arabic)

¹⁰² See *Paying Salaries to Workers Under the Temporary Employment Clause*, site of Ministry of Labor, PA, Gaza, 21/3/2013. (in Arabic)

¹⁰³ Hamas captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in 2006 after winning the elections and forming the tenth government, and kept him for five years until the famous prisoner exchange deal “Devotion of the Free,” on 11/10/2011, took place. It liberated more than a thousand Palestinian prisoners from Israeli prisons from all Palestinian factions. See *Gilad Shalit: The Thousand Prisoner Deal*, Aljazeera.net, 12/10/2011, www.aljazeera.net (in Arabic)

providing them with information concerning the prisoners and developments related to them.

Hamas also extended assistance to the families of the detainees, diverting monthly financial allocations to them, in addition to providing social, educational, and other services to these families. It provided adequate housing to liberated detainees, helped in marrying the bachelors among them, diverted monthly allocations for each liberated prisoner, and exempted them from national health insurance fees. In addition, it reduced their electricity fees, and provided them with various vocational training sessions (e.g. in social service, or as preachers), to help the liberated prisoners rely on themselves.¹⁰⁴

Within the prisons, Hamas disbursed financial aid funds to prisoners to buy clothes, food, and medicines from prison canteens. It helped appoint lawyers to defend them, expressed solidarity with them through sit-ins, strikes, and retaliation against the occupation, to protest the conditions of their detention. It kept contact with their families, visiting them in religious and national occasions, and offering them solace and gifts.¹⁰⁵

As regards women and youths, the government and Hamas launched a number of projects to reform society targeting women and youths.¹⁰⁶ Hamas organized comprehensive training courses for a large number of women in the Palestinian society on “reinforcing positive habits and confronting negative habits towards women,” as part of a campaign to improve societal culture towards women and enhancing their role in society. Hamas also organized art competitions under the title “Princess of Literature,” for writings on women’s issues in categories including poetry, scripts, serialized stories, and short stories.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ See PA, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, General Directorate for the Quality Government Performance, “Report of the Achievements of the 11th Palestinian government During the First Quarter 2012.”

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, more than thirty youth project posted on: Ministry of Labor, PA, Gaza.

¹⁰⁷ See PA, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, General Directorate for the Quality Government Performance, “Report of the Achievements of the 11th Palestinian government During the First Quarter 2012.”

The government was keen to commemorate special occasions for women such as the International Women's Day, Mother's Day, Family Day, and other occasions. Hamas also established the International Committee for Solidarity with the Palestinian Woman, and held sustained events to care for elderly women, including sessions to offer them care at the expense of the government. Hamas also founded a large number of women's societies focusing on community work, fulfilling its duty towards Palestinian women in GS.¹⁰⁸

In the area of youth correction and rehabilitation, Hamas government founded a wide range of social programs for young people, and issued a special law for them. Hamas also held seminars with youth organizations and universities in all GS governorates, as part of its campaign to educate young people about their rights and introduce them to the law. Media outlets, television interviews, and a series of introductory workshops in the newspapers contributed to this effort, in addition to the launch of a short message service, distribution of flyers, and the dedication of a website for this purpose.¹⁰⁹

Sports projects for youths also received special attention, despite the GS siege and the lack of resources. The Hamas-led government did not neglect this aspect, establishing a number of sports projects. It announced the Palestine Award for Youth Creativity covering 16 categories.¹¹⁰ Considering families as the basis of society's righteousness and development, it launched projects to hold weddings for Palestinian youths, offering loans to those intending to get married, and securing dozens of gifts from private-sector institutions.¹¹¹

In order to implement its reformist approach, Hamas sought to attract young people to its side by channeling their energies and promoting high Islamic morals. It implemented the athletic principles and concepts contained in the Islamic education curriculum, established various sports teams at mosques and held tournaments among them.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.; and see Ahmad Muhammad al-Sa'ati, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ See site of Portal for Palestinian Youth and Sports, Ministry of Youth and Sports, GS, <http://www.mys.gov.ps>, where the ministry has sponsored such weddings. On 8/3/2012, for example, weddings were held for a thousand men and women, with each groom receiving \$2,000 as a loan and other amounts as gifts.

¹¹² See 'Imad Afaneh, *Hamas Between a Virtuous Society and Good Governance*, PIC, 19/7/2009.

After Fatah-affiliated PA employees withdrew and refrained from going to courts, Hamas worked on disseminating the culture of social peace, conflict-resolution, doing justice by those who were wronged, serving justice, and encouraging reform through special committees established to assist the official judiciary. This is especially important in light of the people's need for alternative ways to resolve their problems, after the PA in Ramallah tried to disrupt the work of courts and police departments it controlled in GS after Hamas's takeover.¹¹³ Hamas relied on a large number of its symbols who were appreciated and respected by the community for their active and successful reform they've done.

Hamis also considers health services one of the most important means for social reform. The Ministry of Health staff underwent a number of training courses and workshops, and it held many health-related education activities. It established more than 32 health projects, most notably the Al-Yasin Hospital, the Indonesian Hospital, and the Children's Hospital in Deir al-Balah, in addition to the implementation of many projects in various health sectors.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

Hamis sought to achieve its vision for political and social reform, and was able to penetrate the diverse Palestinian civil society. It succeeded in bringing the community closer into the ideas in which it believes, in spite of difficulties and obstacles. It sought to translate these achievements into a tangible political reality that serves the public interests, hopes and aspirations. This enabled Hamas to achieve a strong political presence, based on a wide popular base that is difficult to undermine, marginalize, or ignore.

¹¹³ See details of these committees and their working methods on the site of the Palestine Scholars League in Gaza, www.rapeta.ps/Rapta

¹¹⁴ See PA, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, General Directorate for the Quality Government Performance, "Report of the Achievements of the 11th Palestinian government During the First Quarter 2012."

This Book

The Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas is a prominent Palestinian resistance movement. It enjoyed, and continues to enjoy, broad popularity in the Palestinian arena. Hamas adopts Islam as a creed, way of life, and a code. It belongs to the school of Muslim Brothers movement.

Credit for the idea behind this book is owed to the late Prof. Ibrahim Abu Rabi'. 17 academicians, researchers and senior Hamas leaders participated in writing the chapters of this book.

This book is indeed one of the most specialized references regarding Hamas thought and experience, and it is an indispensable source for those interested in studying the Movement. It committed itself to the methodologies of academic research and all this entails in terms of accuracy, objectivity, and documentation. The contributions by several Hamas leaders shed additional and up-to-date light on a number of controversial issues surrounding Hamas and its experience.

Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh

Islamic Resistance Movement

Hamas

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