

# **Fatah urges Hamas to cede power to safeguard 'Palestinians' existence'**

AFP – Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah movement called on its Islamist rivals Hamas on Saturday to relinquish power in order to safeguard the "existence" of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

"Hamas must show compassion for Gaza, its children, women and men," Fatah spokesman Monther al-Hayek said in a message sent to AFP from Gaza.

He called on Hamas to "step aside from governing and fully recognise that the battle ahead will lead to the end of Palestinians' existence" if it remains in power in Gaza.

Hamas seized power in Gaza in 2007 from the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority, and subsequent attempts at reconciliation have failed.

The territory has been devastated by an Israeli offensive in retaliation for the attack by Hamas and other Palestinian militants on Israel on October 7, 2023.

Hamas has said repeatedly it is willing to leave power in Gaza once the war is over but categorically excludes giving up its weapons.

"We are ready to accept any agreement regarding the administration of Gaza (post-war), and are not interested in participating in it," Hamas spokesman Abdul Latif al-Qanou said in a statement Saturday.

"What's important to us is the national consensus," he added, recalling that Hamas has endorsed an Egyptian proposal for an independent committee of professionals and technocrats to manage Gaza post-war and oversee reconstruction.

Abbas says the committee must report to the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority, the sole legitimate entity to govern Gaza according to him, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government has rejected this.

Following disagreement over the next steps in a January 19 ceasefire in the Gaza war, Israeli resumed air strikes on Tuesday, followed by ground operations the day after.

On Friday, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz threatened to annex parts of Gaza unless Hamas frees the remaining Israeli hostages seized in the October 7 attack.

Of the 251 hostages taken that day, 58 are still being held, including 34 the Israeli military says are dead.

Hamas's 2023 attack on Israel resulted in 1,218 deaths, mostly civilians, according to Israeli figures.

Nearly 50,000 people in Gaza have been killed in the war, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry.

The latest Israeli offensive has caused a new exodus of thousands of Palestinians from Gaza.

"We are exhausted by the cycle of displacement," Ramadan Houdoud told AFP in a tent camp in Al-Zawayda in the centre of the territory, after fleeing from Gaza City.

Displaced woman Umm Khaled lamented the destruction, adding: "There is no water, no food, and no rest."

"Where can we go? We need a solution. Are there really no more Muslims to help us?" she asked.

AFP