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Abbas: Hamas opposes elections

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Fatah leader President Mahmoud Abbas says elections will be the basis to end the division, but that Hamas opposes a vote "at this stage."

"An agreement has been reached with Hamas that we form a unity government to be headed by me, then we have parliamentary elections and Palestinian National Council elections three months after the Central Elections Commission is ready for elections," Abbas said at a meeting in Ramallah with newly-elected mayors and a delegation of senior PA officials.

Reconciliation is in the national interest and elections will offer the Palestinian people the "final word" through the ballot, the president said. "However, our brothers in Hamas do not want us to carry out elections at this stage."

Hamas chief Khaled Mashaal said Tuesday that his party had agreed with all factions that elections were necessary. He said a date for elections and forming a unity government could only be set in an appropriate atmosphere for reconciliation, and once preparations were complete, in an interview with the Hamas-affiliated Palestine Information Center.

In Ramallah, Abbas said he would issue two presidential decrees announcing elections and the formation of a unity government to oversee the vote.

"We are now waiting until the Central Elections Commission finishes the (voter) registration process, then we will hold meetings to evaluate which terms of the reconciliation agreement have been implemented," the president said.

"We already started consultations to form a unity government which will be announced in tandem with a decree announcing elections day," he added.

The president also said he hoped the US government would break the stalemate in the peace process with Israel.

He said negotiations would not resume until Israel stopped expanding illegal settlements on Palestinian land and freed all prisoners detained before 1994.

Meanwhile, Mashaal said if Washington is serious about "changing the current political scene, stopping the bloodshed in the region, and lifting the injustice on the Palestinian people in order to achieve real peace, we remind it that true peace is based on justice, equity and restoration of rights."

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