



PONTIFICAL MISSION

the papal agency for Middle East relief and development

P.O. Box 19642, Jerusalem 91196 • +972 (2) 627 21 26, fax 627 3777 • pmp@pmp.co.il

Jerusalem, 16 December 2019

A Naïve Reading of the Elections

The Israeli Parliament voted to dissolve itself as the two major parties failed to form a government and at the same time, upon the president's call, parliamentarians failed to form a coalition government. Israel is heading towards the third election in less than a year which will take place March 2nd.

Today, we are witnessing the “Netanyahu” effect on Israeli politics. There is no serious ideological or political difference between the Likud headed by Netanyahu or “Kahol Lavan”¹ headed by Beni Gantz, there is no specific program, even their campaigns are similar in their “mottos”. Both parties disassociate themselves with the Arab population, both parties reject any insinuation that either is leftist and use “leftist” as a curse against the other, both parties totally neglect the issue of Jerusalem, negotiations or the occupation in their deliberations as if these issues are a done deal, or have no effect or value whatsoever². In addition, some 35 laws have been passed in the parliament that target the Arabs in Israel or Jerusalem and that support the settlement activities³. This is the Netanyahu effect. Both parties talk about the settlements being part and parcel of the State of Israel, annexation of the West Bank is on the agenda of both parties, Iran as a threat, etc. There is no left nor a middle party in Israel; no one dares criticize the settlement activities or discuss the rights of the Palestinians.

If this is the case, then why can't both parties agree to a broad, national united government, which both parties tried hard to form since April 2019? The real challenge that led to the failure of forming a government, and which is leading today to another round of elections, is the safeguarding of Netanyahu from the charges of corruption against him. Netanyahu's lawyer advised him that he will have better chances if he faces these allegations as Prime Minister⁴. This is the only reason for the chaotic situation that Israel faces today.

To the Israeli government, Jerusalem is a done deal and is considered part of Israel whereby billions of shekels are invested to Judaize East Jerusalem. The right of return is also finished for those Palestinians living in the diaspora. The settlements are prospering and increasing in size every day and the challenge today for the Israeli leadership is how to annex the West Bank. Overall, the occupation costs Israel zero expenses, on the contrary it is a form of income as it exploits fertile land and natural resources in the West Bank, especially water.

Lieberman, head of the Yisrael Beiteinu⁵ party, refused to join any of the two major parties and demanded a national unified government, however he opposes the right-wing religious parties. One of his party's agenda is the “transfer” of the Palestinians to any of the Arab countries.

¹ “Kahol Lavan” in Hebrew means “Blue and White”: it is a newly formed party which won the last elections.

² Sami Abu Shihadeh, Arab member of the parliament, given in a speech at a symposium on “Israeli elections: Jerusalem in the speech of the competitors”.

³ Dr. Huneida Ghanem, director of Madar Center, given in a speech at a symposium on “Israeli elections: Jerusalem in the speech of the competitors”.

⁴ Sami Abu Shihadeh, *ibid*.

⁵ “Israel our Home”

It is really disturbing that this level of hatred, anti-Arabism, fundamentalism and even outspoken racism is not witnessing serious outrage and condemnation by the International Community. Even the approved National Law – making Israel a state for the Jews only – did not witness any serious objection. There is also a surge of hate crimes including vandalism in Arab neighborhoods: slashing tires and scrawling hate graffiti, "Arabs are the enemy and should be expelled or killed". This is a direct effect of hate messages and incitement of Netanyahu during his election campaigns.

Palestinians are facing total failure due to the internal division and the inability of the PLO to renew itself. There is no Palestinian strategy, vision, national plan or developmental program that could respond to the needs of the Palestinian community, especially in East Jerusalem. Israel is oppressing the Palestinian community in East Jerusalem with daily raids in Arab neighborhoods, including arrests, taxes, confiscations, demolitions, settlement construction and expansion.

The situation is not expected to change anytime soon. The new elections most probably will fail unless Netanyahu is out of the picture either because of the charges against him or because his opponent Gideon Saar manages to oust him from the presidency of the Likud Party.

In the midst of all this chaos, the Palestinians have only one option and one goal: to survive⁶. PMP is trying its best through its programs to help the community survive, responding to some of the needs. Currently, PMP is conducting two surveys on the Israeli and Palestinian markets; these surveys will help advance the “educational guidance program PMP launched this year to help young Palestinians select colleges and university programs that have a job market and also to encourage them to select the vocational path. PMP also hopes to use the results to connect between employment opportunities and unemployed youth through the creation of an employment office. Remedial education will continue to be a priority.

Investing in the schools and in youth centers is crucial in reaching out a helping hand to the children and youth in Jerusalem. This is one of the several recommendations of the survey conducted on the Christian youth in Jerusalem. Providing scholarships, making sure that the children complete their high school education, enter university and improve their employability are key to a better future.

The challenges are multifold and a joint plan of action among the various key players is a must. We are confident that in 2020, PMP and its partners will be able to advance a few programs in East Jerusalem to help the children and youth overcome some of the challenges they face.

Joseph Hazboun
Regional Director

⁶ Dr. Sari Nusseibeh, at a lecture for Al-Quds University students.