



**The Elders and The Carter Center
Joint Convening with Palestinian Civil Society March 4, 2021, via Zoom
Summary Report**

On March 4, 2021, The Carter Center and The Elders convened a virtual workshop with 16 new-generation Palestinian civil society and thought leaders to support emerging voices promoting a rights-based approach to peace and justice in Palestine. Palestinian civil society representatives from across geographical areas participated: 1948 Palestinians; the diaspora (based in the U.S., Europe, and Lebanon); Gaza Strip; and the West Bank. Lakhdar Brahimi, former Algerian foreign minister and U.N. diplomat, represented The Elders. The workshop follows a [listening exercise](#) undertaken jointly by The Carter Center and The Elders in 2020-2021.

The workshop was designed to: (i) explore the mechanisms for inclusive collaboration among civil society across Palestinian geographies; (ii) combat national fragmentation; and (iii) begin building an inclusive network of civil society representatives and thought leaders that can leverage their roles and collaboration to strengthen the Palestinian movement for human rights and justice.

Participants explored the upcoming Palestinian and Israeli elections and the changing political context between Palestinians and Israelis and within the United States and other significant political arenas in order to identify opportunities and challenges for advancing the three goals of the workshop and to build an agenda for future workshops.

Advancing a rights-based approach to justice for Palestinians: Opportunities and challenges

Participants pointed to the recent International Criminal Court decision to open an investigation into possible war crimes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) as an opportunity to hold the perpetrators accountable for violations of international law. The prospect for accountability gives civil society across geographical areas a common objective for collaboration.

The general sense was that the Biden Administration's position on Palestine presented a challenge to Palestinian rights and justice because it represents a return to the two-state solution status quo. Nevertheless, one participant saw potential opportunity in the Biden Administration because of its general embrace of a rights-based foreign policy. The growing movement for racial justice in the U.S. and its intersections with Palestinian rights was also seen as an opportunity that could be leveraged.

The decrees issued by the Palestinian Authority curtailing fundamental freedoms were identified as a real threat to Palestinian civil society, creating an additional layer to a growing complex of initiatives by Israeli, U.S., and European entities to silence Palestinian rights advocates.

Most participants expressed reservations about the upcoming Palestinian election, pointing to the physical barriers between Palestinian communities and the growing crackdowns on civil society by Israeli and Palestinian authorities. Concern was also expressed that the election could potentially reinforce an outdated, antiliberation paradigm.

The role of big tech companies in quashing human rights advocacy for Palestine was viewed as an immediate challenge with significant implications. As one participant noted, “tech organisations get to decide which voices can be heard.”

Participants noted that perhaps the greatest challenge to advancing Palestinian rights is the lack of a coherent national movement. At the same time, they agreed that civil society represents the greatest opportunity to craft and lead a collective and effective Palestinian voice in the future.

Collective action points and areas for strengthened Palestinian and international collaboration

There was a call to build an inclusive mechanism to bring civil society together across the different geographical locations, both inside and outside the OPT. The mechanism should find ways to embrace the differences among Palestinians in their respective geographical locations and increase cross-geographical collaboration around: i) coordinated messaging; ii) joint research; iii) dialogue on Palestinian identity and the new political horizon; and iv) the role of civil society in reaching that horizon.

Conclusion: Enabling further dialogue

Participants expressed a desire to see international organizations like The Carter Center and The Elders work to protect civic and advocacy space and support coalition-building between international nongovernmental organizations and Palestinian civil society around a shared agenda. They also said there is an urgent need to increase resources, including more flexible funding sources, for Palestinians to work together across geographies. Donors who come with preset agendas or strings attached were viewed as harming the ability of Palestinians to work collectively.

The Carter Center indicated that it would continue convening civil society across geographies for further discussions, with the field office serving as a conduit for engagement between workshops.