

Palestinians rally for Abbas's UN statehood bid

Reuters

September 22, 2011

RAMALLAH, Sept 22 — Flag-waving Palestinians filled the squares of major West Bank cities yesterday to rally behind President Mahmoud Abbas's bid for statehood recognition at the United Nations in the face of US and Israeli objections.

"We are asking for the most simple of rights, a state like other nations," said Sabrina Hussein, 50, carrying the green, red, black and white Palestinian national flag at a demonstration in Ramallah.

Abbas's Palestinian Authority, which exercises limited self-rule in the Israeli-occupied West Bank under 1990s interim peace deals, gave school children and civil servants the day off to attend events in Ramallah, Bethlehem, Nablus and Hebron.

A large mockup of a blue chair, symbolising a seat at the UN, and giant Palestinian flags hanging from buildings provided a backdrop for the Ramallah rally, where attendance peaked at several thousand.

The main venues were far removed from Israeli military checkpoints on city limits and the rallies were peaceful.

But away from the gatherings, more than a hundred Palestinian youths threw rocks at Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint on the edge of Ramallah. The soldiers responded with teargas and used a "screamer" — a device that emits an ear-splitting high-pitched sound to disperse crowds.

There were also disturbances in the divided West Bank city of Hebron.

The crowds numbered in the thousands across the West Bank. Palestinian analysts said that while respectable, turnout was curtailed by the ongoing political divide between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, which governs in Gaza.

An opinion poll released this week by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) showed 83 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip supported the UN move.

Later in the day in New York, US President Barack Obama was due to meet Abbas to urge him to drop plans to ask the UN Security Council to recognise a Palestinian state. Washington says statehood should be achieved through peace talks.

Abbas has said he will present UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon with a membership application on Friday. The move requires Security Council approval and the United States, one of five veto-wielding permanent members, says it will block it.

"Cry of desperation"

At the Ramallah rally, Amina Abdel Jabbar al-Kiswany, a head teacher, said the UN bid was a step towards statehood, but not a solution to the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which direct negotiations have failed to resolve.

"It's a cry of desperation," Kiswany said.

Reflecting anger with US policy, a Palestinian, his face covered by a scarf, climbed the stage scaffolding and set ablaze an American flag. Earlier, some of the demonstrators had tried to stop the flag burning.

Washington's pledge to veto the bid for UN membership has added to deep Palestinian disappointment in Obama. The Palestinians have long complained of what they see as Washington's support for Israel at their expense.

"America talks about human rights. They support South Sudan. Why don't they support us?" said Tamer Milham, a 26-year-old computer engineer, referring to the new state of South Sudan which was admitted to the United Nations in July.

US-brokered peace talks collapsed a year ago after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refused to extend a 10-month limited moratorium on construction in Jewish settlements in areas Palestinians want for a state.

Netanyahu has called the Palestinian demand of a halt to settlement building an unacceptable precondition and urged Abbas to return to negotiations.

Palestinians hope to establish a state in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip, territories captured by Israel in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

The Palestinian Authority has held sway only in the West Bank since Hamas Islamists opposed to peace efforts with Israel seized Gaza in a brief civil war in 2007.

Hamas has dismissed the UN bid as a waste of time and there were no rallies in the Mediterranean enclave, where Palestinians argue that Abbas should be devoting his energies to bridging the internal political divide.

Israel cites historical and biblical links to the West Bank, which it calls Judea and Samaria, and to Jerusalem. It claims all of the city as its capital, a status that is not recognised internationally. — Reuters

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2011 The Malaysian Insider

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/world/article/palestinians-rally-for-abbass-un-statehood-bid/>