Profile: Dr. Mustafa Barghouthi

Member of the Palestinian parliament; 2005 presidential candidate; General Secretary of the Palestinian National Initiative; former Minister of Information under the first National Unity Government in Palestinian history; physician; social, political, human rights and peace activist; one of the most active grassroots leaders in Palestine; campaigner for the development of Palestinian civil society and grassroots democracy; outspoken advocate of internal reform; international spokesperson for the Palestinian cause; leading figure in the non-violent, peaceful struggle against the Occupation; and organizer of international solidarity presence in the Palestine, Mustafa Barghouthi has made an extraordinary contribution to initiatives to peacefully challenge the ongoing Israeli Occupation of Palestine and bring it to end, as well as efforts to build the institutional framework of Palestinian civil society and promote the principles of internal democracy and good governance. He writes extensively for local and international audiences on civil society and democracy issues and the political situation in Palestine, as well as on health development policy in Palestine.

Recent Activities

Dr. Barghouthi ran in the presidential elections of January 2005 as a Palestinian National Initiative (PNI) candidate, on an anti-corruption and pro-democracy platform. He achieved second place behind Mahmoud Abbas, with almost one third of total votes.

He also headed the “Independent Palestine” Coalition that ran in legislative elections in January 2006, in which he secured a seat in the Palestinian parliament. The Coalition consists of independents, business leaders, academics, writers, women, youth, labour movements, and the PNI, and draws primarily upon grassroots support. Its platform seeks to provide a truly democratic and independent alternative to the large majority of silent and unrepresented Palestinian voters, who favour neither the autocracy and corruption of the previous governments, nor the fundamentalism of Hamas.

Dr. Barghouthi was one of the only candidates to focus major attention on demanding an end to construction of Israel’s Apartheid Wall, and the dismantlement of existing sections. He also strongly advocated at the highest levels for the right to campaign, and to hold elections in East Jerusalem following threats by the Israeli government to forbid elections from taking place in the divided city.

Following the results of legislative elections the situation in Palestine reached a nadir, plunging the Palestinian people into one of the bleakest periods in the history of their struggle. This post-election situation was characterised by a political and economic siege imposed by Israel and some members of the international community on the Hamas-led government, to the detriment of millions of ordinary Palestinians, and the outbreak of in-fighting between armed groups affiliated to the two main political parties, Fatah and Hamas, as the political vacuum at the governmental level translated into a power struggle on the Palestinian street.

During this time, Dr. Barghouthi played a critical role in mediating between the two main factions to secure the formation of a national unity government and to bring an end to internal fighting in which 490 Palestinians were killed and 2,726 injured between in 2007.

As the representative of a movement respected for its genuine independence, Dr. Barghouthi was regarded as one of the actors that could play a constructive role in mediating a solution for internal peace after the conflict between Fatah and Hamas escalated to the point of internal violence, endangering the future of all Palestinians. His role involved months of non-stop shuttle diplomacy between Syria, Egypt, Jordan, the Gulf States, the European Union, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Ultimately, Dr. Barghouthi’s involvement in mediating what became the Mecca Agreement provided a peaceful way out of the crisis, and led to renewed dialogue towards the formation of the first national unity government in Palestinian history, in which he served as Minister of Information. It also led directly to achieving the first mutual, reciprocal ceasefire with Israel implemented in November 2006.

This role saw Dr. Barghouthi's participation in high-level, internal dialogue and in advocating for diplomatic actions at the international level to end the siege on the Palestinian people. Yet at the same time, he has retained his well-deserved image as "*a man of the people*", as one of the leading figures of Palestinian civil society, and as one of the most vocal advocates of the non-violence movement in Palestine. In practice, this has taken the form of support for peaceful demonstrations calling for the immediate formation of a national unity government for the good of the Palestinian people; continued participation in non-violent, popular protests against construction of Israel's Apartheid Wall together with Israeli and international supporters, part of more than 20 years of advocacy for non-violence; and bringing the voices of ordinary Palestinians and of Palestinian civil society to decision-making spheres both nationally and internationally.

Background

Dr. Barghouthi was born in Jerusalem in 1954 to a Palestinian family from Deir Ghassaneh village in the Ramallah District. As a medical doctor trained in the former Soviet Union, with post-graduate training in Jerusalem and an MSc in business administration and management from Stanford University, Dr. Barghouthi has been a key actor in the introduction of modern concepts and models of health care in Palestine. From 1978 till 1988, he worked at the Maqassed hospital in Jerusalem as a Physician in the Departments of Neurosurgery, and in the Internal Medicine, Cardiology and Coronary Care Unit, and finally as Chief Physician of the hospital's Primary Healthcare Clinics.

In 1979, Dr. Barghouthi was among the founders of a voluntary, non-governmental and non-profit medical relief movement, the Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS). The aim of the PMRS at the time of its inception was to provide Palestinians, particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups such as women, children, the elderly, the disabled, and those living in rural, isolated areas with essential emergency and primary healthcare services. Since its foundation, the PMRS has evolved into one of the largest providers of primary healthcare services throughout the Palestinian Territory, with a staff consisting of 360 health professionals and 38,000 volunteers. It currently works in 490 Palestinian cities, villages and refugee camps, providing emergency, preventive and curative primary healthcare, specialised care, and a range of other services to 1.3 million Palestinians each year. The PMRS has pioneered the development of healthcare models such as the Community-Based Rehabilitation programme, aimed at providing rehabilitation services to people with disabilities and at facilitating their integration into their communities. The PMRS has also been at the forefront of efforts to target the most vulnerable sectors of Palestinian society, through its Women's and Child Health services, and through the provision of free medical services to thousands of Palestinians.

After serving as President of the PMRS for 20 years, Dr. Barghouthi resigned his post in 2004 to pursue political activities. He was again elected President in 2007.

At the height of the first Intifada in 1989, Dr. Barghouthi was also one of a group of Palestinian health practitioners and researchers that co-founded the Health, Development Information and Policy Institute (HDIP). HDIP is a policy think-tank and a leader in the field of health and public policy research. In addition to its other functions, HDIP houses the Palestine Monitor, an information clearing house, on behalf of Palestinian civil society. The Palestine Monitor was launched in order to convey unified responses from Palestinian civil society about local developments and to provide objective and accurate information to the press and international community. Its website acts as one of the key information sources on the conflict, with more than 1.4 million hits per month.

Following the US veto on 27 March 2001 of a UNSC resolution calling for the deployment of an international protection force for civilians in the Occupied Territory, Dr. Barghouthi and other members of PNGO worked to mobilise international protection for the Palestinians at the grassroots level instead. As such, Dr. Barghouthi, along with 700 local and international organisations, helped found the Grassroots International Protection for the Palestinian People (GIPP), a program that aims to protect Palestinian civilians through the presence of international civilians by deterring Israeli army and settler aggression.

Dr. Barghouthi has been at the forefront of initiatives promoting non-violent resistance as the most effective means of overcoming the Israeli Occupation, and has been consistently present at grassroots, non-violent resistance initiatives against the construction of Israel's Apartheid Wall. Dr. Barghouthi is also one of the leading exponents of the campaign for economic and political divestment from Israel and its associated institutions.

With a long history of involvement in the Palestinian political sphere, Dr. Barghouthi was a member of the Palestinian delegation to the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991. He was also a member of the Steering Committee to the Multilateral Peace Negotiations from 1991-93. He drafted the Palestinian NGO law and participated in lobbying efforts to have it passed by the Palestinian Legislative Council.

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In 2002, Dr. Barghouthi co-founded the Palestinian National Initiative (PNI, or 'Al Mubadara' in English), along with Dr. Edward Said, Dr. Haider Abdel-Shafi and Mr. Ibrahim Dakak, and currently serves as its General Secretary. The PNI was established in response to popular and widespread demands by Palestinian citizens for participation in nation-building, and in the struggle for an independent, viable, democratic and prosperous Palestinian state that guarantees security, justice and equality before the law for all Palestinians. It is committed to the principles of democracy, transparency, good governance, participation, gender equity, and peaceful, non-violent resistance against the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestine.

The PNI advocates for an independent, sovereign, viable and contiguous Palestinian state on all the Palestinian Territories occupied in 1967, and seeks to represent a genuine, democratic alternative, appealing to the vast majority of silent and unrepresented Palestinians who do not identify with mainstream Palestinian political parties.

For more information, please visit:

www.almubadara.org
www.palestinemonitor.org