

Hamas ready to hold polls in Gaza

Hamas said on Sunday that it had agreed to steps towards resolving a decade-long split with Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas's Fatah, announcing it would dissolve a body seen as a rival government and was ready to hold elections.

The statement comes after Hamas leaders held talks with Egyptian officials last week, and with the Gaza Strip run by the Palestinian Islamist movement facing a mounting humanitarian crisis.

Hamas said it had agreed to key demands made by Fatah: dissolving the so-called "administrative committee" created in March, while saying it was ready for elections and negotiations toward a unity government. It called on the Palestinian Authority government based in the Israeli-occupied West Bank "to come to Gaza to exercise its functions and carry out its duties immediately".

Talks in Egypt

Hamas chief Ismail Haniya agreed to take such steps in talks with Egyptian officials in Cairo last week, said a Hamas official.

It was unclear, however, whether the steps would result in further concrete action toward ending the deep division with Fatah.

Hamas for now continues to run a de facto separate administration in the Gaza Strip and is in charge of the security forces there.

Previous attempts to resolve the split have repeatedly failed.

Mr. Abbas's Fatah welcomed the announcement, saying it followed "extensive meetings" between its own representatives and Egyptian intelligence officials.

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