

Abbas says no elections unless Palestinians in East Jerusalem can vote

PA says it has asked Israel for permission for residents to take part in planned vote, a first in over a decade, but so far had no response from Israel

By **TOI STAFF**

19 December 2019, 2:58 am



Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas shows his ink-stained finger after casting his vote during local elections at a polling station in the West Bank city of Ramallah, October 20, 2012. (AP/Majdi Mohammed)

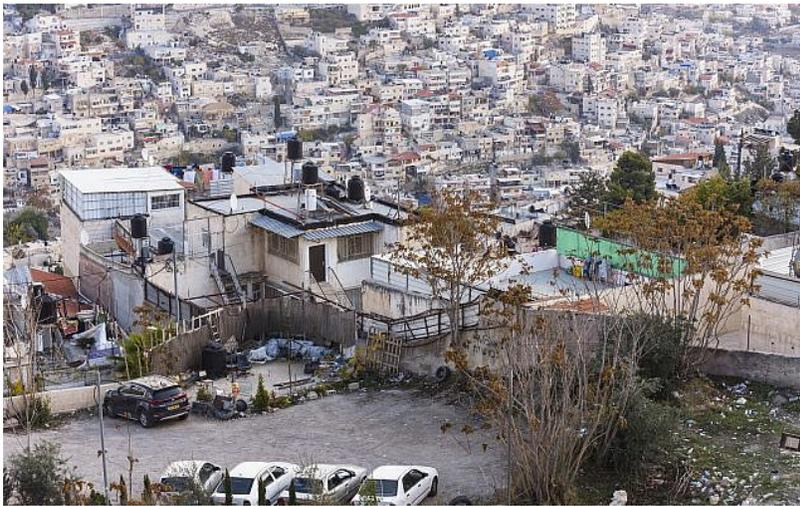
Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said Wednesday that he won't go ahead with planned elections unless Israel allows Palestinians living in East Jerusalem to vote.

"If Jerusalem residents can't vote in the heart of the city where they live, there will not be elections," Abbas said during a speech in Ramallah. "We are very interested in holding elections, but not at any price," he said.

The Palestinians have not held elections for more than a decade.

Last week the PA said it had officially requested permission from Israel to allow Palestinians in East Jerusalem to vote and run in PA parliamentary and presidential elections. Israel has yet to give a response.

The overwhelming majority of Palestinians in East Jerusalem cannot vote in national elections in Israel because Israeli law only permits citizens of the Jewish state to cast ballots. Palestinians in East Jerusalem largely do not hold citizenship, but rather permanent residency.



View of the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan, on December 14, 2017. (Dario Sanchez/Flash90)

Abbas told the annual gathering of the United Nations General Assembly in September in New York City that he would call for general elections in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem in the near future.

He has since met several times with the head of the PA Central Elections Committee, Hanna Nasser, to discuss the possibility of holding elections, but has yet to set dates for the vote.

Meanwhile, the Hamas terror group, which rules the Gaza Strip, has declared it is ready to participate in elections.

The PA has not held parliamentary or presidential elections since 2006 and 2005, respectively.

The PA and Hamas have been at loggerheads since the latter ousted the former from Gaza in 2007. Multiple attempts to reconcile the two and bring the West Bank and Gaza under a single government have failed.

The Oslo Accords, signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in the 1990s, set out a mechanism to enable Palestinians to participate in elections in East Jerusalem, which the Jewish state considers part of its sovereign capital.



In this 9 January 2005 file photo, Palestinian women guard the ballot boxes for the Palestinian Authority Election. (Sharon Perry/Flash90)

The Palestinians have said they want East Jerusalem to be the capital of a future Palestinian state.

Israel allowed PA elections to take place in East Jerusalem in 1996, 2005 and 2006.

Both the PA and Hamas have said they will not take part in elections that exclude East Jerusalem.

Palestinian analysts believe the chances of a vote going ahead are low, both because of internal Palestinian disputes and Israel's apparent unwillingness to let an East Jerusalem vote go ahead.

The Israeli government has cracked down on any PA activity in East Jerusalem in recent years and would be loath to allow a Palestinian vote in the city, particularly during an Israeli election campaign.

Israel considers East Jerusalem part of a united capital of Israel.

Adam Rasgon contributed to this report.

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