



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
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President's Statement on Palestinian Elections

I am heartened by today's strong turnout in the Palestinian elections. Palestinians throughout the West Bank and Gaza took a key step toward building a democratic future by choosing a new president in elections that observers describe as largely free and fair. This is a historic day for the Palestinian people and for the people of the Middle East.

America and all free nations strongly support the efforts of the Palestinian people to create lasting democratic institutions. These efforts -- including today's presidential elections and the parliamentary elections that will follow in several months -- are essential for the establishment of a sovereign, independent, viable, democratic, and peaceful Palestinian state that can live alongside a safe and secure Israel. These elections are further proof that when given a choice, all peoples seek to live in liberty and to choose their own government.

The United States stands ready to help the Palestinian people realize their aspirations. The new Palestinian president and his cabinet face critical tasks ahead, including fighting terrorism, combatting corruption, building reformed and democratic institutions, and reviving the Palestinian economy. We look forward to working with him and the Palestinian people to address these challenges and to advance the cause of Middle East peace consistent with the vision I set forth on June 24, 2002, of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Other countries also have constructive and vital roles to play. Israel must help to improve the humanitarian and economic situation in the West Bank and Gaza, and follow through with the Disengagement Plan. The Arab states must take concrete steps with all parties to create a regional environment conducive to peace, lend financial support to the Palestinian people, and refuse to assist or harbor terrorists. The United States is looking carefully at how we can best organize and fund our own efforts to help the parties achieve a lasting peace.

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