

Handwritten Arabic text in red ink, including the number '19' and some illegible script.

Fatah leaders give their backing to Nusseibeh and Ayalon's plan for 'two states for two peoples'

By Arnon Regular

A plan to have 1 million people, representing the "silent majority" of Israelis and Palestinians ready to compromise on a two-state solution, sign a petition is gaining momentum among West Bank Fatah leaders.

The petition drive is being spearheaded by Al Quds University President Sari Nusseibeh and former Shin Bet chief and navy admiral Maj. Gen. (res.) Ami Ayalon.

Dozens of Fatah leaders convened Saturday at Ramallah's Grand Palace Hotel for a rally, organized by Nusseibeh, by the Palestinian side of a movement called The People's Voice.

The movement is working to organize the petition by Israelis and Palestinians on a document hammered out between Nusseibeh and Ayalon that calls for a peace accord based on the 1967 borders - with minor corrections and territorial exchanges, Palestinian right of return to its new state, and agreement over the end of the conflict. The document also resolves the issue of Jerusalem by keeping Jewish neighborhoods under Israeli sovereignty while placing Arab neighborhoods under Palestinian sovereignty.

The Temple Mount would come under divine sovereignty and be jointly managed by Israelis and Palestinians. The Palestinian state would be demilitarized.

Since the agreement was formulated last fall, Nusseibeh has campaigned for the petition in gatherings throughout the territories and in meetings with Fatah leaders. His efforts are part of an attempt to create within Fatah a broader movement that speaks directly to what the movement believes is the silent majority that wants peace and compromise in both the territories and in Israel. In one meeting at Al Najah University, considered a Hamas stronghold, Nusseibeh was not allowed by the students to speak to a general audience.

However, with the appearance of dozens of leading members of the

PA's security forces and of Fatah at Saturday's rally, there appears to be deep support for the plan. Most of the leaders are unknown to Israelis, but they have enormous influence within Fatah institutions. Among those attending the rally were Col. Salah Jedid, a senior officer in the General Intelligence Service, Col. Ahmed Salhub, from the Preventive Security Forces in Hebron, Hamadan Sa'ifan, a senior Fatah leader from the northern West Bank, and key Fatah members from Bethlehem. The governor of Nablus, Mahmoud Alalul, a supporter of the Nusseibeh-Ayalon document, did not attend the rally in protest of the army's decision to deny permission to a group from Nablus to travel to the meeting.

Ami Makbul, who replaced Marwan Barghouti as head of Fatah's West Bank steering committee, is a key figure who has expressed support for the Nusseibeh-Ayalon plan but has yet to take a public stance on it.

Speakers at the conference sharply condemned the militarization of the intifada, the use of weapons, and particularly the suicide bombings. They agreed that the PA's biggest mistake has been losing support from the Israeli public, particularly the peace camp. They accused both the PA and its chairman, Yasser Arafat, by name, for sending a message that violence could be used at any stage of dialogue with Israel. The speakers emphasized they desire "a political plan based on a strategy, not a tactic, of peace.

The PA must fulfill its security commitments in full, and Israel must meet all of its political commitments."

Besides discussing the principles of the petition, there was discussion on pragmatic ways of disseminating it. The group also talked about plans to meet Israeli activists.