

Egypt-Saudi ready to resume inter-Palestinian mediation

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Egypt and Saudi Arabia are ready to resume mediation between rival Palestinian factions following the bloody seizure of Gaza by Hamas, Egyptian presidential spokesman Suleiman Awad said Tuesday.

Saudi King Abdullah told Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak during talks in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh that his country would be willing to resume inter-Palestinian mediation, Awad said.

"Yes, this is very much on the table," Awad told reporters following the meeting, which came a day after a largely inconclusive summit of Middle East leaders in Sharm.

But he added: "We need some time for the spirits to calm down, for the verbal clashes to subside.

"We need time to create the climate conducive to mediating between the Hamas people and the Palestinian authority in order to sort out their differences."

Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt have been involved in a number of attempts to end the deadly feuding between the Islamists of Hamas and the secular Fatah party of moderate Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas.

But Saudi Arabia had said last week it would no longer mediate after a three-month-old unity government deal brokered by Riyadh collapsed in brutal factional warfare which saw Hamas overrun Fatah in the Gaza Strip and effectively split the Palestinians into two separate entities.

Mubarak on Monday called for the resumption of dialogue between the rival factions during the summit which brought Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert together for the first time since the Palestinian leader sacked his Hamas-led unity government following what he branded a military coup in Gaza.

"Our deliberations today affirmed the (need) to end disagreements, and unify the Palestinian ranks through dialogue," Mubarak told summit participants, which included Jordan's King Abdullah II.

"They affirmed that the resumption of dialogue between all the children of Palestine, and the achievement of a common position that speaks for its people and its cause is an immediate requirement that can bear no delay," he said.

Hamas, which is now completely isolated by Israel and the West in its Gaza stronghold, has voiced readiness for talks with Abbas to end the crisis.

"We warmly welcome the call for dialogue made by President Mubarak to the Palestinian people," dismissed Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniya said in Gaza on Tuesday.

"We think this call mirrors a good understanding of the complexities of the situation, which can be resolved only through dialogue.

"From now on we have made it known we are ready for dialogue," added Haniya, who has refused to step down from his position despite Abbas's unceremonious sacking of him and his Hamas-led government on June 14.