

Palestinian unity talks in crisis

Unity talks face crisis as many Hamas officials still vehemently oppose reconciliation pact, have a number of conditions.

Palestinian unity talks in Cairo faced a crisis on Thursday as President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal agreed to postpone talks about the formation of a new government, a PA official in Ramallah said.

A sharp dispute within Hamas over the recent Qatari-brokered reconciliation deal between Abbas and Mashaal was hindering the establishment of a Palestinian unity government, the official said.

On Wednesday, Hamas's political bureau announced its support for the deal following a 14-hour stormy meeting in the Egyptian capital.

However, on Thursday it transpired that many Hamas officials have not changed their minds about the reconciliation pact and continue to vehemently oppose it.

In a bid to persuade the Hamas opponents to support the agreement, Abbas met in Cairo with members of the Islamist movement's political bureau and briefed them on the details of the agreement.

Abbas was also scheduled to meet late on Thursday with Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, who has voiced reservations about the agreement.

The meeting between the two men would be the first of its kind since 2007, when Hamas seized full control over the Gaza Strip.

Another PA official said Hamas has set "new and unacceptable" conditions for the formation of a unity government that would be dominated by technocrats and headed by Abbas.

The official said that one of the conditions was that current PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad be kept out of the new unity government. Hamas was also demanding that its representatives hold key ministries and maintain security control over the Gaza Strip, the official added.

The official also accused Hamas of preventing the Palestinian Central Elections Commission from opening an office in the Gaza Strip to register voters for presidential and parliamentary elections.

Hamas has also demanded that the new government be presented to the Palestinian Legislative Council for a vote of confidence. However, Abbas has rejected the demand, insisting that there was no need for such a vote because the government would serve as a caretaker government for a limited period.

Abbas and Mashaal arrived in Cairo on Wednesday to participate in discussions among several Palestinian groups on ending the Fatah-Hamas dispute and implementing the Qatari-brokered deal.