

Hamas delays response to Palestinian unity deal

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Hamas has delayed sending a delegation to Cairo to give its response to an Egyptian-proposed Palestinian reconciliation deal, a senior official in the Islamist group told AFP on Sunday

The Hamas delegation was to travel to Cairo on Sunday, but Ayman Taha said the trip has been delayed indefinitely.

"Hamas has postponed sending its delegation to Egypt because General Omar Suleiman is not in Cairo," he said, referring to the Egyptian intelligence chief who has been brokering efforts to reconcile Hamas with its secular Fatah rivals.

"Communication between Egypt and Hamas continues," Taha said, without specifying when the delegation would travel to Cairo.

Another Hamas official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that "there are some points in the (Egyptian) document that need to be discussed before it is signed" without elaborating.

The official added that Hamas "will confirm that there are guarantees for the implementation of the reconciliation agreement."

Hamas has not said what its response will be to the Egyptian unity proposal, which Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah has already signed.

On Friday Cairo announced that its mediators had delayed to an unspecified date their deadline for Hamas to sign the unity deal at the Islamists' request.

The agreement provides for the holding of presidential and parliamentary elections on June 28, 2010 and the reinstatement of 3,000 members of the former Fatah-led security apparatus in Gaza.

It would be implemented by a joint committee appointed by presidential decree and made up of members of Fatah, Hamas and other factions.

Ongoing tensions between Hamas and Fatah came to a boil in June 2007 and ended with the Islamists routing their rivals from the Gaza Strip after a week of deadly street clashes, cleaving the Palestinians into two hostile camps.

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