

# Canada blamed for failure to issue communique at the Forum for the Future in Qatar

Canada's inflexibility and insistence on not including a reference to Palestine has stalled efforts to issue a communique at the end of the Forum for the Future, Qatari officials have said

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Manama: Canada's inflexibility and insistence on not including a reference to Palestine has stalled efforts to issue a communique at the end of the Forum for the Future, Qatari officials have said.

"There had been an agreement on the communique for the seventh Forum for the Future," Ahmad Bin Abdullah Al Mahmoud, Qatar's state minister for foreign affairs, said. "However, the Canadians, the co-chair of the forum, insisted on not including a paragraph on Palestine," he said, quoted by Qatar News Agency (QNA).

The Seventh Forum for the Future Ministerial Meeting between the G8 and Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) countries was held in Doha on January 12-13. Intensive discussions with the Canadians to make them accept the inclusion of the note about Palestine have not succeeded in overcoming their intransigence, the minister said.

"The Canadians said that they would consult with their government, but efforts by members of the G8 and other countries failed to persuade them. Canada did not want to make a reference to the Palestinian cause. So there was an agreement not to issue a joint declaration. Qatar, as co-chair of the forum, cannot accept that a gathering in Doha ignores the legitimate rights of the Palestinians and issues a communique where there is no reference to the Palestinian cause, the Arab lands occupied in 1967 and the UN resolutions on the issue," he said.

The forum is meant to discuss the future, and we all agree that the future should be based on justice, a source of great interest for the peoples and countries of the region, the minister said.

"If we start talking about justice, then the forums will simple a place for discussions, but with no results," Al Mahmoud said.

He said that he hoped Kuwait and France, the co-chairs of the next Forum, would not face "the problems that we had to confront so that we could reach a consensus that reflects our desire for a brighter future, stability and justice."

According to a Qatari source that QNA did not name, the absence of a final communiqué was a "great loss to the region and to the civil society and the business sector."

"Even though the forum issued only one communiqué since it was launched in 2004, there was great hope that the seventh forum in Doha will announce a joint declaration that will reinforce the goals of the gathering and boosts its forward-looking progress," the source said.

"There had been negotiations about a communiqué in Ottawa in November and we were headed towards a full agreement. However, in Doha, Canada suggested a view on the Middle East that was well below what was discussed in Ottawa. During the Doha discussions, there had been concessions by some of the participating states and civil society organisations to achieve the required consensus; however, the Canadian delegation, acting on order from its government, refused to compromise on the item it suggested," the source said.

A request from the Qataris to the Canadians to soften their stance and amend their suggestion, the North American delegation refused.

"The Canadians even refused to include what had been accepted at the Marrakesh Forum in November 2009," the source said.

In Marrakesh, the Chairmen's Statement stated that "participants reaffirmed their firm commitment to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East which end the occupation that began in 1967, based on a two-state solution with an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian State living in peace and security alongside Israel, consistent with UNSC Resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515, 1850, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid principles including land for peace, the Roadmap and the agreements previously reached by the parties."

The statement also called for "immediate resumption of the negotiation process with a view to an early conclusion of a peace treaty resolving all outstanding core issues, including refugees, borders, Jerusalem and security."

"Qatar could not accept a statement that would be less significant than the 2009 Marrakesh Forum for the Future," the source said.

"Based on all this, Canada assumes the responsibility for the immense loss suffered by the civil society organisations and the business sectors. They have lost good opportunities to secure reforms approved by all the governments for the first time following successful negotiations," the source said.

Lawrence Cannon, Canada's foreign minister and co-chairman of the seventh Forum for the Future, noted that Qatar and Canada have worked closely together for the past year in an attempt to revitalise the G8-MENA process, but a declaration could not be made.

“Nevertheless, we should not forsake the progress we have made,” said Cannon.

“Canada is committed to work with our partner Qatar to issue a co-chair statement which reflects the progress we have made and which takes into account the situation in the region including the Middle East process. We are committed to consulting with our partners to finalise the co-chair statement in the very near future. This will be a record of our discussions which will allow us move forward built on the progress achieved this past year,” he said, quoted by Qatari daily The Peninsula on Friday.

Salah Al Deen Jorchi, the First Vice-President of Human Rights League in Tunisia and Representative of the Civil Society Organisations (CSO) at the forum, said Canada should be held accountable for hindering the progress on the final declaration.

"We were shocked because we have always believed that the Palestinian issue was clear to everyone and that there was consensus about it, especially that the previous forum in Marrakesh has agreed on it," Salah Eddine said. "The Canadian stance is a setback and Ottawa assumes the responsibility of not issuing the final communiqué," he said, quoted by QNA.

According to Bakhtiar Amen, Iraq's former human rights minister and founder of the International Alliance for Justice said that there had been an agreement on all points, except the paragraph that was related to the Palestinians.

"It was one of the greatest Forums in terms of substance, composition, participation and quality of discussions," he said. "The only shortfall is that we did not come out with a declaration and hope that this would not undermine the rest of the good work that has been done."

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