

Madrid : What was Missing in Annapolis

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As criticized by some as it was awaited by others, the Annapolis Conference on peace for the Middle East took place between 26-28 November in Maryland (United States). Representatives of the PLO and PNA, the Israeli Government as well as 44 invited countries, including 16 Arab States and the Arab League, the European Union and United Nations attended the meeting. The result : a joint declaration that deserves some comments if we take it as a reference for the peace-making process in the Middle East.

First, the declaration reaffirms the commitment of the involved actors to reach a definitive solution and the will to put an end to the bloodshed in the region. If it is to happen (this question was already implicit in the Oslo Agreements), this could be a novelty since it would mean the recognition of the Palestinian State, and, therefore, the creation of two states. In this sense, the will to reach a global agreement tackling all the central issues in the region without any exception is expressed. This would be the first time that issues such as refugees, the borders and Jerusalem would be addressed.

Second, the declaration expresses its commitment against terrorism and for a peace based on bilateral negotiations, which would place, from the viewpoint of Israel and United States, the PLO and the PNA as their partners against Hamas, considered a terrorist organisation and missing at the conference. Reinstating bilateralism as the solution for peace in the region is going back to a strategy that failed in the past, ignoring the Arab League initiative that expressed a multilateral approach, and in the end, placing its bets on the unilateralism, since even the Jerusalem Post, in its edition on the 28 November pointed out that the President of the PNA, Mahmoud Abbas, has very little to offer to Israel in order to reach an agreement.

Third, the starting point is the Road Map, which failed in 2003. This Road Map demands stopping the Palestinian hostilities against Israel, something that PNA can not guarantee since Gaza is governed by Hamas, who has already declared that it does not feel bound by the Declaration. In addition, the initiative does not respect International Law, forgets the occupation of the Golan Heights, does not take demilitarisation into account, does not bring up the end of the invasion in Iraq nor the normalisation of relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

Fourth, the declaration points out that the conversations will only have United States as an arbitrator, and not the Quartet, formed by USA, the EU, UN and Russia. With this, the International Community loses the capacity of acting as part of the negotiation framework and of interpreting the contents of the Road Map, now exclusively in the hands of the USA.

The Annapolis conference has opened a door, but has closed another one for many citizens in the region. These, including the many who are suffering from a situation of occupation and violations of Human Rights, will have the opportunity to raise their voice in Madrid, which, during the 14, 15 and 16 of December, will host the Forum for a Just Peace in the Middle East. It won't be another Forum, since it will be the first time in the history of this process, in which the spokespeople of the Middle East won't be the governments, but its citizens. A civil society tired and forgotten, that, at the end of the day, would make peace possible. In Madrid, namely in Alcorcón, they will find a space open to dialogue, where they will be able to express their criteria and solutions for a just peace, based on

their rights as human beings and as peoples. As during the Peace Conference in 1992, Madrid is once again an international reference for peace, because for Madrid peace is the present, past and future.

This way, the process will have the citizens impulse, indispensable to reach agreements and take further steps in the peace-making process of the region : it is clear that peace is signed by the governments, but if it does not reach or include the citizenry, it is completely useless. These days, in the media, next to the “shaking hands” pictures of Annapolis, we could see the picture of the citizens from West Bank and Gaza protesting against “another peace agreement,” characterised by leaders that they do not trust and who do not represent them. Citizens must decide on their own future, they should express their opinion and show the gap between the political discourse and the real situation of the citizens.

We will very soon see the results of both Annapolis and the Forum for a Just Peace in the Middle East. The Forum in Madrid will be the gears that will pass from a process led by two leaders with little legitimacy to another one led by the citizens ; from a bilateral approach to one based on multilateralism, with all the actors involved ; from an asymmetric starting point to one that takes International Law and the Declaration of Human Rights as a central reference. Citizens have much to teach the ruling class. In fact, how to make peace.

Co-signed :

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