

Since the electoral victory of the national-religious Hamas movement in the elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council in 2006 the chances for enhanced political participation of women in the Palestinian Territories suffered a setback. During the last years of the Yasser Arafat era a quota for women in local and parliamentary government was introduced and a Ministry of Women's Affairs was created to boost equal rights for men and women in the political and private spheres. However, this issue area finds only a low priority in the platform of Hamas. This could lead to a longer term limitation of women's freedom in the Palestinian Territories.



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Strengthening women as political actors is a central element of the work of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in the Palestinian Territories. This commitment was self evident at a roundtable event at Birzeit University in Ramallah, organized by the Foundation on the occasion of FES Chairwoman Anke Fuchs' visit to the region. Here, Chairwoman Fuchs participated alongside Palestinian parliamentarians and members of women's organizations as well as numerous political actors including Zuheir Al-Manasra, member of the Geneva Initiative and the Fatah Revolutionary Council.

Political participation among women in Germany, according to Anke Fuchs was never a given. From a historical perspective, the introduction of a women's quota was first possible in some political parties in the 1980's. While women's participation in elections has increased, reconciling political involvement with family responsibilities obscured the possibility for many women to take over political offices. Further causes for the under representation of women in German politics were often the lack of networks among women themselves as well as male dominance in political organization and networks. Therefore a general change in the collective mentality in German society and political culture proved to be a prerequisite for successful equal rights policy.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Germany as well as in other countries seeks to make a contribution to this change. In the 2000 the FES adopted the concept of "Gender Mainstreaming" in the Foundation's basic regulations and has since pursued the goal of incorporating equal rights between men and women in all areas. In the Palestinian Territories the FES supports the work of the Women's Affairs Technical Committee and the Fatah Women's Committee in order to strengthen political participation among women.

During her visit to the Palestinian Territories Chairwoman Anke Fuchs gathered information about the current situation facing women in the region as well as the work of the FES there. In support of this mission she met with representatives of partner organizations as well as politicians and academics to develop a picture of democratic development.