

On March 17<sup>th</sup> of this year the new Palestinian Unity Government with members of Fatah, Hamas and smaller parties was sworn in. Only a few days later and under these new conditions an exchange between German and Palestinian politicians took place. The FES Jerusalem initiated the exchange and accompanied the delegation comprised of Members of the Palestinian Legislative Council from March 21-25<sup>th</sup> on their informational visit to Berlin and Neumünster. The high-ranking delegation was comprised of the deputy Prime Minister Azzam Al-Ahmad (Fatah), Minister of Culture Bassam Al-Salhi (Palestinian People's Party) and two further members of the PLC from Fatah.



*Kurt Beck and Azzam Al-Ahmad*

The comprehensive program included, among other things, discussions with Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, Kurt Beck, Hubertus Heil, Peter Struck and a long list of members of parliament and the highest levels of the Social Democratic Party. At the level of the federal states, the delegation reached a high point when they were invited to participate in the state party congress of the SPD Schleswig-Holstein. The delegation had the opportunity to witness the exciting election of Ralf Stegner as state party chairman.



*Members of the PLC Delegation with  
Members of the German SPD*

The high level of interest from the German media was exceeded only by the interest from the Palestinian press, which wrote daily on the visit of the parliamentarians. The high level of interest and the positive reports reflected the broad hope that the international financial boycott would be lifted. The boycott was originally aimed against Hamas and imposed during the Hamas government. Because of the lacking financial flows into the Palestinian Territories, the economic situation in the area as well as the social situation dramatically deteriorated. In the view of

numerous observers, the sanctions contributed to the increasing radicalization of the Palestinian population. Therefore, the boycott served the group that it was intended to harm, namely, Hamas. It delivered the movement new supporters as well as an excuse for the slow progress of the regime.

In this context, the dialogue between members of the National Unity Government as well as the German Parliament and Government was greeted with much enthusiasm in the Palestinian press. Especially the meeting between the Minister of Development, Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul elicited positive and optimistic reactions and awakened hopes that a German initiative against the financial boycott may be launched. The Minister, on the occasion of the delegation visit, called for the international community to resume dialogue with the National Unity Government. Minister Wieczorek-Zeul stated "Dialogue is the prerequisite for preventing further economic decay and the erosion of state structures."