**Hamas calls on armed wing to kill soldiers and settlers**

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Hamas has called on members of its armed wing in the West Bank to target Israeli soldiers and civilians in a bid to ease the plight of its prisoners in Israeli jails, a party spokesman said on Monday.

“We call on the men of resistance in the West Bank, primarily the Al-Qassam Brigades, to fulfill their duty in protecting the prisoners on hunger strike by targeting the occupation soldiers and its settlers,” Hamas spokesman Hussam Badran wrote on his Facebook page Monday.

“The occupation must pay a high price in the blood of its soldiers and settlers until it is persuaded to solve the issue of prisoners on hunger strike. This is everyone’s task, on the individual and organizational levels,” he wrote.

Badran’s comments came a week after the swearing in of a Hamas-backed Palestinian unity government in Ramallah, endorsed by the US and the EU. On Sunday, EU Commission chief Jose Manuel Barroso told the Herzliya Conference that Israel should support the new Palestinian government “in the interest of a future peace deal and of a legitimate and representative government.”

Israel suspended all negotiations with the Palestinians in the wake of the government’s formation, saying it was not prepared to maintain contact with a government backed by Hamas, designated a terrorist organization by Israel, the US and much of the West. The US and much of the international community took an opposite stance, and argued that the new Palestinian government’s ministers were not “affiliated” with Hamas. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has said the new government recognizes Israel, accepts past agreements with Israel and renounces terrorism. Hamas spokesmen have said the group’s position on Israel, which it seeks to destroy, has not changed.

Some 125 Palestinian prisoners held in administrative detention in Israel launched a hunger strike seven weeks ago over their imprisonment conditions. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expressed concern last week over the prisoners’ health.

The prisoner issue has also exacerbated existing tensions between Hamas and Fatah. Solidarity protests with the prisoners organized by Hamas across the West Bank were violently suppressed by PA security on Monday, Hamas charged. Hamas MPs Hassan Youssef and Fathi Qar’awi were physically attacked.

According to the website of Hamas daily Al-Resalah, PA security stopped cars in a solidarity procession in Ramallah, confiscating posters and flags brought by the motorists. Policemen also detained journalist Musib Said, confiscating his press card and camera and demanding he delete his photos.

“Reconciliation is at risk due to the behavior of the PA,” Hamas MP Nayef Rajoub warned in Al-Resalah on Tuesday. The “premeditated attack” by PA security on the families of hunger strikers was “a clear message to the domestic reconciliation” and “a powerful stab in the back of the prisoner movement,” Rajoub charged.

In a statement published on its website Tuesday, Hamas called the assault on its deputies “a serious and unjustified violation that only serves the occupation.”

The unpaid salaries of some 50,000 civil servants appointed by Hamas in Gaza over the past seven years remains another major bone of contention between Hamas and Fatah. In a press conference held in Gaza Monday, Hamas official Khalil Al-Hayya called on the unity government to cover Hamas’s salaries just as it did the salaries of PA civil servants living in Gaza — employees who have abstained from work for years at the behest of Ramallah in protest over Hamas’s bloody takeover in 2007.

“How dare the unity government rush to pay the salaries of Ramallah’s employees who stopped working seven years ago… while preventing the payment of salaries to those who really worked on the ground during this period? Can this paradox possibly exist even after the [end] of the divide?” wondered Hayya.