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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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Subject: Fw: Palestinian Authority delays local vote to October (Reuters)

From: OpsNewsTicker
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To: NEWS-Mahogany
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Subject: Palestinian Authority delays local vote to October (Reuters)

RAMALLAH (Reuters) - The Palestinian Authority announced on Tuesday it was postponing local elections scheduled for July until October, giving time to organise the vote in the Gaza Strip, now under control of Hamas.

The delay had been expected following a surprise unity deal in April between Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah movement, which rules the West Bank, and Hamas, the Islamist group which has controlled Gaza since 2007.

Ghassan Khatib, spokesman for the Ramallah-based Palestinian administration, said delaying the vote until October 22 would allow time for the body which oversees Palestinian elections to organise voting in the Gaza Strip.

The delay means the election will be held after September, when Abbas has said he will ask the United Nations General Assembly to recognise a Palestinian state.

The last time Palestinians voted was 2006, when Hamas won legislative elections, leading to a deep split in the Palestinian national movement and the eventual establishment of rival governments in Gaza and Ramallah.

The local elections will give an indication of the popularity of Fatah and Hamas ahead of presidential and parliamentary elections, which the unity deal brokered by Egypt calls for within a year.

Representatives of Fatah and Hamas are holding talks this week in Cairo aimed at agreeing on a government of technocrats to run Palestinian affairs in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip until the new elections are held.

The rival groups have agreed that the government will not include any members of either Fatah or Hamas, a group which is hostile to Israel and whose security forces will continue to control the Gaza Strip.

Municipal elections had been scheduled for the West Bank in 2010 but they were postponed after Fatah failed to agree on a list of candidates.

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