

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)

The PLO was founded in 1964 during the first Arab summit in Cairo, where leaders of 13 Arab nations pledged to take a more active role for the “liberation of Palestine.” Since that time it has declared itself the representative of the Palestinian people and their nationalist aspirations. The PLO has operated primarily as an umbrella organization for six Palestinian groups, most prominently, Yasser Arafat’s Fatah group. In 1969, Arafat was elected PLO Chairman, and Fatah became the dominant party in the PLO.

The guiding ideology of the PLO was outlined in the Palestine National Charter or Covenant, which was adopted at its founding in 1964 and amended in 1968. The Charter functioned as the PLO’s constitution, and contained 33 articles calling for the destruction of the State of Israel.

In June 1974 the PLO adopted its “Phased Program” which declared “Any liberation step that is achieved constitutes a step for continuing to achieve the PLO strategy for the establishment of the Palestinian democratic state...to pave the way for completing the liberation of all Palestinian soil.”

The PLO was responsible for scores of acts of terrorism from its creation, resulting in the deaths of thousands of civilians. Among the infamous attacks conducted by the PLO are: the murder of 11 Israeli athletes at the [1972 Munich Olympic Games](#); the killing of 21 schoolchildren at Ma’alot in 1974; the death of 35 people and wounding of 85 in an attack on Israeli tourist buses along the Haifa-Tel Aviv coastal highway in 1978; the hijacking of the Achille Lauro cruise ship in 1985 and the murder of disabled American Jewish passenger [Leon Klinghoffer](#). The PLO

also launched terrorist and guerrilla attacks against Israel from Jordan – until they were ousted by King Hussein in September 1972 – and from Lebanon – until they were ousted by Israel in 1982.

In 1988 in Geneva, Arafat announced that he would accept the existence of the State of Israel, renounce terrorism, and accept U.N. resolutions 242 and 338. Despite this declaration, the PLO continued terrorist attacks against Israelis.

Following secret negotiations with Israel in [Oslo](#), on September 9, 1993, Arafat sent a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin recognizing Israel's right to exist, renouncing terrorism, and pledging to remove clauses in the Palestine National Charter calling for the destruction of Israel. In return, Israel recognized the PLO as the “official representative” of the Palestinian people and began formal negotiations with the PLO. The Charter was revised in a vote by the Palestinian Authority Parliament in the presence of U.S. President Bill Clinton in December 1998. However, the original Charter is still featured on some Palestinian Authority web sites.

Today, the PLO continues to exist; however, most of its leaders have now become top Fatah officials in the [Palestinian Authority](#). Fatah-related militia groups, such as the Tanzim, Force 17 and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade played a leading role in Palestinian violence during the [Second Intifada](#), including suicide terrorist attacks, ambushes, and shootings of Israeli vehicles and facilities.

With the death of Arafat in November 2004, Mahmoud Abbas, a long-time secretary general of the PLO, became the new Chairman of the PLO and was subsequently elected President of the Palestinian Authority.