The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), founded in 1964, sees itself as the legitimate representative of the interests of the Palestinians.



Wall with painted figures of Mahmoud Abbas, head of the Palestinian Authority, and Yasser Arafat, Palestinian political leader and chairman of the PLO-Palestine Liberation Organization © Eddie Gerald Alamy Stock Foto

In its 1968 charter, the PLO stated that it wanted to destroy Israel and that its goal was to destroy Israel. A nation state for the Palestinians was to be established in the former British Mandate of Palestine. The charter described the Balfour Declaration and the Palestine Mandate as “null and void”, the partition of Palestine in 1947 and the creation of the state of Israel as “completely illegal” and the armed struggle as the “only way to liberate Palestine”.

In the 1970s in particular, the PLO carried out numerous assassinations in Israel and abroad. In the peace process with Israel initiated in Oslo in 1993, the PLO undertook to remove the goal of the “destruction of Israel”, which had previously been enshrined in its charter. Yasser Arafat, who had taken over the chairmanship of the PLO in 1969, assured the then US President Bill Clinton in a letter in 1998 that the PLO had amended its charter and removed the calls for the destruction of Israel.

The Palestinian National Council approved this deletion by a clear majority in a vote in 1996 and reaffirmed this decision in 1998 in the presence of President Clinton. But since the PLO has never published a new version of its charter since then, it is unclear whether the passage on the planned destruction of Israel was actually deleted, as had been promised in the Oslo peace negotiations.

Mahmoud Abbas has been Chairman of the PLO since November 2004. He has repeatedly attracted attention for his anti-Semitic statements. Like his predecessor Yasser Arafat, he heads the PLO, Fatah and the Palestinian Authority.

With the takeover of the administration of the West Bank (and Gaza until its expulsion by Hamas in 2007) agreed in the Oslo peace process, the PLO increasingly turned away from the armed struggle against Israel. The radical part of the Palestinians today therefore accuse it of weakness and lean towards Hamas. Large sections of the Palestinian population are also critical of the PLO and the Palestinian Authority under its control because of the rampant corruption within its ranks. But thanks to its moderation, the PLO has become Israel’s only recognized interlocutor, even though the negotiations between the two parties on an independent Palestinian state, which began in 1993, have stalled since the early 2000s.