

Hamas 2010 budget mainly 'foreign aid' from Iran

GAZA CITY — Hamas has approved a \$540 million budget for 2010, the lion's share of which was said to come from Iranian aid.

The Hamas parliament approved the 2010 budget on Dec. 31, but legislators provided no details. One parliamentarian, Jamal Nasser, said that no more than \$60 million of the budget would come from taxes and fees.

"The rest would come from gifts and foreign aid," Nasser said.

Nasser announced the passage of the Hamas budget on Jan. 2. He did not identify the foreign aid, but Palestinian sources said Iran would be the main donor.

The Hamas legislator said \$30 million of Hamas funds would be relayed to bolster the Islamic presence in Jerusalem. Nasser did not elaborate.

Palestinian sources said Hamas's biggest revenue-earner was the tunnel smuggling industry, reported to employ about 30,000 people in the southern Gaza Strip. The Hamas government contains 32,000 employees, about two-thirds of them security officers.

The Hamas budget was much smaller than that of the rival Palestinian Authority, which allocated \$2.78 billion in 2009. The PA budget has been used to pay about 20,000 civil servants, including security officers, in the Gaza Strip.

PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas has asserted that Iran gave Hamas \$250 million in 2009 for refusing an Egyptian-arranged reconciliation accord with the PA. Abbas said Hamas could receive up to \$500 million a year from the mullah regime in Teheran.

"As far as I know, Hamas receives \$250 million," Abbas said. "[Maybe] every six months, [maybe] every year. Hamas is funded by Iran. It claims it is financed by donations, but the donations are nothing like what it receives from Iran. It doesn't amount to one fourth, one fifth, or even one percent of what [Hamas] gets from Iran."