

Palestinians condemn U.S. policy shift on Israeli settlements



Ramallah, November 22 (RHC)-- Palestinian officials have lashed out at the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump for breaking with decades of American policy against Israeli settlements build on occupied Palestinian land, describing it as yet another blow to international law.

Earlier this week, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Washington was repudiating a 1978 State Department legal opinion that held Israeli settlements illegal, claiming that the establishment of those structures in the occupied West Bank “is not per se inconsistent with international law.”

The decision -- the latest in a string of pro-Israeli moves by the Trump administration -- angered Palestinian officials from different political factions both in Ramallah and the Israeli-besieged Gaza Strip.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh condemned Pompeo’s announcement as an effort to back Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu amid a political stalemate gripping the regime in Tel Aviv.

“The U.S.’s partial bias towards one of the most radical trends in Israel [of illegal settlement building] prevents it from seeing the basic principles of international law,” he told the official Palestinian news agency Wafa. “This is nothing but an effort to support Benjamin Netanyahu in the final moments of the prime minister’s [electoral] race.”

Additionally, Palestinian presidential spokesman Nabil Abu Rudaineh stressed that Washington's new position on Israeli settler units is "void, unacceptable and condemned." Pompeo's announcement "totally contradicts international law and resolutions that reject settlements," he said, noting that the US administration is "not qualified or authorized to cancel the resolutions of international legitimacy, and does not have the right to give any legitimacy to Israeli settlements."

Abu Rudaineh also urged the international community to reject the announcement which threatens international peace and security. Similarly, Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki denounced the recognition of Israeli settlements as "lawless," criticizing the U.S. government for adopting an anti-Palestinian agenda and endeavoring to legitimize "the Israeli colonial settler agenda."

"This position violates international law, decades-long international consensus over the issue and determinations of the International Court of Justice, the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions and United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions," he said in a statement.

In turn, Saeb Erekat, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) secretary general, described Pompeo's announcement as another attempt by the Trump administration "to replace international law with the law of the jungle."

"Israeli settlements steal Palestinian land, seize and exploit Palestinian natural resources, and divide, displace and restrict the movement of the people of Palestine. In sum, Israel's colonial-settlement enterprise perpetuates the negation of the Palestinian right to self-determination," he added. Erekat further called on the international community to "take all necessary measures to respond [to] and deter this irresponsible US behavior."

Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee, took to Twitter to condemn Pompeo's announcement as "another blow to international law, justice and peace by a Biblical absolutist waiting for the rapture."

Separately, the Palestinian Hamas resistance movement, which runs Gaza, said Washington's policy reversal "confirms that it is a partner in the attacks on our people and their rights." Hamas spokesman Hazim Qasim emphasized that the Israeli settlements are "war crimes where Israel expelled the real owners of these lands and built settlements using force and brought Israelis there from all over the world."

Meanwhile, Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi warned of the "seriousness of the change in the American position towards the settlements and its repercussions on all efforts to achieve peace."

The Israeli settlements "are a breach of international legitimacy, kill the two-state solution and undermine chances of achieving a just and comprehensive peace. The kingdom's position in condemning the settlements is firm," he said. Emboldened by Trump's all-out support, Israel has stepped up its settlement construction activities in the occupied territories in defiance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334.

The resolution, approved in December 2016, states that Israel's establishment of "settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem [al-Quds], has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-state solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace."

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