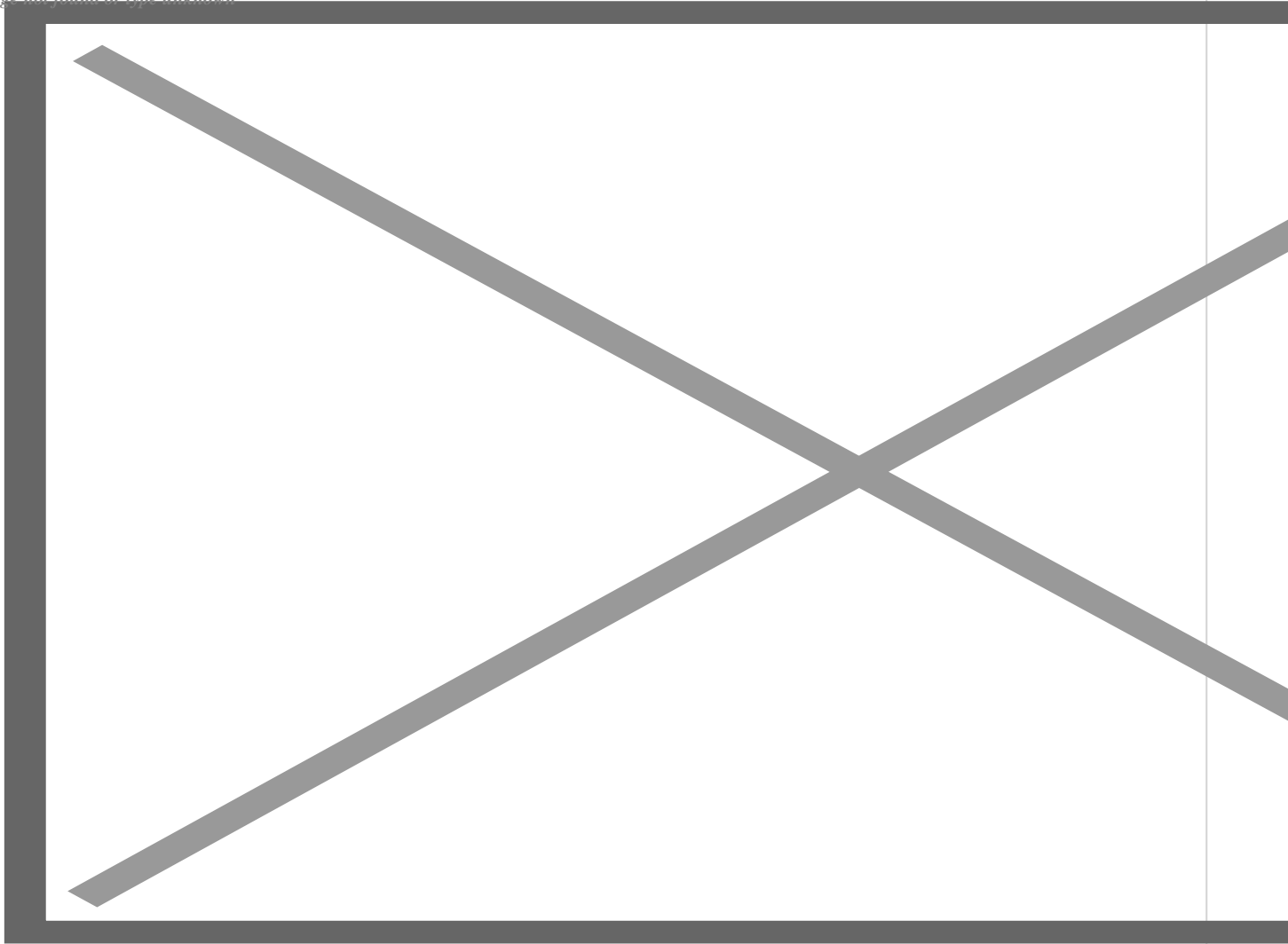


African countries form group to expel Israel from African Union

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The Addis Ababa-based headquarters of the African Union (file photo)

Addis Ababa, August 1 (RHC)-- Algeria along with several others nations has officially begun the process of forming a group of African countries to reject Tel Aviv's observer status in the African Union (AU) in order to preserve the principles of the bloc and to support Palestine.

Palestine's official Wafa news agency, quoting the London-based online newspaper Rai al-Youm and other sources reported on Sunday that at least 14 countries including South Africa, Tunisia, Eritrea, Senegal, Tanzania, Niger, the archipelago of Qamar, Gabon, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Liberia, and the Seychelles had agreed to expel Israel from the 55-member African Union.

Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane is also expected to discuss the issue of Tel Aviv's membership in the African Union in his upcoming trips to the four African countries of Tunisia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt.

Lamamra has stressed that his north African country would not stand idly by the African Union's move which was taken without any consultation with its member states.

He added that the AU's move to accept Israel as an observer member aims to undermine stability of Algeria, which supports Palestine and its just cause.

The top Algerian diplomat stressed that his country's diplomatic moves are in fact a reaction to Israel's obtaining an observer status in the AU following years of efforts by the regime's officials.

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry has slammed the UN for whitewashing Israeli crimes against Palestinian children.

The Republic of Namibia also said in a statement on Saturday that it was deeply disappointed with the decision to award Tel Aviv with membership in the AU as an observer member.

The statement said that giving Tel Aviv membership was followed by the regime's intensified pressure on the Palestinians and its human rights abuses in Palestine.

The decision would contradict the goals and principles of the AU, it added.

South Africa has also in a recent statement denounced the Israeli membership as "unjust and unwarranted", stressing that the decision was taken unilaterally by the African Union Commission without consulting the 55 member states.

On July 22., Israel attained observer status at the AU after nearly 20 years of lobbying.

Making the move official, Israeli ambassador to Ethiopia, Burundi and Chad Aleli Admasu presented his credentials to Moussa Faki Mahamat, the chairman of the African Union Commission, at the bloc's headquarters in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

Israel previously held observer status in the predecessor Organization of African Unity until 2002, when the organization was disbanded and replaced by the AU.

The Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has already strongly condemned the decision to grant the Israeli regime observer status at the AU, describing the move as "shocking and reprehensible."

"The decision would legitimize the presence of the occupying Israeli regime on our lands, and would give it more chances to press ahead with its plans to deny Palestinians their rights, and to continue its brutal crimes against them," the movement said in a statement on July 24.

"The step is, unfortunately, taken by the African states that have struggled under the yoke of a colonial and racist past, and have suffered a lot to shed the practices," the added.

Hamas said African countries have long been backing Palestine's just struggle for freedom and independence, adding the Palestinians look forward to seeing their support continue.

More than 150 Palestinian organizations, village councils and activists launch a petition campaign against the US-registered “charities” engaged in fundraising for Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Head of the political bureau of the Palestinian Hamas resistance movement Ismail Haniyeh has hit out at the AU decision, stating that the move contradicts all values and principles on which the African bloc is founded.

In a letter addressed to Moussa Faki Mahamat, chairman of the AU Commission, Haniyeh said, the move "represents a severe blow to the Palestinian nation and their legitimate national rights as they struggle to get rid of the occupying Israeli regime."

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