

U.S. Palestine solidarity activists rally against Bennett's visit



??Pro-Palestinian activists gather near the White House to protest the visit by Israeli Prime Minister Neftali Bennet, August 26 [Ali Harb/Al Jazeera]??

Washington, August 27 (RHC)-- Dozens of Palestinian rights advocates have gathered near the White House to denounce a visit by Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett to Washington. Waving Palestinian flags and chanting against the occupation, the demonstrators on Thursday called on President Joe Biden to uphold his campaign promise to advance human rights globally.

Biden was set to meet Bennett at 11:30 (15:30 GMT) but the bilateral talks were moved to Friday as the White House turned its attention to the situation in Kabul where two explosions killed and wounded people outside the airport.

“The U.S. is sending this message of moral authority, moral responsibility, but then they don’t do anything when the Israelis commit violence against Palestinians,” Yousef Abdelfattah, a 24-year-old protester, told Al Jazeera.

The activists invoked Israeli efforts to forcibly displace Palestinian families from their homes in the Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah and the blockade on Gaza, where Israeli forces have wounded dozens of protesters this week. They urged Biden to end the “blank cheque” policy to Israel.

Laura Albast, an activist with the Palestinian Youth Movement, one of the groups that organised the protest, said Biden has failed to deliver on his promise of conducting a human rights-centred foreign policy. “But we’re here to stay, and he will listen to us whether he likes it or not,” she said.

Bennett told the New York Times earlier this week that his government will not proceed with former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s plans to annex large parts of the West Bank.

“This government will neither annex nor form a Palestinian state, everyone gets that,” he said, citing the delicate balance in his coalition cabinet that spans across the ideological spectrum in Israeli politics.

Albast, however, said de-facto annexation is continuing, even if it is not formally announced, noting Israeli policies against Palestinians in East Jerusalem, which Israel annexed in 1980.

“The families in Sheikh Jarrah are still under threat of losing their homes, and houses in Silwan have already been demolished, including small businesses of Palestinians,” she told Al Jazeera.

The Biden administration regularly calls for “equal measures” of freedom for Israelis and Palestinians, but it has categorically rejected suggestions of restricting or conditioning the annual \$3.8bn in military aid to Israel. The president and his top aides have also avoided publicly criticising the Israeli government.

The State Department later released a statement saying Blinken reiterated Washington’s commitment to Israel’s security. “The Secretary also emphasized that Israelis and Palestinians alike deserve equal measures of freedom, prosperity, and dignity, which is important in its own right and as a means to advance prospects for a two-state solution,” the statement said.

A senior administration official told reporters earlier this week that Biden will promote the two-state solution in his talks with Bennett.

“We’ve had very constructive discussions with this new government on the set of issues regarding Israel-Palestinian peace,” the official said. “President Biden believes a negotiated two-state solution is ultimately the only way to ensure Israel’s future [as a] democratic and Jewish state.”

At the protest on Thursday, Nihad Awad, the executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), an advocacy group, said by hosting Bennett and refusing to condemn Israeli policies, Biden is letting down the voters seeking justice, who elected him.

“I remind President Joe Biden today that he’s breaking his promise that he will honour and promote and defend human rights ... Justice for people here is no different than justice for people in Palestine,” Awad said.



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