

International advocacy bodies urge African Union to withdraw Israel's observer status



People walk through the main lobby at the headquarters of the African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, March 18, 2013. (File by Getty Images)

Addis Ababa, October 6 (RHC)-- At least three international advocacy organizations have called on the African Union (AU) to withdraw the Israeli regime's observer status over its human rights violations and crimes against humanity.

The U.S.-based Democracy for Arab World Now (DAWN) together with the Legal Resource Center (LRC) in South Africa on Monday signed and supported a legal submission to the executive council of the AU, which was drafted by the International Center of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP).

The submission vehemently argues why the 55-member union should not have granted the regime in Tel Aviv an observer status, and why it should be immediately revoked. On July 22, Israel announced that it had joined the influential pan-African body, which debates continental issues, as an “observer state,” after unsuccessful lobbying for nearly 20 years.

The news elicited lukewarm response from some member countries of the union, who had for years blocked the move, citing the regime’s horrendous war crimes in Palestine. For almost two decades, since the disbandment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 2002, Israel had made futile attempts to join the African Union, which replaced the OAU.

However, the move was always thwarted by members of the union, who even called for an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories in February.

In a statement endorsed by more than a dozen organizations, the three advocacy groups asserted that the apartheid Israeli regime is involved in gross violations of human rights and crimes against humanity that directly contravene the principles and purpose of the AU.

A group of international lawyers, researchers and activists have called on the African Union to reverse its decision to grant Israel observer status in the bloc. “Israel’s actions—especially its commission of the crime of apartheid and persecution—stand in fundamental opposition to the express terms of the AU’s founding document, the Constitutive Act of the African Union, which stresses political independence, human dignity, and economic emancipation, as well as the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, which calls for genuine independence and the elimination of apartheid, colonialism, and all forms of discrimination,” said the statement.

Sarah Leah Whitson, the executive director of DAWN, said granting Israel an observer status in the AU, despite its recent atrocities in the besieged Gaza Strip, was “unconscionable.”

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