

Palestinians urge African Union to expel Israel as leaders gather for summit

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African Union summit underway?

Addis Ababa, February 5 (RHC)-- Palestinian leaders and resistance groups have urged the African Union (AU) to reconsider last year's decision to grant Israel an observer status at the pan-African bloc.

The concerted call came as heads of state gathered in Addis Ababa for the two-day summit of the 55-member bloc, that opened in the Ethiopian capital on Saturday.

The crisis was set in motion last July when Moussa Faki Mahamat, chair of the African Union Commission, accepted Israel's observer status in the bloc, triggering a rare dispute within a body that values consensus.

"Israel should never be rewarded for its violation and for the apartheid regime it does impose on the Palestinian people," Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said. "Your excellencies, I'm sorry to report to you that the situation of the Palestinian people has only grown more precarious."

The decision last year drew quick protest from powerful members, including South Africa and Algeria which argued that it flew in the face of AU statements supporting the Palestinian Territories.

Earlier Saturday Faki defended his decision, claiming that it could be "an instrument in the service of peace." Palestinian resistance movements hit back, with Hamas calling on all freedom-loving Africans to voice solidarity with the Palestinian nation and compel Faki to to revoke it.

"The occupying regime has long practiced state terrorism, and systematically commits all kinds of crimes against the Palestinian people, their territories and holy sites. It enacts a policy of ethnic cleansing and racial discrimination as documented by many international human rights organizations," Hamas said in a statement.

"Israel violates international law as well as international humanitarian law, and refuses to implement dozens of resolutions or to abide by recommendations put forward by relevant United Nations committees.

"Granting membership, or even an observer status, to Israel constitutes a flagrant violation of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in addition to the principles and statute of the AU, which reject racism and demand decolonization and the right to self-determination," it added.

The Ramallah-based Fatah movement also called on African states to prioritize Israel's expulsion from the continental body. Yamin Qadbah, a spokesman for the movement, urged African rulers to use the event as an opportunity to illustrate the principles and foundations of solidarity among the African nations by expelling Israel.

He also praised Algeria's efforts aimed at revocation of Israel's observer status at the African Union. Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra condemned the decision to grant Israel an observer status at the bloc as a "huge mistake." He told the Qatari Arabic-language al-Jazeera television network that his country had no role in adoption of the measure.

"The first mistake was that the decision to grant Israel observer status at the AU was taken without any consultation with its member states. Secondly, there exist disagreements among AU member states on the matter," Lamamra noted.

He also said if consultations had taken place among the AU members in advance, the decision would have certainly not been taken. "This is a bad thing for the African Union and it could jeopardize solidarity among the member states," Lamamra said.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa is leading a continental campaign to cancel Israel's status as an accredited observer at the African Union. 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.

Experts say Israel's observer status is largely seen as part of Tel Aviv's continued campaign to normalize ties in Africa. Other African countries, including Botswana and Namibia, and Algeria have also opposed

Israel's accreditation. They say AU member states were not consulted about the decision.

Pro-Palestine language is typically featured in statements delivered at the AU's annual summits. Palestine already has observer status at the African Union.

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