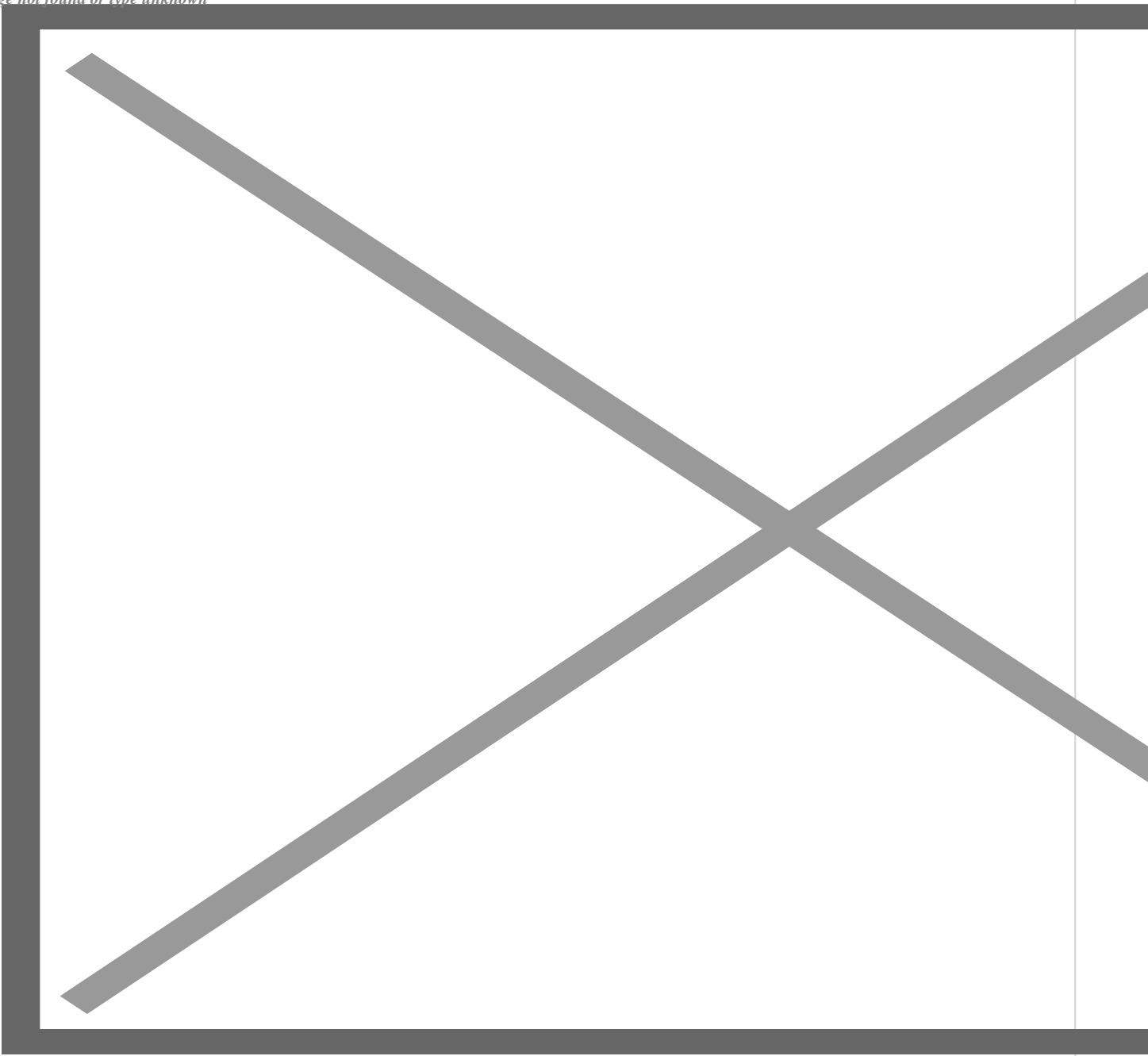


South Africa calls for Israel to be declared an apartheid state

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Pretoria, July 26 (RHC)-- The South African government has expressed concerns that Israel's continued occupation of "significant portions of the West Bank" and the development of new settlements there "are glaring examples of violations of international law" as the longrunning Israel-Palestine conflict goes on.

"The Palestinian narrative evokes experiences of South Africa's own history of racial segregation and oppression," Naledi Pandor, South Africa's minister of international relations and cooperation, said at the second meeting of the Palestinian Heads of Mission in Africa, held in the capital Pretoria.

"As oppressed South Africans, we experienced firsthand the effects of racial inequality, discrimination and denial and we cannot stand by while another generation of Palestinians are left behind," she said.

Naledi Pandor said Pretoria believes Israel should be classified as an apartheid state and that the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) should establish a committee to verify whether it satisfies the requirements.

Palestinian foreign minister Riad Malki, who attended the forum, spoke to the state-run South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) after the session. "If there is any country or countries that can comprehend the suffering and the struggle for freedom and independence of Palestine, it is the African continent and the people of Africa," Malki said.

The first Palestinian embassy in South Africa was accredited in 1995, marking the beginning of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Over the years, the South African government has remained a strong ally of Palestine, providing both material and public support for its liberation cause.

"Our position on Palestine has always been clear, consistent, and convergent with the international community," Pandor said.

According to a recent report by the Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights, a civil organisation with headquarters in the Gaza Strip, approximately 5,418 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli military operations in the embattled Gaza Strip during the past 15 years, including 1,246 children and 488 women.

A recent UN commission of inquiry to investigate violations in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, determined in its report that Israel is responsible for severe human rights violations against Palestinians.

"These reports are significant in raising global awareness of the conditions that Palestinians are subjected to and they provide credence and support to an overwhelming body of factual evidence, all pointing to the fact that the State of Israel is committing crimes of apartheid and persecution against Palestinians", said Pandor while referencing the reports.

Naledi Pandor was the first representative of the South African government to denounce the killing of Palestinian-American Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in May by Israeli forces during a raid in the West Bank.

At the time of Abu Akleh's death, she compared the violent disruption of her funeral procession by Israeli police to the cruelty of the South African apartheid military.

After Tuesday's conference session, she told SABC that "we can't leave the matter of Shireen Abu Akleh untouched." "We will push the Palestinian cause at the UN General Assembly and we need also civil society to join us," said the South African foreign minister.

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