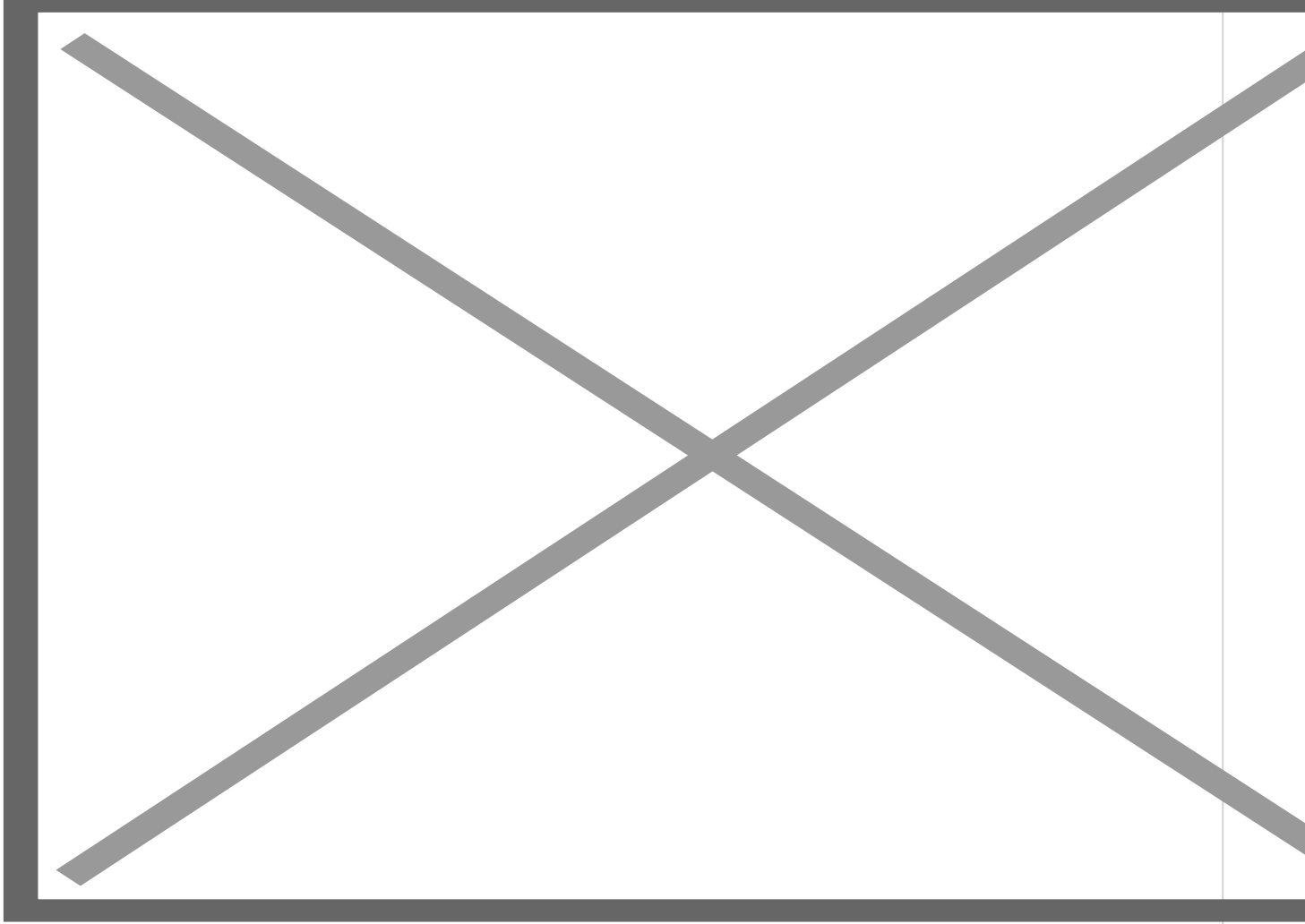


UN asks International Court of Justice for legal opinion on Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories

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The Hague, December 31 (RHC)-- The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has adopted a resolution asking the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for its legal opinion on the Israeli regime's occupation of Palestinian territories.

The 193-member assembly voted on the resolution on Friday. Eighty-seven countries voted in favor of the resolution against 26 negative votes cast by the Israeli regime, the United States, its oldest and strongest ally, and 24 others, along with 53 abstentions.

The Israeli regime claimed existence in 1948 after occupying huge swathes of Palestinian territories during a Western-backed war. It occupied more land, namely the West Bank, which includes East al-Quds, and the Gaza Strip in another such war in 1967.

Ever since, the regime has built hundreds of illegal settlements upon the occupied territories and deployed the most aggressive restraints on Palestinian freedoms there. Tel Aviv withdrew from Gaza in 2005, but has been keeping the coastal territory under an all-out land, aerial, and naval siege since a year after it left the enclave.

Addressing the Assembly's session before the vote, Palestinian UN envoy Riyad Mansour said the world body was about to weigh in on the resolution one day after the swearing-in of an Israeli cabinet led by Benjamin Netanyahu. Mansour reminded that the cabinet -- which has been billed as the most extremist one yet in the regime's history -- had promised to expand the illegal settlements.

"We trust that, regardless of your vote today, if you believe in international law and peace, you will uphold the opinion of the International Court of Justice when delivered and you will stand up to" the Israeli officials, the envoy said.

The occupying regime's ambassador to the world body, Gilad Erdan, however, called the United Nations a "morally bankrupt and politicized" body for deciding to go ahead with the vote. Erdan also said any decision by any judicial body that would receive its mandate from such an organization "is completely illegitimate."

Via the resolution, the General Assembly asked the ICJ to give an advisory opinion on the legal consequences of Israel's "occupation, settlement, and annexation..., including measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character, and status" of the holy city of al-Quds.

Palestinians want East al-Quds (Jerusalem) as the capital of their future state, while the occupying regime lays claim to the entirety of the city as its so-called "capital." Ever since occupying the West Bank, the Israeli regime has been trying to manipulate al-Quds' status quo through various measures, including by enforcing restrictions on the Palestinians' right to worship at the al-Aqsa Mosque's compound -- Islam's third-holiest site -- which is located in al-Quds' Old City.

The regime's military, however, regularly provides protection for its illegal settlers' tours of the holy site as means of hurting the religious sentiments of the Palestinians and their fellow Muslims around the world.

On Thursday, the Palestinian Wafa news agency cited the official heading the Islamic organization that runs the compound's affairs as saying that a record number of Israeli settlers, namely 48,238, had stormed the Muslim holy site in 2022.

According to Azzam Khatib, director of the Islamic Waqf Department, the Israeli extremists have been resorting to provocative conduct while storming the compound, including performing Jewish rituals at the site and raising the occupying regime's flag there.

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