

UN Security Council voices dismay over Israeli settlements



United Nations, February 20 (RHC)-- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has expressed “deep concern and dismay” over Israel’s settlement activity in a watered-down statement replacing a draft resolution that would have explicitly condemned Israeli policies.

The UNSC presidential statement — approved on Monday by all 15 members of the council, including the United States — also underscored what it called the “obligation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to renounce and confront terror.”

“The Security Council reiterates that continuing Israeli settlement activities are dangerously imperiling the viability of the two-state solution based on the 1967 lines,” the council said.

The symbolic measure came in response to a decision by the Israeli government earlier this month to authorise thousands of settlement units in the occupied West Bank and retroactively legalize unlawfully built settlement outposts.

"We are very happy that there was a very strong united message from the Security Council against [Israel's] illegal, unilateral measure," Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian envoy to the UN, told reporters on Monday.

Last week, the UNSC appeared set to vote on a draft resolution calling for an end to Israel's settlement expansion.

But reports by several U.S. and Israeli news outlets, citing diplomatic sources, said the PA agreed to drop its pursuit of the vote amid pressure from the US government, including promises of a financial aid package. As part of the deal, the sources said Israel would temporarily suspend announcements for new settlement units and Palestinian home demolitions.

The Reuters news agency said on Monday that the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which had drafted the resolution along with PA officials, informed the UNSC that the resolution and vote would be dropped. The resolution would have demanded Israel "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory".

Israel captured the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza, in 1967. Since then, it has built settlements housing hundreds of thousands of Israelis on the occupied lands, which Palestinians seek as part of their future state.

International law explicitly prohibits occupying powers from transferring their civilian population into occupied territories. A UN expert has previously called Israeli settlements a "war crime." Monday's UNSC statement called on all parties to "observe calm and restraint, and to refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric." It also urged "full respect for international humanitarian law, including the protection of the civilian population."

"The Security Council reaffirms the right of all States to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders, and stresses that both the Israeli and Palestinian people are entitled to equal measures of freedom, security, prosperity, justice, and dignity," it read, echoing language that US President Joe Biden and his top aides regularly employ.

Israel rejected the statement as "one-sided," criticizing Washington specifically for backing it. "The statement should never have been made and the United States should never have joined it," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said.

Louis Charbonneau, UN director at Human Rights Watch, said the UNSC should clearly condemn settlements.

"While it's helpful to have the UN Security Council criticize Israeli human rights violations against the Palestinians, today's statement, diluted under pressure from the US and #Israel, is a far cry from the full-throated condemnation the grave situation deserves," Charbonneau wrote in a tweet.

At the UNSC on Monday, U.S. envoy Linda Thomas-Greenfield unambiguously voiced U.S. opposition to Israel's settlement activity but did not condemn the Israeli policy. "These unilateral measures exacerbate tensions; they harm trust between the parties," she said of Israel's settlement announcement. "They undermine the prospects for a negotiated two-state solution. The United States does not support these actions, full stop."

In his own statement to the council on Monday, Mansour, the Palestinian envoy, warned that the situation could soon "reach a point of no return." "Every action we take now matters. Every word we utter matters. Every decision we delay matters," he said.

Israel, accused of imposing a system of apartheid by leading human rights organisations like Amnesty International, receives at least \$3.8 billion of U.S. aid annually.

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