

South Africa Parliament votes in favor of motion to close Israel embassy

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Pretoria, November 21 (RHC)-- South Africa's Parliament has voted in favor of a motion calling for the closure of Israel's embassy in Pretoria amid soaring tensions between the two countries over the Israeli assault on Gaza. The action is largely symbolic as it will be up to President Cyril Ramaphosa's government whether to implement it.

The motion calling for the closure of the embassy, and suspension of all diplomatic relations until a ceasefire is reached, passed on Tuesday with 248 votes in favour and 91 votes against. The action was introduced by the leftwing opposition party Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), backed by the ruling African National Congress (ANC), and opposed by members of the centrist, white-majority, largely pro-Israel Democratic Alliance (DA).

Ramaphosa has said his country believes Israel is committing war crimes and genocide in the besieged Gaza Strip, where Palestinian authorities have said that more than 14,128 people have been killed since October 7.

The current round of fighting began when the Palestinian armed group Hamas launched a deadly attack on southern Israel that authorities there say killed about 1,200 people, but was preceded by months of increasing tensions, including raids by Israeli military forces and attacks by Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank.

The vote comes after Israel announced it was recalling its ambassador Eli Belotserkovsky from Pretoria “for consultations.” The African country has not had an ambassador in Israel since 2018, and has long felt a sense of kinship with the Palestinians, who have frequently drawn parallels between the Israeli occupation and South Africa’s decades-long apartheid regime.

In recent years, a growing number of rights groups have said that Israeli policies towards the Palestinians constitute the crime of apartheid, something that Israel firmly denies. South Africa also hosted a virtual summit of BRICS nations on Tuesday, where the group of emerging economies that includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa called for an “immediate, durable, and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities” in Gaza.

“As individual countries, we have demonstrated our grave concern at the death and destruction in Gaza,” Ramaphosa said in a social media post on Tuesday. “Let this meeting stand as a clarion call for us to combine our efforts and strengthen our actions to end this historical injustice. Let us work together to realise a just, peaceful and secure future for the people of both Palestine and Israel.”

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