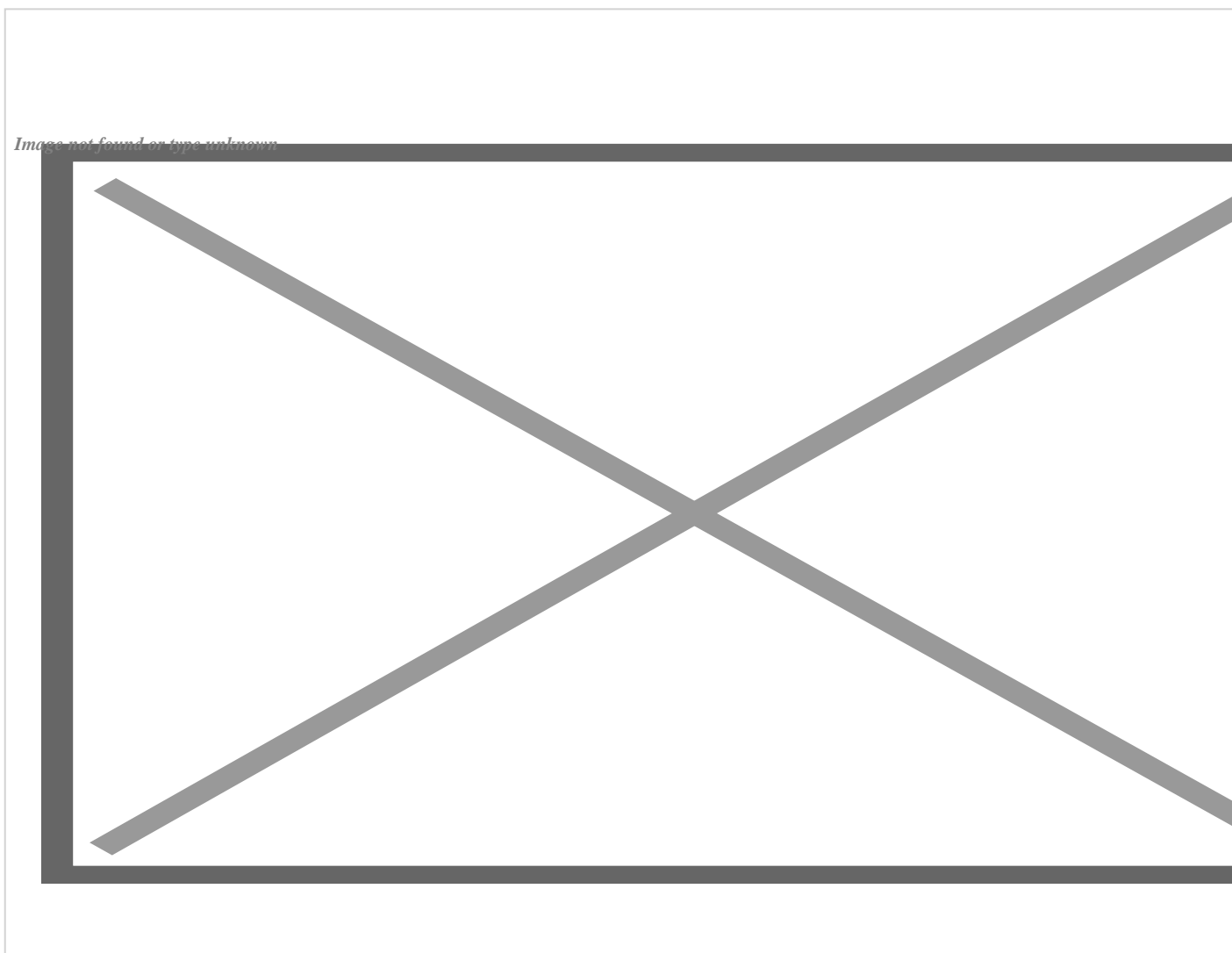


Switzerland moves to ban Hamas, backs Israel's so-called right to self-defense



Zurich, November 24 (RHC)-- The Swiss government has announced it will introduce legislation by the end of February to explicitly ban "Hamas activities or support" for the Palestinian group. The Federal Council, the executive branch, said that it has decided to draft a law to ban the Palestinian group "considering this to be the most appropriate response to the situation that has prevailed in the Middle East since October 7th."

"The act will provide the federal authorities with the necessary tools to counter any Hamas activities or support for the organisation in Switzerland." On October 7, Palestinian fighters from the Gaza Strip, which has been run by Hamas since 2007, launched an attack on southern Israel that killed about 1,200

people, mostly civilians, according to the Israeli government.

Hamas and other Palestinian factions also took an estimated 240 Israelis and foreigners into the Gaza Strip as captives. Since then, Israel has launched a massive air and ground offensive on the beleaguered Strip, killing at least 14,319 people, including more than 5,000 children, local health authorities say.

Early on Wednesday, Israel and Hamas agreed on a Qatar-mediated deal for a four-day truce in Gaza and the release of 50 captives held in the enclave for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli custody, with negotiations ongoing on the timing.

The seven-member council is formed by ministers from the four largest parties, and lawmakers in parliament are likely to swing strongly behind the draft legislation, given the positions of the major parties.

The hard-right Swiss People's Party, the biggest in the country, has been strongly pushing for a ban.

On Wednesday, the government called for respect for international humanitarian law and particularly the protection of civilians. It voiced "deep sorrow for the thousands of civilians who have lost their lives in Israel and across the occupied Palestinian territories" and condemned the Hamas attack on October 7 "in the strongest possible terms."

The statement made no mention of Israel's actions in Gaza but recognized "Israel's right to ensure its own defense and security." "In view of the dramatic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, the Federal Council stresses the need to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access. Humanitarian pauses are necessary for this purpose," the statement added.

Bern reiterated the need to restore the prospect of a political framework in the region based on a two-state solution. "This approach is the only viable path towards ensuring that both the Palestinian and Israeli populations can coexist peacefully, securely and with dignity," it said.

On October 11, the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs (FDFA) suspended millions of dollars in funding to six Palestinian and five Israeli civil society organizations with ongoing international cooperation partnerships with the Swiss government.

The 11 partner NGOs were subject to "in-depth verification of their compliance with the FDFA's code of conduct and the anti-discrimination clause in their contracts". As a result, three of the NGOs saw their contract with the government terminated.

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