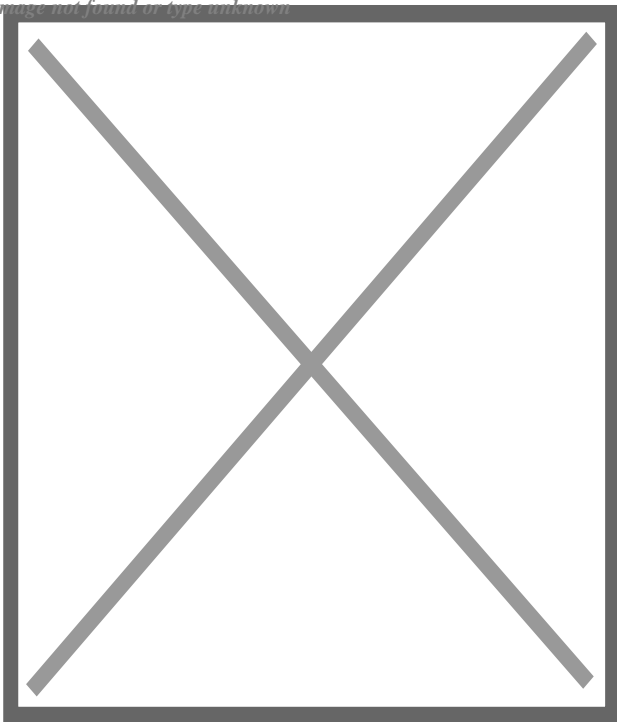


Ben-Gvir lashes out at supermodel Bella Hadid over Palestinian rights

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Tel Aviv, August 28 (RHC)-- Israel's far-right national security minister has sparred with U.S. supermodel Bella Hadid over comments last week that Palestinians condemned as racist. In an interview with N12 News, Itamar Ben-Gvir said that the right to life and movement for settlers in illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank trumped the right to movement for Palestinians.

Palestinians have long railed against travel restrictions, including checkpoints, imposed on them by Israel in the occupied West Bank, an area where they exercise limited self-rule.

Ben-Gvir, who lives in the Jewish settlement of Kiryat Arba near the flashpoint West Bank city of Hebron, said in the interview the curbs were needed to protect his family's security. "My right, my wife's right, my children's right to travel on the roads of Judea and Samaria is more important than the right to movement for Arabs," he said, referring to the West Bank by its biblical Hebrew name.

Supermodel Bella Hadid, whose father is Palestinian and who has been a vocal supporter of Palestinian rights, criticised Ben-Gvir's comment on Instagram, where she has close to 60 million followers. "In no place, no time, especially in 2023 should one life be more valuable than another's. Especially simply because of their ethnicity, culture or pure hatred," she wrote in a post on Thursday.

She also posted a video from leading Israeli rights group B'Tselem showing Israeli soldiers in Hebron telling a resident that Palestinians are not permitted to walk on a certain street because it is reserved for Jews. "Does this remind anyone of anything?" she wrote.

Ben-Gvir responded in a statement on Friday calling Hadid an "Israel hater" and said she had shared only a segment of the interview on her social media account in order to portray him as a racist.

The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has condemned Ben-Gvir's remark as "racist and heinous" and said it "only confirms Israel's apartheid regime of Jewish supremacy."

The international community, along with the Palestinians, considers settlement construction illegal. More than 700,000 Israelis live in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem – territories captured by Israel in 1967 and sought by the Palestinian leaders for a future state.

Palestinians in Hebron, where Jewish settlements eat up a significant proportion of the centre of the city, are particularly vulnerable to state-sponsored settler violence as well as Israeli surveillance.

Settler attacks against Palestinians and their property are also a regular occurrence.

Israel has rejected any suggestions that it maintains an apartheid system over Palestinians, despite reports by leading rights organisations – including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International – otherwise. The West Bank has been rocked by violence since early last year, especially with repeated deadly raids by the army.

According to the United Nations, more than 200 Palestinians have been killed this year, the highest number of fatalities since 2005.

Ben-Gvir, a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right coalition, has been convicted in the past of inciting racism and of supporting a terrorist organization.

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