

Pro-Palestine wave sweeps Caribbean as many regional states recognize Palestinian statehood

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Kingston, May 5 (RHC)-- Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, three island countries in the Caribbean, have in recent days officially recognized Palestinian statehood, signaling a shift towards a more supportive stance on Palestine and an end to Israeli influence in the region.

On April 21st, Barbadian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade Kerrie Symmonds announced that Barbados will be officially recognizing Palestine as a state. Symmonds said his government cabinet had “made the determination that the time is ripe for us to have a formal diplomatic recognition of the State of Palestine.”

In a similar move, Jamaica’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade Kamina Johnson Smith said in a statement on April 23rd that the Caribbean country aims to strengthen its advocacy towards a peaceful solution by recognizing the State of Palestine.

“The decision is in line with Jamaica’s strong commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which aim to establish mutual respect and peaceful coexistence among States, as well as the recognition of the right of peoples to self-determination,” the statement added.

Last Thursday, Trinidad and Tobago became the latest country to announce its decision to formally recognize the State of Palestine which it said will assist in the achievement of a lasting peace by strengthening the growing international consensus on the issue of Palestinian statehood.

“Recognition of Palestine is moral and just and demonstrates Trinidad and Tobago’s acknowledgment of and support for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian People,” the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago said in a statement.

Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, the tiny island countries of the Caribbean in North America, all have shared close diplomatic relations with Israel dating back to the 1960s. In their acknowledgment of Palestine as a State, all three Caribbean countries said they advocate for the so-called “two-state solution” to resolve the longstanding conflict.

In separate statements, the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates welcomed the decision of Barbados and Jamaica to recognize the State of Palestine which it said is consistent with Palestinians’ right to self-determination and in line with the principles of international law.

“An independent, sovereign Palestinian state with East Jerusalem [al-Quds] as its capital is vital,” the ministry said in its statement endorsing Barbados’ decision to acknowledge Palestinian statehood.

However, it added, the Israeli regime has “systematically destroyed” a two-state solution by “accelerating” its policies and plans including its war on the Gaza Strip which has so far killed more than 34,600 Palestinians and the expansion of settlements in the occupied West Bank, which the UN considers to be illegal.

“The continuation of genocidal war in the Gaza Strip, expansion of settlements, invasion of cities, towns and villages in the West Bank, adding to the Judaization policy, displacement and open imposition of apartheid system” all aim at “imposing new realities and preventing the possibility of embodying the Palestinian state on the ground.”

So far, of the 14 independent members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), 12 have acknowledged Palestine’s statehood with The Bahamas being the outlier. Algeria was the first to have done so in 1988.

The eastern Caribbean island of Montserrat, another full member of CARICOM, is an overseas territory of Britain and cannot independently recognize the State of Palestine.

Currently, 142 UN member states, most of them countries in the Global South, have recognized the State of Palestine. The figure does not include most major Western powers. The United Nations General Assembly in 2012 granted the Palestinians de facto statehood, by recognizing it as a non-member state of the UN.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) has been pushing for global recognition of a Palestinian state and has called on the UN to recognize it as one of its 195 member states. The UN Security Council is the body that has to approve Palestine's full membership. Palestine's bid to join the UN must be approved by at least nine of the 15 members of the UNSC.

If any of the five permanent members of the council -- China, France, Russia, the UK and the US vetoes the bid -- it cannot go through. After UNSC approval, at least two-thirds of the General Assembly must vote in favor of the resolution.

PA's quest for recognition of a Palestinian state has always been stymied by the United States, which has veto power in the UNSC and as Israel's traditional ally, it is expected to block any such move. The Palestinian territories are not recognized as a state by France and the UK as well, which can also block a UN resolution.

Western countries, including the U.S. and the European Union, have claimed that such recognition should only come once a final status agreement for a two-state resolution to the conflict is in place.

On April 18th, nearly six months into Israel's genocidal war on Gaza, the U.S. vetoed a draft resolution that recommended to the 193-member UN General Assembly that "the State of Palestine be admitted to membership" of the UN.

Britain and Switzerland abstained, while the remaining 12 council members voted yes.

Deputy U.S. Ambassador to the UN Robert Wood claimed that the veto "does not reflect opposition to Palestinian statehood, but instead is an acknowledgment that it will only come from direct negotiations between the parties."

The U.S.-based news website Axios revealed prior to the vote that the Joe Biden administration has been pressing Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and his advisers to back off from their request for full UN membership. The U.S. officials even reportedly asked Abbas to suspend the bid in return for a meeting with Biden at the White House, according to the report.

But Abbas turned down the offer, according to the report, and said he agreed to such a proposal a year ago but never got an invitation. "We wanted the U.S. to provide a substantive alternative to UN recognition. They didn't. We believe full membership in the UN for Palestine is way overdue. We have waited more than 12 years since our initial request," Axios quoted an unnamed Palestinian official as saying.

The report also said that the U.S. and Israel tried to lobby France, Switzerland, Japan, South Korea and Ecuador to vote against or abstain from voting so the Palestinians don't reach nine votes, and the U.S. would not have to veto the resolution.

"A U.S. veto of such a resolution, especially amid the war in Gaza, would bring sharp criticism for Biden internationally and inside his own party, including with some of his supporters," it said. The efforts failed and the U.S. had to veto the resolution.

Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago's decision to join other Caribbean countries in endorsing Palestinian statehood came after Washington vetoed the UNSC resolution to recognize a Palestinian state through membership, giving the PA a significant diplomatic victory.

Amid Israel's genocidal campaign against Gaza, a number of European countries have also revisited their position, distancing themselves from the US in regard to the Palestinian question.

Slovenia, Spain, Ireland, and Malta have all weighed the possibility of recognizing Palestinian statehood following a meeting of the European Council in Brussels in April.

Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares confirmed that Madrid will recognize the State of Palestine before July. “We need a real Palestinian state,” Albares said at a meeting with journalists in Brussels. “The Palestinian people must not be condemned to be refugees forever.”

Before the recent decision, Spain had maintained that official recognition of the State of Palestine should only happen with the rest of the European Union.

But Albares has said the change in Spain’s position is directly linked to the high number of civilian casualties since the start of Israel’s war on Gaza, as well as to the lack of progress in securing peace by other methods.

He added that recognizing Palestinian statehood was a key to ending the conflict in the region.

Currently, only nine of the EU’s 27 members recognize the right of Palestinians to a state, but the majority did so before joining the bloc and within a 1988 effort among the then non-aligned countries. Only Sweden, which extended recognition in 2014, has done so as an EU member.

Most predictably, Israel, enjoying good relations and influence in the West, has objected to the move particularly in the aftermath of the October 7th Hamas-led Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, claiming it would “reward terror”, while some countries hold that it’s a necessary move to revive a diplomatic resolution.

Currently, Palestine can only observe UN proceedings and can’t cast votes in the UN General Assembly because of its non-member observer status. Therefore, for instance, Palestine couldn’t vote in the recent failed resolutions calling for a ceasefire in Gaza in the UN General Assembly.

Palestinian officials and international rights groups say the recognition is a crucial step towards securing Palestinian fundamental rights and one that offers more legal avenues to hold the Israeli regime accountable for the crimes it is committing on a daily basis in Gaza and the West Bank.

Palestinian Authority spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said in a statement in February that the creation of an independent Palestinian state with East al-Quds as its capital is the key to stability in West Asia.

“Without the State of Palestine obtaining its full membership in the United Nations, realizing its independence on Palestinian land with East Jerusalem as its capital..., the region will remain in constant turmoil, enduring endless wars,” he said.

Others believe that recognizing the State of Palestine is merely a “symbolic political move” and argue that it must be accompanied by stronger measures such as imposing embargoes and sanctions on the Israeli regime, to support Palestinians and reaffirm their right to sovereignty.

Rima Hassan, a Franco-Palestinian jurist and activist standing for Insoumise, a left-wing political party in France, told Jacobin earlier in April that in order to defend Palestine as a state, Israel must be “completely isolated.”

“There’s no point in recognizing the state of Palestine if we don’t do everything in our power to isolate Israel for its policy of occupation and colonization — above all by adopting sanctions,” said Hassan.

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