

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: MDE 15/015/2011
22 February 2011

US veto effectively gives Israel “green light” to expand illegal settlements

Amnesty International has condemned the US veto of a UN Security Council resolution reaffirming that Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) are illegal and demanding that Israel cease all settlement activities in the OPT, including East Jerusalem.

The other 14 members of the UN Security Council voted in favour of Resolution S/2011/24 on 18 February 2011, which was proposed by Lebanon and co-sponsored by over 120 countries.

US Ambassador Susan E. Rice stated during the debate on the resolution that the US government “reject[s] in the strongest terms the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlement activity.” However, she argued that the resolution would not “move the parties closer to negotiations and an agreement” and risked “hardening the positions of both sides.” Other US officials have maintained recently that the Security Council is not the right forum to address the settlements issue at a time when the US government is attempting to restart Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

As the UN’s most powerful body, the Security Council has the primary responsibility for dealing with threats to international peace and security caused by activities such as Israeli settlement expansion in the OPT.

Amnesty International notes that the US veto of this resolution – which merely demanded that Israel fulfil its legal obligations and previous commitments to the Quartet and the US government – seriously undermines the US government’s claims to oppose Israel’s ongoing settlement construction.

The Israeli government has indicated that it seeks to expand settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, with further construction plans due to be considered in the coming months. Amnesty International is concerned that the Israeli government will interpret this US veto as a “green light” for these plans and conclude that it can escape meaningful international censure.

Israel’s policy of settling its civilians on occupied land violates the Fourth Geneva Convention, and is considered a war crime according to the statute of the International Criminal Court.

Israel’s settlement policy is also inherently discriminatory and results in continuing violations of the rights to adequate housing, water and livelihoods for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, as Amnesty International has repeatedly documented.

Reported US government attempts to pressure the Palestinian Authority not to bring this resolution to a vote at the UN Security Council, including threats to cut US aid, are also troubling. If the Obama administration is serious about promoting a lasting, just resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it should fully back the international consensus against Israel’s illegal settlements and the human rights violations that result from them.

Further information

Following the vote on Friday, other permanent members of the UN Security Council including the UK and Russia expressed strong support for the resolution, and EU High Representative Catherine Ashton expressed regret that the resolution was not passed.

Both the Palestinian Authority and the Hamas de facto administration condemned the US vote against the resolution, which was the first time that the Obama administration has used its UN Security Council veto. Protests were held in several West Bank cities on 20 February 2011, and the Palestinian Authority indicated its intention to take the issue of settlements to the UN General Assembly, possibly by calling an emergency session this week.