Lapid: 2022 will see intense effort to paint Israel as apartheid state

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Foreign Minister Yair Lapid warned on Monday that Israel will face intense campaigns to label it an apartheid state in 2022.

“We think that in the coming year, there will be debate that is unprecedented in its venom and in its radioactivity around the words ‘Israel as an apartheid state,'” Lapid said during a Zoom briefing with Israeli journalists.

“In 2022, it will be a tangible threat,” he predicted.

Lapid pointed at Palestinian campaigns against Israel in the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice in The Hague, and the UN Human Rights Council’s establishment of a permanent “Commission of Inquiry” — the most potent tool at the council’s disposal — into Israel’s treatment of Palestinians, including Operation Guardian of the Walls in May 2021.

“The commission of inquiry into Guardian of the Walls is unprecedented because it doesn’t have a time limit, it doesn’t have a limit of scope, and it is well-funded with many people working on it.,” Israel’s top diplomat emphasized.

Lapid pointed out that the COI has a budget of $5.5 million with 18 staffers. By contrast, the COI looking into the Syrian Civil War has an annual budget of about $2.5 million and 12 staffers.

“It shows where it is heading,” he said, stressing that the campaign by the Palestinian Authority and anti-Israel organizations could affect Israel’s ability to participate in international cultural and sporting events, among other challenges.

Lapid called the accusation that Israel is an apartheid state “a despicable lie.”

Israel has long adamantly denied accusations of apartheid, saying its Arab minority enjoys full civil rights, as well as the term “occupation” to describe its activities in the West Bank and Gaza. It views Gaza, from which it withdrew soldiers and settlers in 2005, as a hostile entity ruled by the Islamic terror group Hamas, and it considers the West Bank to be disputed territory subject to peace negotiations — which collapsed more than a decade ago.

In May 2021, shortly after the end of the 11-day conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, the top United Nations human rights body created an open-ended international investigation into Israel’s treatment of Palestinians, after the UN rights chief said Israeli forces may have committed war crimes and faulted the Hamas terror group for violations of international law.

The resolution called for the creation of a permanent Commission of Inquiry to monitor and report on rights violations in Israel, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. It will be the first such COI with an “ongoing” mandate.

### A good agreement

As Iran nuclear talks resume in Vienna after a New Year’s hiatus, Lapid said that Israel was “not against every agreement” that might come out of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1.

“A good agreement is a good thing. Israel will not oppose a good agreement,” he said.

The foreign minister said that Israel and its international allies are conducting “intensive discussions” on what a good agreement on Iran’s nuclear program entails.

“In these discussions, we are at the table. There is global attention, and more than that, attention from the actors involved, to the Israeli position,” he explained.

Lapid asserted that Israel has been consistently able to move Western positions in negotiations with the Iranians closer to Jerusalem’s stance.

“We feel that we have succeeded somewhat — I don’t want to exaggerate — in bringing the world to listen to us and treat it like a critical issue,” he said.

During the briefing, Foreign Ministry Director-General Alon Ushpiz said that the ministry’s three primary goals for 2022 are strengthening ties with the United States, especially by protecting bipartisan support for Israel; curbing Iran’s nuclear program and activities of its armed proxies; and continuing the normalization process with regional partners.

An important outcome of the Abraham Accords, he said, was an emerging four-way technological and economic partnership between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, the US and India on technology.