Companies targeted by UNHRC settler blacklist reject wrongdoing charges

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Some of the companies that may be on the United Nations Human Rights Council’s blacklist for their business dealings over Israel’s pre-1967 border have rejected the organization’s charge that they have violated international human rights laws.

This includes the companies AHAVA Dead Sea Laboratories, Motorola and Beseq.

“I am certain that we are not breaking any international law,” AHAVA CEO Ron Michael told The Jerusalem Post.

The head of the well-known cosmetics company that uses Dead Sea minerals spoke in advance of next month's publication of a data base which is presumed to involve upwards of 150 companies from Israel and abroad.

The United States and Israel are working behind the scenes to sway the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, not to publish what they have dubbed the “black list.”

Al Hussein has sent warning letters to companies likely to appear on the list and has asked for their response. The UNHRC holds that such companies could be criminally complicit under international law.

While the proceedings and the contents of the list have not yet been published, names of the companies have been leaked to the media.

Michael noted that many of the companies on the list have already been targeted by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement and their business dealings in the West Bank, east Jerusalem and the Golan Heights are well known.

“We got the letter. We are checking it out. It is not clear what the impact is,” Michael said.

While many of the company’s holdings are within sovereign Israel, it has a factory in the West Bank settlement of Kibbutz Mitzpe Shalem, by the Dead Sea.

The location of its facility is based on proximity to the Dead Sea, Michael said. He added that AHAVA did not discriminate in its hiring practices and employed Palestinians and Israelis.

Motorola also confirmed to The Jerusalem Post that it had received its warning letter.

“As a well-respected and responsible corporate citizen, our global activities are conducted in accordance with US, local, country and other applicable laws, as well as our own code of business conduct,” Motorola said.

“Our company has a comprehensive set of policies and procedures that address human rights that are designed to ensure that our operations worldwide are conducted with the highest standards of integrity,” it added in an Email correspondence.

Earlier this month, Beseq CEO Stella Handler posted on Facebook that her company had received a letter. She added that Beseq respects the rights of all citizens and, that the blacklist was anti-Israel.

She removed it at the Foreign Ministry’s request. It believes the issue is best dealt with silently.

But on Thursday, the Hebew daily Yediot Aharonot published 25 Israeli companies it believes the UNHRC has targeted for its data base.

The list also included Amisragas, Angel Bakeries, Arison Investments, Ashdar, Cafe Cafe, Clal Industries, Cellcom, Danya Cebus, Dor Alon, Electra, Hewlett Packard, HOT, Israel Aerospace Industries, Matrix Systems, Nesher, Partner, PAZ Gas, Rami Levy, Remax, Shikun & Binui, Shufersal, Bank Leumi and Sonol.

Cafe Cafe and Rami Levy said they had not received a letter from the UN about the list. A spokeswoman for Rami Levy said she heard they were on it from a report on Army Radio.

Settler leaders immediately blasted the UN.

Efrat Council head and Chief Foreign Envoy of the YESHA Council Oded Revivi said, “I suggest that instead of boycotting the companies on the black list the UN should hand them Nobel Peace Prizes.”

“These companies are the ones that employ and support thousands of Palestinian families,” Revivi said. “Jews and Arabs are brought closer together in their factories where they work in the same buildings. Those who want to boycott these companies only distance the co-existence, the good neighbor relations and the joint economic growth,” Revivi said.

The UN blacklist is not the first vehicle to target Israeli businesses over the pre-1967 lines. Two years ago, the EU published guidelines to help its member states place consumer labels on settlement products stating that they were not made in Israel.

Israeli companies in the West Bank have countered by increasingly seeking markets outside of Europe, such as Russia and Asia.