Anti-Israel 'Apartheid' Report Was No Secret, Despite UN Chief's Disavowal

March 31, 2017

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Fox News

<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2017/03/31/anti-israel-apartheid-report-was-no-secret-despite-un-chiefs-disavowal.html>

EXCLUSIVE: A United Nations report that branded Israel an “apartheid state” was available online to U.N. officials months before it was published, according to an email obtained by Fox News -- though top officials only distanced themselves after it caused a firestorm.

The report, "Israeli Practices towards the Palestinian People and the Question of Apartheid," was published by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) on March 15, and written by Richard Falk -- a former U.N. special rapporteur to the Palestinian territories known for his outlandish criticisms of the U.S. and Israel and his questioning of what he calls “the official version” of the 9/11 attack.

The report said Israel's policies in the Palestinian territories today meet the definition of “an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination” by one racial group over another.

“Aware of the seriousness of this allegation, the authors of the report conclude that available evidence establishes beyond a reasonable doubt that Israel is guilty of policies and practices that constitute the crime of apartheid as legally defined in instruments of international law,” the report said.

The charges sparked fury from Israeli and U.S. officials, with U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley calling it “anti-Israel propaganda" and demanding it be withdrawn.

Secretary General António Guterres immediately distanced himself from the report, with a spokesman telling Fox News it does not reflect his views and was published "without prior consultation" with U.N. headquarters.

Guterres’ office later told ESCWA to withdraw the report – a demand that prompted Executive Secretary Rima Khalaf to resign in protest. The report was later removed from ESCWA’s website.

However, a March 16 email from Khalaf to Maria Luiza Viotti – Guterres’ 'chef de cabinet' – and obtained by Fox News suggests the report was widely available months before it was published.

In the missive, Khalaf said the findings "should not have come as a surprise."

The email, written a day after the report’s publication but before it was withdrawn, showed Khalaf bristling at the secretary general’s office instructions to withdraw the document. She noted that the position of ESCWA’s member states “on Israeli policies are well known to the UN secretariat and member states.”

After noting a number of instances where ESCWA member states have described Israeli policies as “apartheid practices” since 2014, Khalaf then wrote:

“ESCWA presented the main findings of this study to the ESCWA 29th Ministerial Sessions, based on which Resolution 326 (XXIX) of 15 December 2016 requested the secretariat to 'Publish widely the results of the study on considering Israeli policies towards the Palestinian people as apartheid, by disseminating it to member States, national, regional and international organizations and media institutions, and by organizing activities and producing media material in that regard.””

Khalaf told Viotti: “The aforementioned findings of this Apartheid Report should not have come as a surprise to anyone as they have been online since December 2016.”

Khalaf, Viotti and the secretary general’s spokesman did not respond to requests for comment from Fox News.

While it is not immediately clear to what extent, or in what manner, the report was available to U.N. officials online, the email called into question the secretariat’s claim that it was unaware of the report and not consulted.

Khalaf also noted in the email that the apartheid report was not the first report by ESCWA withdrawn that year. She mentioned a report called “Injustice in the Arab World and The Road to Justice” which she said was withdrawn by the secretary general’s office just months before. It is not clear what was contained in that report, or why it was withdrawn.

“Withdrawing yet another well-researched, well-documented UN work on grave violations of human rights will dent our credibility, especially when this happens twice in the space of two months, and in a region that is passing through one of the most difficult moments in its long history in terms of human suffering,” she wrote.

The latest twist in the controversy surrounding the report comes as the Trump administration is cracking down on what it sees as an ever-present anti-Israel bias in the United Nations.

On March 20, the U.S. boycotted a session of the United Nations Human Rights Council over a number of anti-Israel resolutions the body was set to adopt.

In an address to an “Ambassadors against BDS” at the U.N. General Assembly Hall Wednesday, Haley took aim again at the U.N. over what she called its “anti-Israel obsession.”

"The effort to delegitimize the state of Israel being waged on college campuses and the anti-Israel obsession at the U.N. are one and the same," she said. "They both seek to deny Israel's right to exist."