Washington weighs cutting funds to UN agencies after Palestinians join

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The United States is considering whether to cut funding to two UN agencies and the chemical weapons watchdog after the Palestinians joined the organizations, a US official said Wednesday.

In a move aimed at boosting their international profile, the Palestinians have joined the UN trade development organization UNCTAD, industrial development agency UNIDO and the Chemical Weapons Convention which is upheld by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

US legislation bars funding for UN agencies or affiliates that grant membership to Palestine, which has the status of a non-member observer state at the United Nations.

“It has been the consistent position of the United States that efforts by the Palestinians to join international organizations are premature and counterproductive,” a US official said.

“We will review the application of US legislative restrictions related to Palestinian membership in certain UN agencies and organizations,” the official added.

The Palestinian move comes amid a rift with US President Donald Trump’s administration over its decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The Palestinians want to make East Jerusalem the capital of their future state.

Last week, citing the US embassy move to Jerusalem, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas recalled the Palestinian envoy to Washington, marking a new low in already frayed ties between Ramallah and the White House.

Palestinians froze contacts with US officials in December over the recognition of Jerusalem, saying the move exposed Washington’s pro-Israel bias and rejecting it as a mediator.

Nickolay Mladenov, the UN coordinator for the Middle East, told the Security Council that the Palestinians had joined Geneva-based UNCTAD, Vienna-based UNIDO and the Chemical Weapons Convention last week.

The United States withdrew in 1996 from UNIDO, a little-known agency that promotes “inclusive and sustainable industrial development,” according to its website.

The OPCW and UNCTAD rely on voluntary contributions from UN member-states to fund its activities as well as regular funding for its budget.

The United States withdrew some funding for UNESCO when the Palestinians joined the cultural and education agency in 2011 and last year pulled out of the agency altogether.

The Trump administration has also cut funds to the UN Palestinian refugee agency, leaving UNRWA struggling to fill a major budget gap for its education and health programs.

The Palestinians angered Israel when they became a state-party to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2015.

Israel is vehemently opposed to Palestinian recognition in world bodies ahead of a peace deal and has pursued intense diplomatic efforts to stop them.

The Palestinian announcements at the UN came in the wake of a visit by Palestinian officials Tuesday to the Hague-based International Criminal Court, where they [urged its prosecutor](https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinians-ask-international-criminal-court-to-probe-israels-crimes/) to probe alleged war crimes committed against Palestinians by Israel.

Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Riyad al-Malki said the complaint seeks an investigation into Israeli policies in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem since the Palestinians joined the ICC in June 2014.

Israel rejected the Palestinian request as “cynical” and “absurd.”

In response to Tuesday’s move at the ICC, Israel said it took a “severe view” of the Palestinian request. It accused the Palestinians of violent incitement against Israel and exploiting women and children as human shields.