Skipping Session on Gaza, Israel’s Envoy Slams UNHRC

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By Judah Ari Gross and AFP

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<http://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-envoy-slams-morally-flawed-human-rights-council/>

Israel’s representative to the United Nation’s Human Rights Council on Monday blasted the international organization for being “morally flawed,” as the findings of a UN report on the Gaza summer conflict were presented to the council.

Eviatar Manor, who represents Israel in the UNHRC, did not attend the day’s session in protest and instead delivered a scathing condemnation outside the UN building in Geneva.

“I am out here and not in there because the Human Rights Council has abandoned fairness, has become morally flawed and has entirely politicized its concern for universal human rights,” Manor told reporters.

The press conference took place as the Commission of Inquiry’s report on the 2014 Gaza conflict, released last week, was presented to the council in Geneva. The report concluded that Israel and Palestinian terror groups in the Gaza Strip may have committed war crimes in the course of the 50 days of fighting. The UNHRC was set to vote on the findings later this week.

“This is not the Human Rights Council. It is the Palestinian Human Rights Council,” Manor said, pointing out that it has adopted more resolutions against Israel than against the rest of the countries in the world combined.

During the three-hour debate boycotted by Manor, the representatives of Saudi Arabia and Venezuela referred to Israel as a “racist regime” that had a “genocidal aggression,” drawing the criticism of the head of the council.

Asked whether Israel would again consider boycotting the Human Rights Council altogether — as it did for more than a year, starting in March 2012, over the council’s plans to probe how Jewish settlements were harming Palestinian rights — Manor said that depended on the final language of a resolution to be tabled this week, based on the report.

“I cannot predict now what the government’s reaction will be,” he commented.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly addressed that very question in a closed meeting on Monday. According to Army Radio, the PM said that, “as a result of the report, we will consider whether to remain or to leave the council.”

In 2012, then-foreign minister Avigdor Liberman [cut ties](http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-cuts-ties-to-unhrc/) with the UNHRC over its probe into Jewish settlements in the West Bank. [Israel resumed](http://www.timesofisrael.com/for-first-time-israel-to-join-regional-group-at-un-human-rights-council/) cooperation with the council in 2013, but did not cooperate with the inquiry into last summer’s war.

During the closed meeting in Jerusalem, Liberman castigated Netanyahu for reversing the decision. “As foreign minister, I ended Israel’s involvement in the Human Rights Council. Why did you change that decision?” Liberman asked.

The UNHRC report placed blame on both parties, but focused more on Israel’s role. It also accepted the Palestinian death count, which claimed that Israel killed 1,462 civilians out of a total of 2,251 Palestinians who died — a 65-percent ratio.

As the Commission of Inquiry presented its findings to a committee in Geneva on Monday afternoon, approximately 1,000 pro-Israel demonstrators rallied outside. Commission chairperson Mary McGowan Davis said during the presentation that the fact Israel had not changed its policies — in light of the information on the number of fatalities and damage in the Gaza Strip — raises concerns about the conduct of top Israeli officials, according to Army Radio. She repeated that Israel may have committed war crimes during the 50-day war.

Davis also stressed that Hamas is not free of responsibility for the conflict’s deadly outcome, as the group had intentionally fired rockets at Israeli civilian centers, and had dug attack tunnels extending into Israeli territory. She noted that missiles were fired at Israel from populated areas in Gaza, thus endangering Palestinian lives.

Several Israeli residents of communities bordering the Gaza Strip took part in the protests outside the Geneva hall.

At the protest, Adele Raemer, a resident of Kibbutz Nirim, described how the residents of the kibbutz were nearly murdered last year when terrorists emerged from an attack tunnel.

“I am disappointed by the tone, at times, of the Human Rights Council, which insinuates that Israel does not demand accountability from its army,” she said. “I know that in the process of protecting my community, our soldiers have put their lives at risk to save innocent Palestinian lives, aborting vital missions when noncombatant Palestinians were in harm’s way.”

Hundreds of people bused in from all over Europe gathered to demonstrate in support of Israel. They waved Israeli flags and banners, and insisted the country’s actions were “legitimate defense.”

Israel has rejected the findings of the Gaza report, accusing the international probe of bias.

“The report is biased,” Netanyahu remarked when the report was released. “Israel is not perpetrating war crimes, but rather protecting itself from an organization that carries out war crimes. We won’t sit back with our arms folded as our citizens are attacked by thousands of missiles.”

The Human Rights Council “in practice does everything but worry about human rights,” the prime minister charged. “The commission spends more time condemning Israel than Iran, Syria and North Korea combined.”