US Jewish leaders slam UN rights chief over West Bank blacklist

September 29, 2017

The Times of Israel

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-jewish-leaders-slam-un-rights-chief-over-west-bank-blacklist/>

US Jewish leaders have charged the UN Human Rights chief with abusing his authority by directly [informing some 150 Israeli and international companies](https://www.timesofisrael.com/150-companies-said-to-get-letters-from-un-threatening-to-add-them-to-blacklist/) operating in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights that they could be blacklisted for their activities.

In a statement Thursday, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations said the “grossly discriminatory” blacklist was being compiled through an undisclosed process overseen by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein.

“Despite the limits of the terms of the blatantly anti-Israel ‘blacklist’ resolution, and over strong objections from the United States and others, the High Commissioner continues to abuse the authority of his office,” the statement said.

“By notifying companies they are on the ‘blacklist,’ the High Commissioner is actively abetting the Council’s unwarranted discriminatory campaign to coerce international businesses to cease doing business with Israeli companies in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.”

The Jewish leaders said Hussein’s action gives “official UN cover to the unrestrained bias against Israel in the international body, fans the flames of discord, and interferes with prospects for peace in the Middle East, calling into question his objectivity, judgment and ability to carry out his duties as a protector of human rights.”

Senior unnamed Israeli officials told the Haaretz daily on Wednesday [that Hussein contacted the companies earlier this month](https://www.timesofisrael.com/150-companies-said-to-get-letters-from-un-threatening-to-add-them-to-blacklist/) to inform them that due to their activities in the “occupied Palestinian territories” they may be added to the blacklist being compiled by the UN of companies “that operate in opposition to international law and in opposition of UN resolutions.”

An unnamed western diplomat told the daily that more than half of the companies that received the warning letter were Israeli, about 30 were from the US and the remainder from countries including Germany, Norway and South Korea. The diplomat added that Hussein also sent copies of the letter to foreign ministries of several countries who are home to companies which may be added to the blacklist.

Earlier this month Channel 2 reported that among those on the UN Human Rights Council list are Coca-Cola, TripAdvisor, Airbnb and Caterpillar.

Israeli companies on the list reportedly include pharmaceutical giant Teva, the national phone company Bezeq, bus company Egged, the national water company Mekorot and the country’s two largest banks, Hapoalim and Leumi.

Last year, the UN body voted to compile a database of all business enterprises that have enabled or profited from the growth of Israeli settlements in areas Palestinians see as part of their future state. The resolution passed with 32 nations voting in favor and 15 abstentions.

The proposal, put forward by the Palestinian Authority and Arab states in 2016, included a condemnation of settlements and called on companies not to do business with Israeli settlements.

In June, the US ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, condemned the blacklist as “the latest in this long line of shameful actions” taken by the UNHRC. Haley went on to warn that the US could withdraw from the 47-member body unless it reformed, ending its built-in procedural mechanism to condemn Israel, and banning notorious human rights violators from serving on the council.

Since 2007, Israel has been the only country whose alleged human rights abuses are regularly discussed in the framework of a single permanent item on the Human Rights Council’s agenda.