Israel's Foreign Ministry quietly fights UN blacklist

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The Foreign Ministry is waging a silent campaign against the pending publication of the UN Human Right’s Council blacklist of Israeli and international companies doing business over the Green Line.

This includes West Bank settlements, east Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

The extent to which the Foreign Ministry believes publicity is bad for its campaign was highlighted by its request this week that Bezeq CEO Stella Handler remove a Facebook post condemning the UNHRC and the blacklist.

While she did comply with the request, her words had already been published and widely circulated on the Globes and TheMarker websites.

Handler said Bezeq, Israel’s major phone and Internet provider, received a letter from the UNHRC saying the company was slated for inclusion on the list and asking for information to help determine if that initial determination was correct.

But rather than comply with the UNHRC’s request that the information be kept confidential, Handler turned to Facebook to state: “We will not cooperate with a process that is so completely anti-Israel.”

Bezeq is proud of its work with the Israeli army and its record of providing service to all Israeli citizens, regardless of religion, race and gender, Handler said. The company respects the rights of those citizens to live anywhere in the country they want, whether in Ra’anana or Ma’aleh Adumim, she added.

While her post was pro-Israel, the Foreign Ministry feared it would inspire other companies to speak openly about the process, including ones that might want to comply with the list and whose statements might sway other businesses to follow suit.

Israel holds that the best hope for preventing publication is to maintain a low profile on its work and keep media stories about the blacklist at a minimum.

The Foreign Ministry is working with the ministries of justice, strategic affairs and trade, as well as with the United States.

The Trump administration and its Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley have been outspoken in criticizing the list. It is believed the US would pull out of the UNHRC if the list is published.

The UNHRC has already published reports warning that businesses working over the Green Line risk criminal liability under international law. The blacklist is seen as part of an attempt by the UNHRC to criminalize that activity.