Israel Complains to UN: Report on Palestinian Children Biased, Kept Secret from Israel

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Israel’s ambassador to the United Nations, Ron Prosor, sent a letter of complaint Wednesday to United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in which he accused the secretary general’s special representative for children and armed conflict, Leila Zerrougui, of bias against Israel.

Prosor accused her of attempting to hide the fact from Israel that she was writing a report about harm suffered by children in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Prosor sent the letter to Ban in advance of a UN Security Council session scheduled for Thursday in New York on the conclusions of Zerrougui’s report. The report was published about 10 days ago and contained exceptionally harsh criticism of Israel, particularly in connection with the killing of more than 500 Palestinian children in last summer’s war between Israel and Hamas and its allies in Gaza.

Zerroughi called the effect on children unprecedented and unacceptable, and wrote that it prompted grave concerns about Israel’s application of international law, particularly with respect to everything related to excessive use of force. She also wrote of the destructive cumulative effects of Israel’s military operations in Gaza and the continued occupation of “the State of Palestine.”

Zerrougui had recommended that Ban include Israel and Hamas in an annex to the report that included a blacklist of countries and organizations that commit systematic harm to children. Following heavy pressure from Israel and the United States, however, the UN secretary general decided not to accept the recommendation and removed both Israel and Hamas from the list.

In his letter, Prosor noted a number of deficiencies in the drafting process of the chapter of the report on Israel. Zerrougui, he stated, wrote it together with pro-Palestinian organizations that had what he said was a clear anti-Israeli agenda that includes promoting the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement against Israel. Some of the groups even have contacts with Hamas, he added.

Zerroughi and her associates, he said, nearly completely headed off any effort by Israel to present different facts to provide balance in the report. It is therefore not surprising, the Israeli ambassador stated, that Israel appears in the report more than ISIS, Taliban or Al-Qaida, while Hamas is absent from it entirely, he claimed. It was as if the report was designed to strengthen a regular anti-Israel stance and satisfy politically interested parties at the UN, he said.

Prosor criticized the fact that the report was being written without Israel’s knowledge, adding that when Israel discovered its existence and suggested that the Israeli government be given an opportunity to present its own information, Zerroughi refused. Only after months of being ignored, the ambassador said, was Israel asked at the last moment to respond to a draft of the report. Most of Israel’s explanations were rejected out of hand by Zerrougui and her associates, while additional requests from Israel for clarifications regarding portions of the report were not addressed at all, Prosor stated.

The manner in which the report was compiled was at variance with the Security Council directives, Prosor wrote to Ban, in that governments were to have had an important role in the process. The Israeli ambassador called on the UN secretary general to examine the matter and take steps to change the work methods used in Zerrougui’s office to ensure fairness and credibility in the future.