**UN accused by Israeli group of flouting international law by funding construction in Israeli-controlled areas**

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The United Nations is being accused of funding illegal infrastructure projects for Palestinians in an area where Israel exercises exclusive functional control as envisioned by current peace agreements.

Fox News was told that the world body has simply bypassed the legal permitting process to fund the projects.

The allegations come in a week when U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres criticized Israel in remarks for undermining prospects for “a viable, contiguous Palestinian state,” due to, among other things, settlement building in the West Bank, also known as Judea and Samaria.

While the U.N. condemns Israel for what it calls illegal settlement building, critics accuse the world body of hypocrisy.

Regavim, an Israeli organization that describes itself as being dedicated to the protection of Israel’s natural resources, told Fox News that it had exposed at least five illegal projects built with U.N. funding since last year. A few years ago, the same organization exposed the U.N. for illegal building at the headquarters of a U.N. agency in Jerusalem.

Naomi Kahn, the group’s international spokesperson, told Fox News that the U.N. has violated international law and the Oslo Accords for years by “pouring millions of dollars into projects that support the Palestinian Authority’s systematic program to unilaterally establish a state.”

Kahn said the U.N.’s financial and diplomatic support of construction projects puts peace plans in jeopardy, such as the one envisioned by the Trump administration. She said the U.N. targets “the open spaces that form the basis for division of the territory under President Trump’s Vision for Peace and Prosperity.”

She cautioned that the world body’s funding encourages “Palestinian intransigence, making a negotiated resolution of the conflict less and less likely, by circumventing the entire process of negotiation and compromise and creating a de facto Palestinian state, specifically in areas under Israeli jurisdiction.”

Several requests by Fox seeking comment from the U.N. secretary general’s spokesman regarding Regavim’s accusations were not returned. Another U.N. agency deeply involved in the area also did not return Fox News’ request for comment.

But while the U.N. has not responded to Fox News’ questions about the illegal building, the Israeli authority that deals with granting permits and governance of the area, known as COGAT, all but acknowledged the practice was ongoing.

Its spokesperson noted: “As for the cases indicated in your inquiry, these are familiar with the enforcement officials in the Civil Administration. The enforcement will be carried out subject to priorities and operational considerations.”

The examples provided by Regavim and sent to COGAT included the funding of agricultural roads in 2019 near Kfar a-Dykk outside of Peduel, which Regavim said was a clear violation of the Oslo Accords, stating that no permits were sought.

Regavim also stated that in 2020 millions of U.N. dollars have been used for construction in the Arugot Nature Reserve.

Other projects included infrastructure work in the Heletz Valley, including a new water system and more projects west of Salfit. Salfit sits in Area B and is under the civil control of the Palestinian Authority.

Tzachi Hanegbi, Israel’s minister for settlement affairs, told Fox News through his spokesperson that “All Israeli communities in Judea and Samaria must be legal. This is why the Supreme Court of Israel ruled several times in the past that settlers on private land must move from their homes, sometimes after years of living there. The same principle must be applied when it comes to the illegal invasion of Palestinians to land in Area C.”

While not mentioning the U.N. by name, Hanegbi made clear where much of the funding was coming from.

“It’s been happening for decades, too many times with the financial support of foreign governments," he said.

Millions of dollars have been donated to the U.N. and its agencies to fund Palestinian projects in the area. Much has come from the Europeans either indirectly through the U.N., or directly. And while some have been granted legal permits, others have not.

Meanwhile, on Wednesday the U.N. General Assembly passed five anti-Israel resolutions. The Palestinian representative to the U.N., Riyad Mansour, took a similar, but perhaps less diplomatic, line than the U.N. secretary general when he condemned settlement expansion.

Mansour noted that without action, Israel “will continue to ignore the international community and trample international law, violating the rights of the Palestinian people and destroying the prospects for genuine peace, security and coexistence.”

Eugene Kontorovich, director of the Center for the Middle East and International Law at George Mason University’s Antonin Scalia Law School, told Fox News that such illegal funding by the U.N. confirmed its anti-Israel bias and showed it cannot be a neutral mediator in the conflict.

"When Israelis see the U.N. literally paying for Palestinian violations of existing peace agreements, they naturally conclude that signing any more such agreements would be a big mistake--the U.N. only considers them to bind Israel, and not the Palestinians,” Kontorovich said.

Questions to the United States Mission to the U.N. on the subject were not returned, but just last month Secretary of State Mike Pompeo signaled a shift in U.S. policy when he visited a winery in Psagot, an Israeli settlement in Area C which is controlled by Israel.

Israel’s former ambassador to the U.N., Danny Danon, who left his post in July, told Fox News the projects in question had been advanced without any government consultation or respect for environmental or security impacts.

“Hundreds of millions of euros have been spent, and continue to be spent, to physically alter Israel’s landscape,” Danon said. “How would the United Nations react if an Israeli organization were to pump millions of euros into another member state for illegal infrastructure projects?”