

The Elders urge US not to block UN resolution on Israeli settlements

Demands for freedom and respect for basic rights are no less urgent in West Bank and Gaza

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Across the Arab world, men and women are demonstrating in support of freedom, democracy and their basic rights. These demands are no less urgent in respect of the West Bank and Gaza where the need for lasting peace, an end to occupation and an independent Palestinian state cannot be ignored.

At this critical time for the Middle East peace process, the Elders have written to the US Administration urging Washington to join the global consensus and permit a draft resolution calling for an end to Israeli settlement activity to be put to a vote at the United Nations Security Council.

More than 140 UN Member States have co-sponsored the draft resolution which has been in final form for the past four weeks. While support for the UN resolution will not eradicate the many challenges currently facing the region, the Elders believe its passage would send a powerful signal that the international community is serious about upholding international law and achieving a just and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

The Elders argue that, on grounds of principle, the US should either support the resolution or, at least, abstain when the issue is put to a vote. They point out that the resolution is in large measure a re-statement of language already used in the Quartet Road Map. The United States is a member of the Quartet, along with the United Nations, the European Union and Russia. In addition, the illegality of the settlements, according to the Fourth Geneva Convention, has also been recognized in previous UN resolutions.

Believed to command overwhelming support in the 15-member Security Council, the resolution is consistent with long-standing US policy on the incompatibility of settlement construction with efforts to advance peace. In his June 2009 speech in Cairo, President Obama clearly stated: "The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. This construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace. It is time for these settlements to stop."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chair of The Elders said: "As we are seeing in Egypt and across the Middle East and North Africa, the cry for basic rights and justice cannot be ignored. Now more than ever before, it is extremely important that respect for universal values and international law is upheld."

Former Algerian Foreign Minister and UN special envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, said:
“Washington’s refusal to apply universal standards of international law and human rights to Israeli settlements is difficult to understand. It seriously compromises its role as a peace broker. Young people on the streets of Cairo, Tunis and elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa are profoundly disappointed and angered by the persistent double standards that continue to prevail. The stature of the United States in the region is not served by such policies which run counter to the hope invested in President Obama. US attempts to block this resolution will further negatively impact their country's image in the world.”

Dr. Gro Brundtland, who was Prime Minister of Norway in 1993 when the Oslo agreements were reached between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, commented: “As the principal negotiator for the Quartet, the United States should lead by example. Justice for the Palestinians and security for Israel go hand-in-hand. We have all agreed, for many years now, that continued settlement building is a major obstacle to peace.”

Over 60 percent of the West Bank is currently off-limits to Palestinian construction, while Jewish settlement-building in the occupied territory beyond the 1967 Green Line is proceeding apace.

Former US President Jimmy Carter, who visited the region with his fellow Elders in October added: “Time is of the essence because the land available for a viable Palestinian state is rapidly eroding. All growth of settlements makes it harder to achieve. This clear and simple UN resolution addresses a central obstacle to the realization of that state and of the achievement of a two-state solution.”

ABOUT THE ELDERS

The Elders are an independent group of eminent global leaders, brought together by Nelson Mandela in 2007, who offer their collective influence and experience to support peace-building and help address major causes of human suffering.

The Elders are Martti Ahtisaari, Kofi Annan, Ela Bhatt, Lakhdar Brahimi, Gro Brundtland, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Jimmy Carter, Graça Machel, Mary Robinson and Desmond Tutu (Chair). Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi are honorary Elders.

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CONTACT: media@theElders.org

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