UN rights council releases list of companies operating in Israeli West Bank settlements

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The United Nations Human Rights Council on Wednesday released its long-delayed list of more than 100 companies it said were in violation of Palestinian human rights for operating within Israeli settlements in the contentious West Bank.

The “database” was created to single out companies contributing to the settlements, which are considered illegal by the vast majority of the international community. The attempt to name and shame the businesses is largely symbolic and has no direct impact.

While a majority of the companies are Israeli, including banks and construction firms, others included international businesses from the United States, Netherlands, France, and the United Kingdom.

Travel companies Airbnb, Expedia, TripAdvisor, Booking.com and Opodo were among the names of U.S. companies.

Other names include food maker General Mills, known for brands like Cheerios and Pillsbury, tech and communications giants Motorola and Altice Europe, and infrastructure companies like France's Egis Rail and Alstom, and Britain's JC Bamford Excavators.

Israel's foreign minister, Israel Katz, called the publication of the list a "shameful surrender" to countries and organizations that want to hurt Israel. He accused the council of assisting a global anti-Israel boycott movement.

“The state of Israel will not accept discriminatory and anti-Israel policies and we will work in every possible way to prevent such decisions from being carried out,” he said.

NGO Monitor, an Israeli group that is highly critical of the rights council and has long denounced its actions as a "blacklist," on Wednesday called the list “defamatory" and an endorsement of the anti-Israel boycott movement.

Anne Herzberg, the group's legal adviser, called on countries to “reassess their relationships” with the rights office and urged the “maligned companies” to consider legal action against U.N. officials who prepared the list.

Meanwhile, Anne Bayefsky, the director of the Touro Institute on Human Rights and the Holocaust, said in a statement that the release of the "blacklist" should "unleash a wave of revulsion."

"It is modern antisemitism on a global scale," she said, adding: "Make no mistake. This is a Nazi-like effort to isolate, demonize and destroy the Jewish state. It is not about so-called Jewish 'settlements.' It is an attack on the very idea of Jews living, breathing, working where Arabs claim they can't. Classic apartheid. And the antithesis of human rights."

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki hailed the list as a “victory for international law and for the diplomatic effort to dry up the sources of the colonial system represented by illegal settlement in the occupied Palestinian territory.”

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh demanded the companies shut down their operations in the settlements, threatening international legal action.

“We demand the companies immediately close their headquarters and branches inside illegal Israeli settlements because their presence contradicts international and U.N. resolutions,” Shtayyeh posted on Facebook. “We will pursue companies listed in the report legally through international legal institutions and in courts in their countries for taking part in human rights violations in Palestine.”

He also said Palestinians will “demand compensation” for “the use of our occupied territory.”

The council has previously come under fire from President Trump for anti-Israel bias, and he withdrew the U.S. in 2018 – criticizing the U.N. for accepting countries that his administration said have repeatedly violated human rights.

The list was released just two weeks after the U.S. announced its long-awaited Mideast initiative. The plan turns over key parts of the West Bank to Israel, which has angered Palestinians.

The Palestinians seek all of the West Bank and East Jerusalem areas captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war — for an independent state and the removal of many of the more than 700,000 Israeli settlers from these parts.