New Zealand Says it Stands Behind Anti-Settlement UN Motion

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<http://www.timesofisrael.com/new-zealand-says-it-stands-behind-anti-settlement-un-motion/>

A day after officials in Jerusalem said Israel and New Zealand agreed to end their diplomatic spat surrounding Wellington’s co-sponsoring of an anti-settlements resolution at the United Nations, the country’s leader rejected any suggestion that patching the rift equaled pulling support for the measure.

In a statement to the media Tuesday, the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said New Zealand Prime Minister Bill English had sent a letter expressing regret over the harm the resolution had caused to ties between the countries.

On Wednesday, English said Wellington did not regret co-sponsoring UN Security Council resolution 2334 and still opposed Israeli settlement building in the West Bank.

“The resolution expressed longstanding and international policy and we stand by those positions,” English told reporters, [according to the New Zealand Herald](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11875792). “Whether we agree with a country or don’t disagree with them, we certainly prefer to have diplomatic connection and it’s good that Israel has seen fit to restore their post in New Zealand.”

On Tuesday, the Israeli government announced the bilateral crisis that started in December [had ended](http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-and-new-zealand-restore-ties-after-spat-over-un-resolution/) after English expressed “regret” over the fallout of Wellington’s support for the controversial resolution, which was co-sponsored by New Zealand alongside Senegal, Malaysia and Venezuela. Israeli Ambassador to New Zealand Itzhak Gerberg, who had been recalled in December, would return to his post in Wellington, the Prime Minister’s Office announced.

After months-long “discreet high-level bilateral discussions” led by Israel’s Foreign Ministry, English recently spoke with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the phone and followed the conversation up with a letter, the statement said. According to the PMO, English wrote: “First and most importantly, as I said in our conversation, I regret the damage done to relations between New Zealand and Israel as a result of New Zealand’s co-sponsorship of UNSC resolution 2334. We welcome the return of Israel’s ambassador to Wellington.”

In light of this letter, Netanyahu instructed Foreign Ministry Director-General Yuval Rotem to notify the New Zealand authorities of his decision “to end the diplomatic crisis.”

Some observers, including Israeli journalists and opposition politicians in New Zealand, interpreted English’s statement as an “apology” from New Zealand for having backed the anti-settlements resolution.

But speaking to reporters in the Cook Islands, English, the leader of the center-right National Party, denied that he had apologized to Israel.

“What we do express regret about was the fact that it disrupted our relationship with Israel,” he said.

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Speaking to the Herald, New Zealand’s Foreign Minister Gerry Brownlee hailed Israel for being a democracy — “which in that part of the world is not all that usual” — but confirmed his prime minister’s account that Wellington did not apologize for supporting the Resolution 2334.

“We’re not apologising for anything,” he [told the paper](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11875792). “We’re simply saying that friends who are estranged can’t talk about these matters. So being able to discuss them is important.”

Opposition leader Andrew Little, from New Zealand’s Labor Party, spoke out in support of the government’s policy vis-a-vis Israel.

“It’s proper to have diplomatic relations with Israel and attempt to restore them, but that doesn’t get away from the fact that when that country has committed breaches of international law, we have a right to call them out,” he told the Herald. Co-sponsoring the anti-settlements resolution “was the right thing to do then, which is why Labour unambiguously backed the resolution from the start,” he said.

Last week, Israel also [buried the hatchet with Senegal](http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-and-new-zealand-restore-ties-after-spat-over-un-resolution/), which also co-sponsored Resolution 2334, and returned its ambassador, Paul Hirschson, to Dakar.