**Israel Says UN Grants NGO Status to Hamas-Linked Group**

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By Reuters

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Israel on Monday accused a UN committee that oversees non-governmental organizations of granting UN accreditation to an association that it said promotes "anti-Israel propaganda in Europe" and is linked to the militant Palestinian group Hamas.

Israel's mission to the United Nations issued a statement condemning the decision, by the 19-member UN Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, to approve the application of the Palestinian Return Center (PRC), an organization based in Britain.

The statement said that in 2010 Israel banned the PRC because of its ties to Hamas, labeling it "an organizational and a coordinating wing of Hamas in Europe" with members that include senior Hamas officials.

"Until today, the UN has given Hamas discounts and let it strengthen its activities," Israel's UN ambassador, Ron Prosor, was quoted as saying in the statement. "Now, the UN went one step further, and gave Hamas a welcoming celebration at its main entrance, allowing it to be a full participant."

"According to this script, one day we may find Hezbollah sitting at the Security Council and ISIS (Islamic State) voting at the Human Rights Council," he added. "This is the peak season for the UN's Theater of the Absurd."

The Israeli statement said 12 countries voted in favor, including Iran, Pakistan, Sudan, Turkey, Venezuela, China and Cuba, and three voted against, the United States, Uruguay and Israel. India, Russia and Greece abstained, and Burundi was absent.

Official UN status as an NGO gives groups access to UN premises and opportunities to attend or observe many events and conferences at United Nations sites around the world.

Neither the PRC nor the British or US missions to the United Nations had an immediate response to Reuters requests for comment on the vote or the Israeli announcement. A UN spokesman said it would be up to member states to comment since it was their decision.

The United States and European Union have designated Hamas a terrorist organization.

Since Hamas, and not the Western-backed Palestinian Authority, is the de facto governing authority in the Gaza Strip, the United Nations maintains limited contact with it in terms of aid delivery, education and other activities.

The United Nations' principal Palestinian interlocutor is the Palestinian Authority, which controls the West Bank.