

Written by B'nai B'rith Europe

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(Nov. 29, 2012) - B'nai B'rith International and B'nai B'rith Europe condemn the Nov. 29 vote at the United Nations General Assembly to grant non-member observer "state" status to the Palestinians. The Palestinians' unilateral effort to upgrade their status is a violation of signed agreements with Israel. Furthermore, it defies insistence by the international Quartet for Middle East peace, of which the U.N. itself is a member, that progress be made through direct negotiations between the parties.

The vote was 138 in favor and 9 against in the 193-seat General Assembly, with 41 abstentions. This could further allow the Palestinians to advance their goal of "internationalizing" the conflict with the Jewish state and initiating judicial scrutiny of Israel's efforts at self-defense in the face of relentless terrorism. The Palestinians will be accorded the same degree of recognition as the Vatican.

B'nai B'rith especially commends the United States for its consistently strong position on this issue, and the other countries that voted against: Canada, Czech Republic, Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau and Panama. These nations clearly recognized that this is not an appropriate way for the Palestinians to create a new state. In bypassing negotiations the Palestinians are making it clear they have no intention of dealing directly with Israel in good faith.

"So many issues need to be resolved between the parties, including not only borders but security, yet this vote leaves Israel on the sidelines," B'nai B'rith International President Allan J. Jacobs said. "The Palestinians have refused to negotiate with Israel for nearly four years despite Israel's offer to meet at any time without pre-conditions. This U.N. move demonstrates not only how Israel has been marginalized by this resolution, but also how much more difficult this move has made the prospects for a peaceful resolution of the conflict."

With backing from countries that included Austria, France and Italy, the Palestinians are shirking the difficult but vital work of bilateral negotiations and compromise, while asking the United Nations to deliver their political goals. The abstentions of Australia, Germany and the United Kingdom are also deeply disappointing.

"This unilateral move will only hurt any chance of moving peace talks forward," B'nai B'rith International Executive Vice President Daniel S. Mariaschin said. "As it is, recent events should have reminded the world that there isn't even unified control over the Palestinian territories. Hamas, which is committed to Israel's destruction, continues to control the Gaza Strip. Even the Palestinian mission to the U.N., which brought today's motion, features on its emblem a map of 'Palestine' that encompasses the entire State of Israel."

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For decades, B'nai B'rith has worked to erode systemic abuse of Israel at the world body through active engagement with U.N. officials, ambassadors and other key players in the international community.

Last year, UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, recognized "Palestine" as a state.

B'nai B'rith will continue to work within the U.N. system to urge a far more just and constructive approach to global challenges.