**Saudi threatens nations who back Yemen probe**

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By: Associated Foreign Press

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Saudi Arabia has in a letter seen by AFP on Tuesday threated economic retaliation against countries that vote for a UN resolution setting up an international probe into violations in Yemen.

The United Nations rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein has repeatedly lobbied the Human Rights Council to create an independent investigation of alleged atrocities in Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition has been bombing Huthi rebels since March 2015.

But the kingdom, accused of bombarding civilian targets like markets and hospitals, has so far succeeded in blocking an international probe.

The Human Rights Council, which concludes its ongoing session on Friday, is again split over a path forward.

Council members are weighing a Dutch/Canadian draft which calls for the international UN-backed probe -- known as a Commission of Inquiry -- and an Arab proposal supporting an extension of Yemen's domestic investigation.

"Adopting The Netherlands/Canadian draft resolution in the Human Rights Council may negatively affect the bilateral political economic relations with Saudi Arabia", a letter circulated by the kingdom and seen by AFP said.

It adds that Saudi Arabia "will not accept" the Dutch/Canadian draft and calls for more support to the Yemeni domestic probe, which the UN says lacks credibility.

The Geneva director for Human Rights Watch, who has also seen the document sent to multiple countries, described the threat as "disgraceful".

"It is outrageous that Saudi Arabia is seeking to use threats of economic and political sanctions to bully states into not supporting the kind of international investigation that could put an end to the abuses," Fisher told AFP.

"The (Arab) coalition forces have bombed hospitals, they have bombed market places, homes, funeral parlours and it is time for the international community to say enough is enough."

The Saudi mission to the UN in Geneva was not immediately available for comment.

In previous rights council sessions, major Saudi trading partners like the US and Britain have tried to forge a compromise between the Arab bloc and the European push for a Commission of Inquiry.

The Saudi-led coalition intervened in Yemen in March 2015 to support President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, who says the rebels are supported by Saudi's regional arch-rival Iran.

The war has killed more than 8,500 people and wounded nearly 49,000 others, according to the World Health Organization.

More than 17 million Yemenis are now facing dire food shortages, and a nationwide cholera epidemic has killed more than 2,100 people since April.