Following US exit, Israel ‘lowers’ participation in UN Human Rights Council

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/following-us-exit-israel-lowers-participation-in-un-human-rights-council/>

Diplomats say Israel has temporarily reduced its participation in the UN Human Rights Council, days after the United States pulled out.

The diplomats in Geneva, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly, said Israel had “lowered” its participation in the council’s ongoing activities.

Israel was not participating in the council plenary Friday, where its seat sat empty. The diplomats noted that the move was not definitive and could change from day-to-day.

Israeli diplomats have not participated in UNHRC events since a council discussion Thursday on discrimination against women, they said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu applauded the US walkout announced Tuesday. The Trump administration insists the council is biased against Israel.

Since Israel is not a member of the 47-nation UNHRC, it cannot follow suit this time. But Israeli sources maintained Wednesday that it was possible and even likely that Netanyahu would soon announce that Israel was ceasing all contacts with the council.

Jerusalem welcomed the US decision to leave the council, with Netanyahu hailing it as “courageous” and calling the council a “biased, hostile, anti-Israel organization that has betrayed its mission of protecting human rights.”

Options for measures Israel can take against the council are limited, but in the past it has found ways to express its displeasure with the Geneva-based body.

In 2012 Israel announced it was cutting all ties with the UNHRC after member states voted for the establishment of a fact-finding mission into Israel’s settlement activity in the West Bank. It restored contact less than a year later.

Last month the council [voted for a probe](https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-human-rights-council-votes-to-investigate-israel-for-gaza-protest-deaths/) into Israel’s recent military actions to fend off protests at the Gaza border, which was vehemently denounced by Israeli politicians.

Just two months ago Aviva Raz Shechter, Israel’s envoy to UN institutions in Geneva, [assumed a position](https://www.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/Documents/HRBodies/SP/CompositionCGNew2018_2019.docx&action=default&DefaultItemOpen=1) representing the Western States and Others Group at the so-called Consultative Group to the Council, a body nominating and appointing special mandate holders.

She is currently set to serve in that position until April 2019.

The US exit was the first time in the council’s history that a member state quit voluntarily. (Libya was kicked out seven years ago.) The US, whose term was to expire at the end of 2019, will now have to be replaced by another state from the West European and Others Group. Member states are elected by the UN General Assembly; it is currently unclear when and how a replacement for the US will be selected, or whether formally the US will remain an observer until December 31, 2019.

While many Israeli politicians have expressed satisfaction at the US withdrawal, Foreign Ministry officials told Channel 10 that America’s absence would make it much more difficult to block or influence anti-Israel initiatives at the council.