UN chief in Jerusalem: Calls for Israel’s destruction are ‘modern anti-Semitism’

August 28, 2017

By [Alexander Fulbright](http://www.timesofisrael.com/writers/alexander-fulbright/)

The Times of Israel

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/un-chief-calls-for-israels-destruction-are-modern-anti-semitism/>

United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said Monday that calling for Israel’s destruction is a “form of modern anti-Semitism” and said he would treat Israel with “impartiality” amid vocal complaints by Israeli officials that the world body is biased against the Jewish state.

“I do believe that in particular when you mention those who call for the destruction of the State of Israel that that is a form of modern anti-Semitism,” Guterres told President Reuven Rivlin at the President’s Residence in Jerusalem.

“But you also understand that I sometimes disagree with positions of the Government of Israel or any other government, and that is absolutely normal in a society where many of your citizens have exactly the same expressions of opinions,” he added.

“We will always be very frank in the dialogue with the State of Israel in trying to find ways for peace to be possible in this region, but we will always be very committed to make sure anti-Semitism doesn’t prevail and that equality in the treatment of all states is fully respected.”

Guterres, who was greeted upon his arrival Sunday with complaints from Israeli officials of the UN’s “[anti-Israel bias](http://www.timesofisrael.com/end-bias-or-else-israel-threatens-un-ahead-of-chiefs-visit/),” said under his leadership the international body will treat Israel with “impartiality,” as he said it does with every country.

“I want to express to you, Mr. President, that you can be fully confident that in my role as Secretary General, and in relation to the functions of the secretariat that I am supposed to meet, I am very keen in stressing the values of the Charter, and the very important value of the Charter, impartiality,” he told Rivlin.

“And impartiality means treating all states equally, and I am totally committed to that in my action and in everything I can do for the organization I lead.”

The secretary general also mentioned his trip to the Yad Vashem Memorial Holocaust museum earlier Monday and mentioned his home country Portugal’s own history of anti-Semitism in the 16th century.

“Yad Vashem is there to remind us that we need to be in the first line in fighting against antisemitism, but first of all fighting against all other forms of bigotry, be it racism, xenophobia, even anti-Muslim hatred, to promote understanding and to promote dialogue,” he said.

In his remarks at Yad Vashem, Guterres said he was “shocked” by the anti-Semitic and Nazi chants at the violent white supremacist rally earlier this month in Charlottesville, Virginia, and also warned that anti-Semitism is “alive and well.”

“I was shocked a few [days] ago to listen to the chant of a group of neo Nazis in developed country in the world chanting ‘blood and soil’ – [a] slogan of the Nazis. That is a dramatic demonstration that it is our duty to do everything possible and as Secretary General of the United Nations I fully assume that commitment to do everything possible to fight anti-Semitism in all its expressions,” he said.

“As I said I’m truly committed to fight anti-Semitism, as to fight racism, xenophobia, anti-Muslim hatred and all other forms of bigotry that unfortunately we are not yet able to make our world free of.”

In his remarks, Rivlin called on Guterres “to work to end the discrimination against Israel” at the UN, while also thanking him for “brave leadership” on the issue.

“This targeting of Israel, this singling out of the world’s only Jewish state, and even actions and statements that threaten to destroy Israel are unacceptable, and should come at a price. No member state in the UN should be allowed to behave like that,” the president said.

“We appreciate your brave leadership regarding the discrimination against Israel. We hope that working together, we can create a more productive partnership between Israel and the UN, for the sake of our region, and for the sake of all humanity.”

Guterres arrived in Israel Sunday evening for a three-day visit that will include meetings with senior Israeli officials in Jerusalem and Palestinian officials in the West Bank, as well as a stop in the Gaza Strip, where the UN runs a major Palestinian aid program.

Stephane Dujarric, the spokesperson for the UN chief, said that the purpose of his trip was “to engage directly with Israeli and Palestinian people and their leaders” about “finding a long overdue peaceful resolution to the conflict.”

Guterres is set to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu later Monday.

On Sunday, Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely announced that Israel will discuss two key issues with the UN head during the visit: ending “anti-Israel bias” at the 193-nation organization, and changing the mandate of its peacekeeping mission in Lebanon, known as UNIFIL.

“We are seeking a dramatic change in the way the UN treats Israel. It’s time to place the issue squarely on the table and address it head-on,” Hotovely said, threatening funding cuts for the body if changes were not implemented.

The trip came as the UN Security Council is debating renewing the mandate of UNIFIL’s peacekeepers for another year, with a vote expected on August 30.

The US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, has blasted the commander of UNIFIL, Irish Maj. Gen. Michael Beary, accusing him of turning a blind eye to Hezbollah weapons smuggling.

Pointing to Haley’s comments, Hotovely said that “if the UN does not drastically change its behavior it will lose both support and funding” from Israel and other countries.

“It’s no longer just us threatening this,” she said. “The US position has changed. Led by Nikki Haley, they have made clear that they will not tolerate bias against us and will no longer be giving an open check.”

Guterres’s spokesman Dujarric has said in the past that the UN secretary general has “full confidence in (UNIFIL’s commander’s) work.”