Response: Palestinian Attempt to Raise Flag at UNHQ

September 1, 2015

Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations

<http://embassies.gov.il/un/statements/letters/Pages/-First-Israeli-Response-to-the-Palestinian-Attempt-to-Raise-Their-Flag-at-the-UN-Headquarters.aspx>

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His Excellency,

In recent days, we have witnessed another cynical misuse of the UN by the Palestinian Authority, whereby they are attempting to swiftly change longstanding UN tradition in order to score political points. To achieve this goal, they did not hesitate to manipulate the system and provide member states with inaccurate and misleading facts.

Last week, the Palestinians surprised the UN Member States with their new unprecedented idea to raise their flag at the UN Headquarter. For 70 years the United Nations has raised only flags of full member states. Even though the Palestinians are attempting to change longstanding protocols and traditions, they have not deemed it appropriate to allow the Member States of this organization to debate, discuss or reflect on the consequences and implications of this proposal. Not even one round of informal consultations was held before the resolution was formally submitted to the secretariat.

I find it difficult to understand why, after 70 years, there is such an urgency to change longstanding practices. And yet, the PGA and the secretariat have been called on to treat the resolution as if lives were hanging in the balance. With enough votes in their pockets, the Palestinians lack of respect for due process is brazen and directly damages the integrity of the institution.

In conversations with many other members of the UN, they shared the same concerns regarding this blatant attempt to hijack the UN.

As part of their campaign to garner support for this initiative, the Palestinians have presented the draft resolution in the UN corridors as a joint initiative with the Holy See. I was thus astonished to learn from the media that not only is the Vatican not part of this initiative, in fact they are not even co-sponsoring it and do not have any aspirations to raise their flag. The Holy See has made it clear that it stands by the long held practice of raising only the flags of member states at UN Headquarters. Unsurprisingly, this revelation did not deter the Palestinians. When they realized that their plot was uncovered, they have- together with the Arab group- exercised strong pressure on the Holy See to change their public position.

Following this pressure, which was exercised at the highest levels, the Holy See indeed published another statement. However, the Vatican held firm to its principled position stating again that the reason it does not oppose the Palestinian resolution, is because procedurally, it simply cannot oppose it. In a very diplomatic manner, they remind us all of the very longstanding practice that only flags of Member States are raised at UN Headquarters.

Once again the Palestinians prefer to score easy and meaningless points at the UN, simply because they can. Rather than choosing to negotiate in good faith while making the required compromises, they prefer hollow one-sided resolutions. It's time to unequivocally tell them - this is not the path to statehood, this is not the way for peace.

As the gatekeeper of this institution, I call on you to reject this aggressive behavior at the UN. The United Nations has longstanding traditions, symbols and protocols that have become an essential and integral part of its legacy. We must not allow them to be turned into mere recommendations, and we cannot surrender to the arbitrary changes that are imposed solely for narrow, cynical and political purposes of certain groups.

Allowing the undermining of the credibility of these symbols today, symbolizes the surrender of this institution to an intimidating and cynical political agenda tomorrow.