PA Says it Will Go to UN over Amona, Mosque-Muffling Bills

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The Palestinian Authority said Sunday it would strike back at Israel via the UN Security Council to protest two pieces of legislation that would recognize illegal building in the West Bank and ban loudspeakers for Muslim calls to prayer.

On Sunday night, Israeli ministers backed both controversial measures, giving them an important boost as they head to the Knesset for approval.

The so-called [Regulation Bill](http://www.timesofisrael.com/ministers-okay-bill-to-legalize-outposts-over-netanyahus-objections/), which is designed to avert the court-ordered demolition of the West Bank outpost of Amona by December 25, was unanimously approved by the Ministerial Committee for Legislation, despite objections by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit.

An hour later, ministers also gave the green light to a separate bill that would [bar mosques from using loudspeaker systems](http://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-backs-racist-bill-to-silence-mosque-prayer-calls/) for the Muslim call to prayer.

Both bills still need to be passed by the Knesset but will receive the backing of the coalition.

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesperson for PA President Mahmoud Abbas, called the Israeli measures “completely rejected,” and said the Palestinian leadership would turn to the UN Security Council and “all international organizations” in order to stop them, the official PA news outlet Wafa reported.

The newest Israeli measures, Abu Rudeineh said, “will drag the region into a catastrophe.”

Mandelblit has warned that the Regulation Bill, being rushed through the Knesset to save the Amona outpost from its scheduled evacuation next month, is contrary to international law and won’t stand up in court.

The passage of the measure Sunday night drew a flurry of domestic criticism in Israel, including by the anti-settlement watchdog Peace Now, which said it would challenge the legislation in court.

Speaking about the bill to ban mosque loudspeakers and its ramifications in Jerusalem, the Palestinian Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, Sheikh Yousef Id’es, said the bill threatened to plunge “the entire region into a religious war,” Wafa reported.

Irdis called the measure “a violation of freedom of faith and expression enshrined in both divine and international law.”

The prayer calls, traditionally announced through minarets five times a day and often amplified with loudspeakers, have been a frequent target of right-wing ire, with some claiming they are an unnecessarily loud nuisance that echoes in Jewish towns and neighborhoods.

“We have no intention to harm freedom of religion but rather to prevent the harming of people’s sleep,” Jewish Home MK Moti Yogev, who sponsored the legislation, wrote on Twitter Sunday, after the measure passed.

But Joint (Arab) List leader MK Aymen Odeh slammed the legislation, calling it “another bill, in a series of populist bills, whose objective is to create an atmosphere of hate and incitement against the Arab population.”

His fellow party lawmaker Hanin Zoabi suggested that those who are bothered by the calls to prayer should find somewhere else to live.

Netanyahu had supported the bill to ban loudspeakers at mosques but opposed the Regulation Bill to legalize the illegal West Bank outpost Amona, a collection of trailer homes populated by a few dozen Israeli families on a scrubby hill east of Ramallah.

The High Court has ruled that the settlement was built on private Palestinian land and demanded it be evacuated and razed.

Netanyahu said pushing through the bill it would lead the High Court to reject the government’s appeal to stall the demolition of Amona by a further seven months.

Netanyahu’s opposition, however, was outflanked by Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked and Education Minister Naftali Bennett of the Jewish Home party, who brought the bill to a vote.

The right-wing lawmakers feared that any further delay in passing the bill would leave insufficient time to push the legislation through the Knesset before December 25, the date set by the Supreme Court for the demolition of Amona.

The outpost, founded in 1995, is home to about 40 families. It is the largest of about 100 unauthorized outposts — built without permission but generally tolerated by the government — that dot the West Bank. A partial evacuation a decade ago sparked violent clashes between residents and security forces and it is feared a new evacuation could trigger another showdown.

Regarding the bill to ban loudspeakers at mosques, Netanyahu on Sunday pointed to similar legislation in Europe, and said he was protecting “all walks of Israeli society, who are crying out about the suffering that is caused by excessive noise reaching them from prayer house announcements.”