Britain criticises United Nations move to list companies operating in the West Bank

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Britain has joined in the United States in publicly opposing the creation of a United Nations database of companies operating in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

The UN’s Human Rights Council released the list of 112 companies — along them multinational operations like Airbnb and TripAdvisor — it said had ties to settlements on Wednesday.

A spokesman for Michelle Bachelet, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the report was not a “blacklist” and not intended to qualify any of the companies’ business activities as illegal.

But some Palestinians said it provided an opportunity to take legal action against the listed companies.

Foreign Minister Riad Malki called it a “victory for international law and for the diplomatic effort to dry up the sources of the colonial system represented by illegal settlement in the occupied Palestinian territory.”

The list was criticised by Israel, which called the council “unimportant”, and the US, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo saying it “only confirms the unrelenting anti-Israel bias so prevalent at the United Nations”.

They have since been joined by Britain.

A spokesperson for the Foreign Office told the JC: “The UK, along with a number of other European countries, opposed the creation of this database.

“The UK Government neither encourages nor offers support to individuals or companies who operate in settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.”

But Jewish groups in Britain were divided over the list.

Marie van der Zyl, president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, called it “the latest example of clear and unacceptable prejudice by the UN”, saying there were more than 100 territorial disputes around the world for which no similar list had been produced.

But Yachad, the charity that campaigns for a two-state solution, said the Board’s response was “hypocritical and misguided”.

It said: “In truth, this is something the UN does regularly — they have previously published lists of companies involved with Myanmar’s army, the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo and various other conflicts.”