U.K. and U.S. to shun U.N. 'Nakba Day' event as Israel calls for boycott

Israel called on UN member states to shun the event and B’nai Brith International is circulating a petition calling on officials from UN member states not to attend.

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The US and UK are expected to stay away from the UN General Assembly’s first-ever commemoration of Nakba Day on May 15.

Israel called on UN member states to shun the event held 75 years after Arab armies attacked the nascent Jewish state on that same day in 1948.

Israel calls to boycott the event

“Israel will not be pressured by this slanderous campaign to rewrite history, and therefore calls on all member states who truly support reconciliation not to attend this shameful and antisemitic event,” Israel’s Ambassador to the United Nations Gilad Erdan said.

May 15 is traditionally the day that Palestinians mark what for them is the “catastrophe” of Israel’s establishment and the impact of the War of Independence that led 750,000 Palestinians to flee.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is expected to address the UN, along with UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary A. DiCarlo, UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini, NGO representatives and others. The speeches will take place during a morning session held by the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, while the commemorative event with music, videos and personal testimony will be held in the UN General Assembly hall at 6 p.m.

The PA envoy to New York, Riyad Mansour, told a UN committee last week he hoped that countries would attend to see how the Palestinians told their story, because “75 years of Nakba is something that should not be acknowledged as a normal day.”

He added that he hoped there would be some 1,000 attendees from outside the diplomatic community to the event, explaining that there were already 500 people who wanted to come.

The event was instituted in November, as part of the annual package of UN resolutions favoring the Palestinians. Ninety countries, less than half of the UN’s 193 member states, voted in favor of commemorating the Nakba. Only 30 countries opposed the motion, including the United States and the United Kingdom, so together with the 47 abstentions and additional absences the motion was approved.

There was no decision taken to also commemorate the expulsion of some 900,000 Jews from Arab lands as the result of Israel’s creation.

No event for expulsion of Jews

Erdan called the event “a new low for the UN.”

“Instead of commemorating the real Nakba – the expulsion of almost a million Jews from Arab countries following the establishment of Israel – this biased organization is distorting its own history, ignoring Israel’s establishment and the Palestinians’ rejection of the 1947 UN Partition Plan,” Erdan said.

Erdan argued the Palestinians are bringing catastrophe upon themselves, “by their hate and terror attacks and by the Holocaust-denying Mahmoud Abbas, who refuses to recognize the legitimacy of a Jewish state and the Jewish people.”

Following a cable from Erdan calling for an international campaign to counter the event, the Foreign Ministry tasked Israeli diplomats around the world with convincing the countries in which they are stationed not to take part in the events and to speak out against it when possible.

Foreign Ministry Deputy Director-General for International Organizations Amir Weissbrod cabled diplomats telling them to convey the message that the event totally adopts the Palestinian narrative and opposes Israel’s right to exist. Countries that voted in favor of the event were told that, while they may traditionally support the pro-Palestinian resolutions brought forward each year, this is different in that it seeks to deny Israel’s right to exist.

The Jewish NGO B’nai Brith International is circulating a petition calling on officials from UN member states not to attend the event.

A diplomatic source said some interlocutors from other countries were also told that Abbas says “crazy things,” such as his remark in Berlin last summer that the Palestinians suffered “50 holocausts.”

Mansour told Voice of Palestine Radio that Abbas’s speech will be “very important... This step has diplomatic significance in relation to the right to self-determination and implementing UN Resolution 194 about refugees.”

The UN will also host a cultural “Nakba Day” event featuring Palestinian musicians and a photo exhibit. A film will be shown by UK-based Israeli writer Ilan Pappe, once called “one of the world’s sloppiest historians” and “one of the most dishonest” by The New Republic, who has dedicated his career to claiming Israel ethnically cleansed Palestinians.

Last year, the Israeli Mission to the UN set up an exhibition at the UN about the “Jewish Nakba,” the expulsion of about 900,000 Jews from Arab countries and Iran following the establishment of Israel.