UN Upholds Accreditation for Group Said Linked to Hamas

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<http://www.timesofisrael.com/un-approves-accreditation-to-hamas-linked-group/>

The United Nations approved UN accreditation for the London-based Palestinian Return Center. The vote was a defeat for Israel, which claims the organization is affiliated with Hamas and “openly promotes terrorism.”

The center, which says it researches and monitors “issues related to dispersed Palestinians and their right to return,” has denied the Israeli allegations.

In June, the UN committee that accredits non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, recommended that the center’s application be approved.

But Israel circulated a resolution, co-sponsored by the United States, Australia and Canada, to the committee’s parent body, the 54-member Economic and Social Council, opposing the application.

In Monday’s vote, 13 countries supported Israel’s resolution, 16 were opposed and 18 abstained, which meant the resolution was defeated and the application was approved.

Israel’s Deputy UN Ambassador David Roet said before the vote that the center “is not what it claims to be.”

Roet said world media sources, intelligence agencies and independent researchers have cited numerous links between the center and Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip. He called the center “an essential part of the Hamas network in Europe,” that recruits, radicalizes and encourages operatives to take up arms against Israel.

The center says it has been operating in Britain and Europe since 1966 and specializes “in the research, analysis, and monitor of issues pertaining to the dispersed Palestinians and their internationally recognized legal right to return.” It says it has worked with different British governments and members of Parliament from all parties.

US Deputy UN Ambassador Michele Sisson said the center only applied for consultative status a year ago and the United States has “serious concerns” about its background and activities that haven’t been answered.

The pro-Israel NGO UN Watch claimed Monday that ahead of the vote, the PRC deleted tweets [promoting terrorism](http://blog.unwatch.org/index.php/2015/07/20/hamas-linked-uk-group-celebrated-kidnapping-of-teens-today-set-to-win-un-status/) and [anti-Semitism](http://blog.unwatch.org/index.php/2015/07/20/un-to-vote-today-on-admitting-antisemitic-prc-group-tied-to-hamas/).

Last month Israel’s mission to the UN condemned the decision to grant the PRC consultative status, calling it “a coordinated organizational branch of Hamas in Europe.”

Following the decision, Israel’s UN ambassador Ron Prosor castigated what he called “the height of the ‘theater of the absurd’ at the United Nations.

“Until today, the UN has given Hamas discounts, thereby helping it strengthen its activities,” Prosor said. “Now, the UN has gone one step further, giving Hamas a grand welcoming at its main gates, allowing it to be a full participant.”

Consultative status grants PRC leaders access to UN facilities worldwide and the ability to participate in various events and debates.

While it officially denies any Hamas links, the PRC was banned by Israel in 2010 for its “deep entanglement with top leaders of the Hamas terrorist organization based in Gaza and abroad,” UN Watch reported.

According to a February report in the UK’s Telegraph, the PRC “regularly” hosted top Hamas officials, including Ismail Haniyeh, at the organization’s annual conferences.

Both the US and EU have designated Hamas a terrorist organization.

Israel’s Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center also detailed PRC’s Hamas links in a 2011 report.

“Senior PRC figures send flotillas and convoys to the Gaza Strip and transfer funds to Hamas,” the center said. Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh has also addressed the PRC’s annual European conference on several occasions, it said.