Israel: Disband UN Gaza war probe over member’s ‘antisemitic comments’

July 28, 2022

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The Times of Israel

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-disband-un-gaza-war-probe-over-members-antisemitic-comments/>

A spokesperson for Prime Minister Yair Lapid on Thursday slammed comments by a member of the ongoing UN Commission of Inquiry into last year’s 11-day war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, and called for the committee to be disbanded.

Earlier this week, Miloon Kothari, a member of the commission, said on a podcast for Mondoweiss, a website highly critical of Israel, that a lot of money was being spent on efforts to “discredit” the UN Human Rights Council, which set up the commission, and that social media was “controlled largely by the Jewish lobby.”

“It’s not only governments. We are very disheartened by the social media that is controlled largely by, whether it is the Jewish lobby or specific NGOs. A lot of money is being thrown into trying to discredit us,” Kothari said.

Kothari also questioned why Israel was even a UN member. “I would go as far as to raise the question of why [Israel is] even a member of the United Nations. Because … the Israeli government does not respect its own obligations as a UN member state. They, in fact, consistently, either directly or through the United States, try to undermine UN mechanisms,” he told Mondoweiss.

Keren Hajioff, Lapid’s international spokeswoman, said Thursday that “the international community should be outraged by Miloon Kothari’s antisemitic comments.

“His racist remarks about ‘the Jewish Lobby’ that controls the media and his questioning Israel’s right to exist as a member of the family of nations – echo the darkest days of antisemitism,” she said in a statement.

The statement also said the commission was the “epitome of moral hypocrisy” and “makes a mockery of the UN Human Rights Council’s own supposed standards of independence and impartiality.”

“This illegitimate and biased Commission must be disbanded and its commissioners disqualified from UN work,” the statement concluded.

US envoy to the United Nations Ambassador Michèle Taylor tweeted that she was “outraged by recent antisemitic, anti-Israel comments” made by a member of the UN commission of inquiry.

“These unacceptable remarks sadly exacerbate our deep concerns about the open-ended nature and overly broad scope of the COI and the HRC’s disproportionate and biased treatment of Israel,” she wrote.

US special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism Deborah Lipstadt also said it was “outrageous” for a human rights expert to make such a remark.

“It is wholly unacceptable that such comments would come from an appointed member of a Commission of Inquiry,” she added.

The UN probe was launched following the 2021 war to investigate “all alleged violations of international humanitarian law and all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law” in Israel, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza.

Israel has [previously said](https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-rejects-cooperation-with-morally-bankrupt-un-rights-probe-into-may-fighting/) it will not cooperate with the commission, saying its members “have repeatedly taken public and hostile positions against Israel on the very subject matter that they are called upon to ‘independently and impartially’ investigate.”

Kothari said in a statement released by the UNHRC in June that “ending Israel’s occupation, in full conformity with Security Council resolutions, remains essential in stopping the persistent cycle of violence. It is only with the ending of occupation that the world can begin to reverse historical injustices and move towards self-determination of the Palestinian peoples.”

In his interview with Mondoweiss, Kothari said the term “apartheid” was a “useful paradigm/framework to understand the situation but not sufficient.”

“We need to figure in settler-colonialism, general issues of discrimination, occupation and other dynamics to get a fuller picture of the root causes of the current crisis… ending ‘apartheid’ will not end the crisis of occupation for the Palestinian peoples… the issue of self-determination requires many other changes,” he said.

A report [released last month](https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-probe-blames-israel-for-perpetuating-conflict-with-palestinians/) by the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel blamed Israel’s “persistent discrimination against Palestinians” for violence between the two sides.

The commission took two trips to research the report, one to Geneva and the other to Jordan. Israel has refused to cooperate with the commission and has not granted it entry into Israel or access to Palestinian-controlled areas in the West Bank and Gaza.

In its report, the UN commission said: “Forced displacement, threats of forced displacement, demolitions, settlement construction and expansion, settler violence, and the blockade of Gaza” were identified as “contributing factors to recurring cycles of violence.”

The report reaffirmed that the UN sees Israeli settlements as illegal, including in East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

It also blasted Israel for restrictions on Palestinian movement, and for settler violence. Israel destroys Palestinian water infrastructure, it alleged, and tries to silence critical voices in Palestinian civil society.

The report was presented on June 14 to the UN Human Rights Council, during which another commission member, Chris Sidoti, dismissed accusations of antisemitism against the commission and [said](https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1f/k1fqe02cux) these were being “thrown around like rice at a wedding.”

“Antisemitism is an atrocity in itself. It is the basis for some of the most extreme atrocities in history, the Shoah most particularly, pogroms, persecution going back centuries,” Cidoti said.

“It is a tragedy and a travesty to trivialize antisemitism for political purposes, to rob it of its content, to use it as a shield for ordinary criticism of the actions of a state,” he added.

On Wednesday, B’nai B’rith International, a 180-year-old Jewish organization, [called for the dismissal](https://www.timesofisrael.com/bnai-brith-calls-to-dismiss-un-probe-against-israel-over-members-odious-remarks/) of the United Nations Commission of Inquiry over recent “odious remarks” by some of its members and “other blatant violations.”

In a statement, B’nai B’rith International President Seth J. Riklin said: “The UN is charged to uphold fairness and neutrality in its work, but is this commission fair and neutral? Clearly not.”

B’nai B’rith’s Riklin said that “the fact that the deck has predictably been stacked against Israel, and that these commissioners have not hesitated to hide their bias, necessitates that all countries funding UN operations speak out now.”