**Settlers to tell ICC West Bank not occupied, Israel good for Palestinians**

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The Yesha Council plans to launch their own diplomatic initiative against any International Criminal Court war crimes suits, including sending a folder to The Hague explaining that the West Bank is not occupied and that Israel’s presence there is good for the Palestinians.

The document, which is likely to be sent out in the next few weeks was first published on the Hebrew news website Ynet.

The initiative is not intended to be a formal response to the ICC proceedings or to supplant any actions by the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

Israel has told the ICC that it will not cooperate with its investigation into war crimes charges against Israel for its actions against Palestinians in the 2014 Gaza war, the Hamas led Great March of Return from March 2018 to December 2019 and Israeli settlement activity from June 13, 2014 and onward.

The Yesha Council, however, believes that in an informal way it wants to make sure that the ICC as well as international diplomats understand the truth of the situation, council CEO Yigal Delmoni told The Jerusalem Post.

The basis of the ICC argument on settlements is the claim that all of the West Bank, including Area C where the settlements are located, is occupied territory and should be part of the final boundaries of a Palestinian state.

Israel has never believed that all of this territory, which it acquired from Jordan in 1967 during the Six Day War would be relinquished.

The Yesha document lays out a biblical, religious, historical, legal, security and economic rationale for Israel’s claim to the land and its right to build Jewish communities.

“The Jewish people’s legal right to the Land of Israel as its national home, from the Mediterranean Sea to the River Jordan, emanates from an unprecedented historic claim,” the council stated.

It went back as far as the Bible and in modern times referenced both the 1920 San Remo Conference and the post World War I League of Nations as creating the pills of Israel’s international claim to the territory it referenced as Judea and Samaria and which until 1948 was administered by Great Britain.

The term West Bank, it said, is a left-over reference from the time that Jordan occupied the West Bank from 1948-1967.

There was never an expectation that Israel withdraw from all the West Bank territory, the council argued.

It addressed the issue of the pre-1967 lines, which the international community holds to be the borders of a two-state resolution to the conflict.

“The Green Line was created as an armistice line between Israel and Jordan in 1949 and was never a recognized border, and was defined as such in the armistice agreements,” the council stated.

“The armistice agreement anchored in the UN Security Council Resolution 62 of November 16, 1948 specifically expresses that the Armistice Demarcation Lines (the ‘Green Line’) should have no political ramifications,” it added.

It explained that 80%-90% of the Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria created since 1977, were built on either Jewish owned land or state land.

Palestinians have benefited from Israel in general and from its presence in the West Bank, the council said noting that Palestinians have a greater exposure to the internet and a 92% literacy rate, higher than Jordan at 91%, Syria at 81% and Egypt at 71%.

The Palestinian life expectancy of 74 years is higher than Jordan’s at 73, Lebanon’s at 72 and Egypt’s at 70, it said.

The cost of food for Palestinians is lower than in Jordan and the cost of housing “is of the lowest in the region,” the council stated.

It noted that Israel is the Palestinian Authority’s main trading partner and that 66% of its exports go to Israel. In addition Israeli Arabs who visit Areas A and B of the West Bank spend NIS 3 billion.

Some 140,000 Palestinians work in sovereign Israel or the settlements, where they earn double the wages they would receive in the Palestinian territory, the council said.

The number of factories in 20 West Bank industrial zones has grown from 680 to nearly 1,000 in eight years, with some 18,000 Palestinians working in those industries, the council said.

“The area’s economy will continue to strengthen with the increase of employment in factories throughout Judea and Samaria, will continue to benefit the area’s residents, Israelis and Palestinians alike and create a better life framework for the entire population,” the council stated.