

NGOs urge UN to disclose firms involved in Israel's settlements



Ramallah, January 15 (RHC)-- Ramallah-based human rights group Al-Haq released a statement urging the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and its chief Michelle Bachelet to publish a database listing companies that “directly and indirectly, enabled, facilitated and profited from the construction and growth of the settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.”

The database was created in 2016 after the U.N. Human Rights Council (HRC) voted the resolution 31/36 instructing the OHCHR to create a list of businesses engaged in activities in Israel's settlements. The list should have been submitted to the HRC at its 34th session in March 2017 and updated annually since. However, this was never done.

“After three years since the adoption of resolution 31/36 and more than two years of its initial scheduled release at the 34th HRC session, the OHCHR is yet to release the U.N. database,” Al-Haq said.

“The repeated, open-ended and unexplained delays in releasing the U.N. database make us question whether the High Commissioner will fulfill her mandate at all. At this point, the release of the U.N. database has become a matter of ensuring the impartiality and credibility of the High Commissioner, the OHCHR, and the HRC. If the High Commissioner is unable to implement and fulfill an entrusted mandate, then an explanation must be provided to the HRC,” the group added.

Al-Haq said that with the support of international civil society and rights groups, they have frequently called on Bachelet to issue the list. Last year, over 100 human rights groups sent Bachelet a letter demanding the publication of the database and recalling that the list would help to “bring an important degree of transparency on the activities of businesses which contravene rules and principles of international humanitarian and human rights law as a result of their operations in or with illegal Israeli settlements.”

“The undersigned organizations are deeply concerned that the release of the Database, including the names of companies facilitating Israel’s settlement enterprise, has once again been delayed and was not published at the 41st HRC session,” the signatories including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Oxfam, among others wrote.

Israel has called the database a blacklist and with the support of the United States, has been diplomatically working behind the scenes to prevent its publication and pressure for its elimination.

Last year, Israel’s foreign minister issued a letter to defy the HRC from compiling such a list, saying it wants to do so out of “political and anti-Israeli bias.”

The Jewish state’s ever-growing settlements in east Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Golan Heights, are illegal under international law, breaching the Fourth Geneva Convention, among other international agreements and U.N. resolutions.

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