

United Nations General Assembly overwhelming supports Palestinian bid for membership

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Palestinian Ambassador to the United Nations Riyad Mansour gestures to delegates [Eduardo Munoz/Reuters]

United Nations, May 10 (RHC)-- The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has backed a Palestinian bid to become a full UN member by recognizing it as qualified to join and recommending the UN Security Council "reconsider the matter favourably".

The vote by the 193-member UNGA on Friday was a global survey of support for the Palestinian bid to become a full UN member – a move that would effectively recognise a Palestinian state – after the United States vetoed it in the UN Security Council last month.

The assembly adopted a resolution on Friday with 143 votes in favor and nine against – including the United States and Israel – while 25 countries abstained. It does not give the Palestinians full UN membership, but simply recognises them as qualified to join.

The UNGA resolution "determines that the State of Palestine ... should therefore be admitted to membership" and it "recommends that the Security Council reconsider the matter favourably."

While the UNGA alone cannot grant full UN membership, the draft resolution on Friday will give the Palestinians some additional rights and privileges from September 2024 – like a seat among the UN members in the assembly hall – but it will not be granted a vote in the body.

Reporting from the UN headquarters in New York, Al Jazeera's Gabriel Elizondo said it was significant that such a high number of countries voted in favor of the resolution. "What we were hearing before the vote was anywhere perhaps between 120, 130 – at top end, 140. The fact that they got 143 meets and exceeds all expectations. It's been overwhelmingly passed," he said. "But they still only have observer status."

The Palestinian push for full UN membership comes seven months into a war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and as Israel is expanding illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Prior to the vote, Riyad Mansour, Palestine's ambassador to the UN told the UNGA that "voting 'Yes' is the right thing to do and I can assure you, you and your country for years to come will be proud to have stood for freedom, justice and peace in this darkest hour."

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said the resolution's passage showed that the world stands with the rights and freedom of the Palestinian people, and against Israel's occupation. "I think strategically speaking, this [the vote] is not going to make any difference to Gaza," Al Jazeera's senior political analyst Marwan Bishara said.

"It is far more symbolic. It is an important milestone for Palestine for achieving status in the world arena."

An application to become a full UN member first needs to be approved by the 15-member Security Council and then the UNGA. If the measure is again voted on by the council it is likely to face the same fate: a U.S. veto.

Bishara said that stances towards the U.S. likely affected Friday's vote. "I think a good number of votes [in favour] were against the United States as much as they were for Palestine, and I think a good number of votes were abstaining under pressure from the United States."

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