

UN Takes First Concrete Step to Hold Israel Accountable for Violating Palestinian Human Rights

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Today's media reports [revealed](#) that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights began sending letters two weeks ago to 150 companies in Israel and around the globe, warning them that they could be added to a [database](#) of complicit companies doing business in illegal Israeli settlements based in the occupied Palestinian West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The letters [reminded](#) these companies that their operations in and with illegal Israeli settlements are in violation of "international law and in opposition of UN resolutions." They also requested that these companies respond with clarifications about such operations.

According to senior Israeli officials, some of the companies have already responded to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights by saying they won't renew their contracts or sign new ones in Israel. "This could turn into a snowball," worried an Israeli official.

Of the 150 companies, some 30 are American firms, and a number are from nations including Germany, South Korea and Norway. The remaining half are Israeli companies, including pharmaceutical giant Teva, the national phone company Bezeq, bus company Egged, the national water company Mekorot, the county's two biggest banks Hapoalim and Leumi, the large military and technology company Elbit Systems, Coca-Cola, Africa-Israel, IDB and Netafim.

American companies that received letters include Caterpillar, Priceline.com, TripAdvisor and Airbnb.

The Trump administration is reportedly trying to prevent the list's publication.

Omar Barghouti, co-founder of the BDS movement, commented,

After decades of Palestinian dispossession and Israeli military occupation and apartheid, the United Nations has taken its first concrete, practical step to secure accountability for ongoing Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights. Palestinians warmly welcome this step.

We hope the UN Human Rights Council will stand firm and publish its full list of companies illegally operating in or with Israeli settlements on stolen Palestinian land, and will develop this list as called for by the UN Human Rights Council in March 2016.

It may be too ambitious to expect this courageous UN accountability measure to effectively take Israel “off the pedestal,” as South African anti-apartheid leader Archbishop Desmond Tutu once called for. But if implemented properly, this UN database of companies that are complicit in some of Israel’s human rights violations may augur the beginning of the end of Israel’s criminal impunity.

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