

U.N.

## **Israel to Face New Condemnation for Settlements**

(UNITED NATIONS) — The Palestinians said Tuesday that all of the U.N. Security Council members except the United States will condemn Israel's recent announcements of new settlement construction which are making a two-state solution more difficult to achieve.

Palestinian envoy Riyad Mansour said the 14 other council members will tell reporters after the council's monthly Mideast meeting on Wednesday that continuing settlement activity is illegal and must be stopped.

The United States delivered a rare blunt rebuke to Israel, its top Mideast ally, on Tuesday for its new settlement construction, but Mansour said the Obama administration won't approve a Security Council resolution or statement.

He said there is near global unanimity against Israel's actions, pointing to the 169-6 vote in the General Assembly Tuesday on a non-binding resolution condemning settlement activities by Israel and demanding their immediate cessation.

"Unfortunately, one powerful country with veto power does not want the Security Council to act accordingly," Mansour said. "Therefore, the 14 other countries in the Security Council, in their own creative way, will make their position clear, collectively or separately, to the media outside the chamber on Wednesday."

He said the four West European council members — Germany, France, Britain and Portugal — would issue a statement of condemnation, followed by India speaking on behalf of the Nonaligned Movement of mainly developing countries, and other council members likely including South Africa, Russia and China.

"Therefore one can say 14 versus 1 is the reality of the Security Council in condemning Israel settlement activity — although the one is also condemning," Mansour said.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has announced plans to build thousands of homes in settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem in response to the U.N. General Assembly's decision last month to upgrade the Palestinians' status to a nonmember observer state. On Monday, he said Israel will push forward with plans to build 1,500 apartments in east Jerusalem, the Palestinians' hoped-for capital.

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland accused Israel of engaging in a "pattern of provocative action" that runs counter to the government's commitment to peace. She said settlement activity only puts the goal of peace "further at risk" and urged both Israel and the Palestinians to halt all provocations and take steps to revive long-stalled peace talks.

Her comments came as the United States grows increasingly frustrated with the Israelis, who continue to announce new settlement activity and take other measures to punish the Palestinians for the U.N. vote recognizing the state of Palestine, despite U.S. calls for restraint.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague on Tuesday called all Israeli settlements "illegal under international law."

He urged Israel to reverse its latest expansion plan in east Jerusalem, warning that if implemented "it would make a negotiated two-state solution, with Jerusalem as a shared capital, very difficult to achieve."

The European Union, Israel's biggest trading partner, has been increasingly vocal in its criticism of new settlements just as Israel is gearing up for general elections next month. In an unprecedented move, a string of European governments summoned their local Israeli ambassadors to lodge protests following the Israeli settlement announcements.

Wednesday's expected statement by key European countries on the U.N.'s most powerful body would be a symbolic, but nonetheless high-profile show of displeasure with the Israelis.

Israel's Netanyahu has been unshaken by the criticism, and on Tuesday he vowed to continue building in east Jerusalem. "Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the state of Israel, and we will continue to build there. A united Jerusalem expresses a wide national agreement," he said in the northern Israeli town of Acre.

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor said the idea of taking action at the United Nations only lowers the chances of renewing peace talks, and he insisted the only way to advance negotiations is "to weigh on the Palestinians and convince them to return to the negotiating table."

"Fiddling with U.N. resolutions will take us the opposite way," he added. "So it's their choice to make, a step forward or two steps backward."

Despite its vocal frustration, the United States has repeatedly blocked Security Council condemnation of Israeli settlements.

Almost exactly a year ago, the four West European nations issued a statement critical of Israeli settlements at the Security Council. They and the other 10 members pointed a finger at the United States for blocking any condemnation of Israel's accelerated settlement construction.

That scenario is likely to be repeated on Wednesday.

The United States also vetoed a U.N. resolution in February 2011 that would have condemned "illegal" Israeli settlements and urged an immediate halt to all settlement building. The 14 other Security Council members voted in favor of the resolution.

The General Assembly decision recognized a Palestinian state in the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza Strip, territories captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war. That annexation has not been recognized internationally.

Israel rejects a return to the 1967 lines and accused the Palestinians of bypassing negotiations with the U.N. bid.

Peace talks have been frozen for four years, in large part because of the settlement issue. The Palestinians refuse to negotiate while Israel expands its settlements, which are now home to more than 500,000 Israelis.

Netanyahu has rejected calls to halt settlement construction, saying that a partial freeze he imposed in 2009 and 2010 failed to restart substantive negotiations. He says talks should resume without any preconditions.

Israeli officials have brushed off the international criticism as either unfair or by portraying it as a disagreement among friends. But officials say the increasingly frosty relations with Europe are a cause for concern.

*By EDITH M. LEDERER and JAMEY KEATEN*