PA seeks UN action on settlements in wake of PM’s ‘ethnic cleansing’ video

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<http://www.timesofisrael.com/pa-seeks-un-action-on-settlements-in-wake-of-pms-ethnic-cleansing-video/>

The Palestinian Authority on Sunday redoubled efforts to persuade the international community to take action over Israel’s settlements, following the release of a video by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in which [he accuses the PA](http://www.timesofisrael.com/pm-world-silent-as-palestinians-seek-ethnic-cleansing-of-jews-in-west-bank/) of advocating “ethnic cleansing.”

Saeb Erekat, a senior aide to PA President Mahmoud Abbas, said the prime minister’s video — published on Facebook and Twitter on Friday — “shows that Netanyahu has crossed every red line with his egregious and blatantly unethical remarks that flout international law.”

In the video, Netanyahu decried what he said was a PA wish for the West Bank to be free of Jews in a future Palestinian state, calling such a desire “ethnic cleansing.”

The remarks drew swift condemnation from the United States and members of the Arab Israeli community.

According to the PA’s official news agency Wafa, Erekat said the video should spur the world to take action against Israel, including a resolution by the UN Security Council condemning Israeli settlements and prosecution of Israel in the International Criminal Court.

The “world must now begin to hold this government responsible, and must not suffice with statements and denouncements, but require real and immediate accountability,” he said.

The Palestinian foreign ministry also called Sunday for the international community to “compel” Israel to abide by international law and halt settlement construction.

Without referring directly to Netanyahu’s ethnic cleansing accusation, the ministry accused the Israeli prime minister of trying to “legitimize” settlements, which “shows once again he is no longer a partner for peace.”

The International community considers Israeli building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem illegal. Jerusalem argues the status of West Bank settlements is subject to a final peace deal with the Palestinians.

Israel began building settlements in the West Bank after it captured the territory, previously controlled by Jordan, in the 1967 Six Day War. Today, over 350,000 Israelis live in West Bank settlements and outposts and another 200,000 in East Jerusalem, which Israel considers part of its territory.

“The whole world knows who is destroying the two-state solution,” said Erekat, referring to Netanyahu’s government, which he called a government “by the settlers, for the settlers in the settlements.”

Israel has thus far avoided a resolution in the UN Security Council against its settlements due to a US veto. There is speculation, however, that US President Barack Obama may not continue to utilize such a veto to defend Israel as his term in office winds down.

The US State Department on Friday condemned Netanyahu’s remarks as “inappropriate and unhelpful.”

“We obviously strongly disagree with the characterization that those who oppose settlement activity or view it as an obstacle to peace are somehow calling for ethnic cleansing of Jews from the West Bank. We believe that using that type of terminology is inappropriate and unhelpful,” US State Department spokeswoman Elizabeth Trudeau said.

She said Israel expansion of settlements raises “real questions about Israel’s long-term intentions in the West Bank.”

The prime minister’s video on Friday also brought outrage from Arab Israeli politicians for his comparison of Arab citizens of Israel to Jewish Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

[In a column published Sunday in Haaretz newspaper](http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.741350), MK Ahmad Tibi of the Joint (Arab) List accused Israel of ethnically cleansing Arabs in 1948.

“Mr. Netanyahu’s recent comparison of Palestinian citizens of Israel with its illegal settlers in Occupied Palestine is not only immoral, but a total departure from rationality, history and Israel’s obligations under international law,” he wrote.

Ayman Odeh, the chairman of the Joint List, accused Netanyahu of creating “an imaginary reality” and rejected the comparison between Israeli Arabs and Jewish West Bank settlers, who he said implement a policy of “ethnic cleansing.”

“Netanyahu doesn’t care that it is the settlements that were established precisely in order to cruelly expel Palestinian populaces from the West Bank to limited territories around the major cities,” he wrote on Facebook.