Abbas: Palestinians working with int'l courts against Israeli settlements

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By Adam Rasgon

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Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said on Tuesday that the Palestinian leadership plans to continue to confront Israeli settlements in international courts, following the Knesset’s passage of a law that legalizes settlement homes built on private Palestinian land.

“This legislation is in violation of international law, and we will continue our work with international courts to protect our existence and survival on the land of Palestine,” Abbas told a press conference in Paris, after meeting with French President Francois Hollande.

While Abbas did not specify with which international courts, the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court could are international courts could take on cases related to settlements.

Saeb Erekat, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Executive Committee secretary-general, said that the law amounts to land theft. “Israel’s ‘Legalizing theft law’ is another affirmation by the Israeli government for the Israeli settlers and occupation forces to continue their attacks against the land and people of Palestine,” Erekat said in a press release.

The legislation retroactively legalizes some 4,000 homes in the West Bank built on private Palestinian property and pledges to compensate Palestinian landowners, who will lose rights to their land. Sixty Knesset members voted in favor of the law, whereas 52 opposed it. Erekat, who also serves as a Fatah Central Committee member, called on the international community to hold Israel accountable for its action.

“The international community has the responsibility to take concrete measures to protect the Palestinian people under Israel’s military rule, rather than merely issuing statements,” Erekat stated. “It’s long overdue to hold Israel accountable for its systematic violations of international law.”

Nabil Abu Rudeinah, Abbas’s spokesman, told the PA’s state run news agency, Wafa, that the law is “unacceptable and condemned” and a violation of UN Security Council resolution 2334, which states that the establishment of settlements “has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law.”

Hamas blasted the law and called on Palestinians to take “practical” steps to confront it. “Hamas affirms the illegality of the occupation on any inch of Palestine’s soil and calls on our people and its factions on all levels to take immediate, practical, and urgent steps to confront this Israeli seizure of Palestinian land,” Abdel Latif al-Qanou, a Hamas spokesman, said in a press release, adding that the law amounts to “organized terror…and the continuation of wanton Israeli aggression at the expense of the Palestinian people.”

The PA Foreign Ministry called for a sharp response from the Security Council and the White House to the law. “The ministry calls on the Security Council to defend the credibility of its resolutions pertaining to settlement construction and achieving a just peace, including UNSC 2334, and invites the American administration to clarify and explain its position regarding this dangerous Israeli escalation quickly,” the Foreign Ministry said in a press release.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki told official PA radio that, “if the White House, the ICC, the EU, and the international community generally do not hold Israel accountable…the leadership will not accept any blame for steps it will take to defend Palestinian people’s rights,” without elaborating on what such steps would be.

Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the PLO Executive Committee, denounced the law, saying that it ends all hope for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. “Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his extremist government coalition are implementing dangerous and catastrophic measures to destroy the principle of the two state solution and the possibility of peace, and to force the ‘Greater Israel’ project on historic Palestine,” Ashrawi stated to Wafa, adding that the goal of such a project “is to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state.”

The law will likely be challenged before the High Court of Justice in the near future, as a number of Israeli non-governmental organizations have already committed to petition against its constitutionality. The court has historically ruled against the legalization of settlements on private Palestinian property.