**A brazen anti-Semitic ‘blacklist’**

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In 2018 Nikki Haley, Donald Trump’s UN ambassador at the time, was right on the money when she described the UN Human Rights Council as a “cesspool of political bias” against Israel. Her exasperated assessment then is even more relevant now following the publication of the council’s “blacklist” of 112 international and local companies operating in the Israeli-occupied territories. It’s a shameful attempt to strike a blow against the Middle East’s only functioning democracy and upholder of the rule of law and religious freedom. The aim is clearly to mobilise the 47-member UN body, of which Australia is a member, to help the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement campaign seeking to isolate Israel. UN deputy executive director for advocacy Bruno Stagno Ugarte says it puts all the companies “on notice (that) to do business with illegal settlements is to aid in the commission of war crimes”.

Given the companies — from Airbnb, Booking.com and Expedia to Motorola — employ hundreds of Palestinian workers, allowing them opportunities they otherwise would not have, it beggars credulity and common sense that the UN should see them as “aiding the commission of war crimes”. No wonder Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council executive director Colin Rubenstein described publication of the blacklist as “the ultimate sign of hypocrisy and bias by the UNHRC” and “a witch-hunt that reminds us of Nazi-era boycotts of the Jewish people”. There is no precedent for any UN body taking similar action over a disputed territory, and no basis in international law for it to do so.

According to the UN Watch monitoring agency, there are more than 100 territorial disputes across the world, including Crimea, Western Sahara, Northern Cyprus, Kashmir and Tibet. None has been targeted for similar action by any UN body — only Israel. Yet, as Dr Rubenstein pointed out, it is not in breach of international law for the 112 companies to operate in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. “They are legitimate businesses providing goods and services … they are not breaking any international laws.” Given the make-up of an organisation that claims to be the world’s “premier human rights body”, there can be little surprise about its obsessive targeting of Israel with the blacklist. Its publication has been in the works since 2016, when countries with some of the worst human rights records, including Cuba and Venezuela, made the running at the UNHRC. Nicolas Maduro’s jackbooted Venezuelan dictatorship remains a leading light, alongside other great exponents of human rights such as Angola, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan, Somalia and Libya.In 2018, Scott Morrison, in pledging Australia would not abstain from voting against anti-Israel resolutions at the UN, said: “We won’t turn a blind eye to an anti-Semitic agenda masquerading as defence of human rights.” It is hard to see the UNHRC blacklist as anything but part of a blatantly “anti-Semitic agenda” aimed at crippling companies legitimately bringing goods, services and much-needed employment to the occupied territories. Australia must waste no opportunity to condemn and counter the council’s brazen hypocrisy and the sinister witch-hunt it has embarked on.