

UN, Israeli allies condemn settlement law passed by Parliament

08/02/2017 20:37 by admin

Jerusalem: United Nations Chief Antonio Guterres has expressed deep regret over the passage of a bill in the Israel's Parliament that legalise Jewish outposts built on private Palestinian lands.

File pic - Jewish settler outposts

The Secretary-General noted that the Israeli government's bill "was in contravention of international law and will have far-reaching legal consequences for Israel".

"The Secretary-General insists on the need to avoid any action that would derail the two-state solution," Antonio's spokesman Stephane Dujarric said here on Tuesday.

Some of Israel's closest allies, including Germany, Britain and the Czech Republic, also condemned the legislation.

Germany's Foreign Ministry said that its faith in Israel's commitment to a two-state solution was "deeply shaken". Britain's Minister for the Middle East, Tobias Ellwood, said that the law damages Israel's standing with its international partners.

Jordan, a key Arab ally, said that such provocative acts could fuel the anger of Muslims and drag the region to more violence and extremism.

Turkey's Tourism Minister, Nabi Avci, visiting Israel as part of a reconciliation process, said that he hoped Israel's Supreme Court would make the "right decision and strike down the law".

Meanwhile, prominent Israeli advocacy groups, including Peace Now, the Arab rights group Adalah, and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, all announced plans to file legal challenges.

"There's going to be a legal battle against this bill," said Lior Amihai, spokesman for Peace Now.

Legal experts say the law is problematic and Israel's Attorney General has said he will not defend it in court.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has also expressed misgivings, reportedly saying it could drag Israel into international legal prosecution, though in the end he agreed to support it.

In December, the UN Security Council passed a resolution declaring settlements illegal.

In a late-night session on Monday, the Israeli Parliament had approved the so-called "Regulation Bill" in a 60-52 vote. Under the new legislation, about 3,850 housing units in dozens of outposts built illegally on privately owned Palestinian lands would be retroactively legalised.

The State of Israel will seize the lands, offering compensations or alternative land to the landowners, even if they do not agree to waive their property.

The outposts were erected by ultra-right settlers without permits from the Israeli authorities but the governments often have turned a blind eye to their construction. There are additional 120 settlements that Israel considered as legal.

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