

UN says Israel move designating Palestinian groups as 'terrorist organizations' unjustified

Wed, 2021-10-27 00:45

GENEVA: Israel's designation of six leading Palestinian civil society groups as outlawed "terrorist organizations" is an unjustified attack, the UN human rights chief said Tuesday.

The Jewish state said its move last week was due to their alleged financing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

It accused the six of working covertly with the leftist militant group, which pioneered plane hijackings in the 1970s to highlight the Palestinian cause and is blacklisted by several Western governments.

Michelle Bachelet said the decision was an attack on human rights defenders, on freedoms of association, opinion and expression and on the right to public participation.

She called for the move to be immediately revoked.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said anti-terrorism legislation should not be applied to legitimate human rights and humanitarian aid activities.

"The organizations ... face far-reaching consequences as a result of this arbitrary decision, as do the people who fund them and work with them," said Bachelet.

"The crucial work they perform for thousands of Palestinians risks being halted or severely restricted," she added.

She said the decision would have "a chilling effect" on human rights defenders.



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Israel envoy to brief US over ban on Palestinian groups
UN experts denounce Israeli branding of Palestinian rights groups as terrorists

[Lebanon top politicians agree solution to political tensions, cleric says](#)

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Tue, 2021-10-26 22:17

BEIRUT: Lebanon's top Christian cleric on Tuesday said the country's three leading politicians agreed to a "solution" to political tensions and government paralysis tied to high-profile judicial investigations. "There is a constitutional and legal solution to the current crisis," Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rai said during a news conference after a day spent shuttling between the prime minister, the parliament speaker and president. An official source said the solution involved prosecuting former ministers charged over the August 2020 Beirut port explosion at a special court made up

of MPs and judges while allowing blast investigator Tarek Bitar to continue with the cases of lower-level officials.

The special court, formed by a parliamentary vote, has never held any official to account.

Bitar has sought to question top officials including former ministers affiliated with the Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri's Amal movement and the Marada Movement, both allies of Iran-backed Hezbollah, which has responded with a smear campaign accusing Bitar of politicizing the probe.

Rai had earlier said after a meeting with Berri that issues had to be resolved "because Lebanon is dying, the people are dying and the state is disintegrating."

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati has not convened a Cabinet meeting since Oct. 12, pending a solution to the standoff that has paralyzed government for over two weeks.

The dispute spilt over into the Cabinet when ministers allied to those parties called for Bitar's removal in a heated discussion during the last session.

Rai also said he was "slightly upset" about the summoning of Lebanese Forces party leader Samir Geagea by army intelligence for a hearing over fatal clashes in Beirut's Ain Al-Remmaneh neighborhood this month.

On Oct. 14, seven people, all followers of Hezbollah and Amal, were shot dead during a Beirut protest the parties organized against Bitar, the worst street violence in more than a decade.

The parties said the seven were killed by supporters of the Christian Lebanese Forces party headed by Samir Geagea, who has backed the blast investigation. Geagea has repeatedly denied the allegations.

Geagea was summoned for a hearing on Wednesday by army intelligence. No other top politician has received such a summons.

On Tuesday, Geagea's lawyers filed a motion claiming the summons was unlawful, while attorneys representing a number of detainees submitted a motion requesting that Judge Fadi Akiki recuse himself from the case.

A group of Ain Al-Remmaneh residents this week filed a lawsuit against Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah, claiming fighters under his command involved in the clashes had undermined "national unity" and committed terrorist acts.

President Michel Aoun, a Hezbollah ally who has said Bitar's probe should continue, on Tuesday urged the government to resume Cabinet meetings in order to reach a funding agreement with the International Monetary Fund, widely seen as the only way for Lebanon to access desperately needed international aid.

Rima Zahed, the sister of port blast victim Amin Zahed and a member of a committee representing the families of victims, warned against "any kind of settlement or deal" that infringed upon the reach of the investigation.

"No-one can threaten us with sectarian tensions or the difficult situation the Lebanese people are in. Politicians need to know this," she said. "There will be no deals made over the blood of our martyrs."



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[UN experts denounce Israeli branding of Palestinian rights groups as terrorists](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-10-26 02:26

NEW YORK: UN human rights experts on Monday “strongly and unequivocally” condemned the decision by Israeli authorities to designate six Palestinian human rights groups as terrorist organizations.

“This designation is a frontal attack on the Palestinian human rights movement and on human rights everywhere,” the special rapporteurs said.

“Silencing their voices is not what a democracy adhering to well-accepted human rights and humanitarian standards would do.”

They called on the international community to “defend the defenders” and added: “These civil society organizations are the canaries in the human rights coalmine, alerting us to the patterns of violations, reminding the international community of its obligations to ensure accountability, and providing voices for those who have none.”

Special rapporteurs are independent experts who serve in individual capacities, and on a voluntary basis, on the UN’s Human Rights Council. They are not members of UN staff and are not paid for their work.

They include Martin Lynk, special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, and Fionnuala Ni Aolain, special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism.

The experts said that antiterrorism laws must not be used as a tool to undermine freedoms, and reminded Israeli authorities that the Security Council and all other UN bodies “have all been clear about the requirement to apply counter-terrorism measures in a manner which is consistent with international law and does not violate states’ international obligations.” Such “egregious misuse” of counterterrorism measures by Israel, the experts added, undermines the security of all.

Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz on Friday designated as terrorist groups the Palestinian organizations Addameer, which provides legal support for prisoners and collects data on arrests and detentions; Al-Haq, which documents rights violations; Defense for Children International Palestine; the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, the Bisan Center for Research and Development, and the Union of Palestinian Women Committees.

“These organizations speak the language of universal human rights (and document abuses in Palestine),” the experts said.

They added that the decision to designate them as terrorist organizations effectively bans their work and gives the Israeli military free rein to arrest employees, close offices and confiscate assets.

The experts expressed concern that in the case of one of the organizations, the decision might be a reprisal for cooperation with UN groups.

“The Israeli military has frequently targeted human rights defenders in recent years as its occupation has deepened, its defiance of international law has continued and its record of human rights violations has worsened,” the experts said.

“While international and Israeli human rights organizations have faced heavy criticism, legislative restrictions and even deportations, Palestinian human rights defenders have always encountered the severest constraints.”

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said that the UN office in Jerusalem, in addressing the issue, continues to engage with the Israeli authorities and the concerned parties.

“The secretary-general has repeatedly expressed concern about the shrinking space for civil society in many places around the world, including in

Israel,” he added.



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Jordan's King Abdullah urges world to work together to resolve Palestine-Israel conflict
Israel slammed over 'vicious' attacks on Palestinian civil society

[Prince Charles to visit Jordan and Egypt to follow up on COP26 commitments](#)

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ARAB NEWS

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Tue, 2021-10-26 01:56

LONDON: Britain's Prince Charles will travel to the Middle East next month on a trip that aims to showcase strong bilateral relationships and address the climate crisis.

The prince and his wife, Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall, will visit Jordan and Egypt from Nov. 16 to 19, as part of his autumn tour, at the request of the British government, his office announced on Monday. During his last autumn tour, in 2019, he visited India, New Zealand and the Solomon Islands.

Prince Charles "will explore how leaders, the private sector and wider society can implement commitments" following the World Leaders' Summit that will take place in Glasgow, Scotland, on Nov. 1, during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26).

During his visit to Jordan, which coincides with the nation's centenary celebrations this year and 100 years of the UK-Jordan bilateral relationship, the royal couple will meet King Abdullah II and Queen Rania at Al-Husseiniya Palace.

They will also tour cultural and religious sites in Jordan and meet representatives of humanitarian organizations, including the UN Refugee Agency and the International Rescue Committee, the latter of which he became patron in January last year.

Charles will use his visit to focus on environmental issues, heritage preservation, and the creation of jobs and opportunities for young people. He will also participate in an interfaith discussion that "will acknowledge the diverse, tolerant and integrated nature of Jordanian society, highlighting the importance placed on religious freedom," the prince's office said. Camilla will focus on supporting education for women and girls and will discuss with Queen Rania her efforts in this area.

"Their royal highnesses' return to Jordan underlines the importance that Her Majesty's Government places on its close ties with Jordan, which is underpinned by the countries' deep security cooperation and the long-standing relationship between the two royal families," according to the prince's office.

It added that Charles, who last visited Jordan in February 2015, will highlight the nation's generosity in hosting refugees forced to flee conflicts in neighboring countries.

During their visit to Egypt, the royal couple will meet President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and First Lady Entissar Amer at Al-Ittihadiya Palace. They will also meet the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar to discuss "religious harmony and the role of faith in preserving the environment, (which) will serve to further strengthen religious ties between the UK and Egypt," the prince's office said.

Egypt will assume the presidency of COP27 in 2022, so the talks will also

focus on efforts to combat climate change, it added.

“Their visit to Egypt will highlight the country’s close relationship with the UK, and will provide an opportunity to demonstrate Egypt’s growing commitment to protecting the environment,” the prince’s office said.

Charles and Camilla last visited the North African country in 2006. The trip will conclude with a reception in the shadow of the pyramids in Giza to celebrate the bond between the nations, and a visit to the ancient city of Alexandria.



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By LOLITA C. BALDOR and ROBERT BURNS | AP

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WASHINGTON: US officials say they believe Iran was behind the drone attack last week at the military outpost in southern Syria where American troops are based.

Officials said Monday the US believes that Iran resourced and encouraged the attack, but that the drones were not launched from Iran. They were Iranian drones, and Iran appears to have facilitated their use, officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss details that have not been made public.

Officials said they believe the attacks involved as many as five drones laden with explosive charges, and that they hit both the US side of Al-Tanf garrison and the side where Syrian opposition forces stay.

There were no reported injuries or deaths as a result of the attack.

US and coalition troops are based at Al-Tanf to train Syrian forces on patrols to counter Daesh militants. The base is also located on a road serving as a vital link for Iranian-backed forces from Tehran all the way to southern Lebanon and Israel.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby declined to provide details when asked about the report during a news conference Monday. He called it a "complex, coordinated and deliberate attack" and said the US has seen similar ones before from Shia militia groups that are backed by Iran. But he would not go into specifics and said he had no update on the munitions used in the attack. Kirby also declined to say if troops were warned ahead of time or whether the US intends to make a military response.

"The protection and security of our troops overseas remains a paramount concern for the secretary," Kirby said, referring to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, "and that if there is to be a response, it will be at a time and a place and a manner of our choosing, and we certainly won't get ahead of those kinds of decisions."

Pro-Iran media outlets have been saying that the attack on Tanf was carried out by "Syria's allies" – an apparent reference to Iran-backed groups – in retaliation for an attack days earlier near the historic Syrian town of Palmyra. Israel has been blamed for the attack, but US officials say America was not involved with it.

The Al-Tanf attack came in a period of rising tensions with Iran. The Biden administration this week said international diplomatic efforts to get Iran back into negotiations to return to a 2015 nuclear deal were at a "critical place" and that patience is wearing thin.

The last major Iranian attack on US forces was in January 2020, when Tehran launched a barrage of ballistic missiles on Al-Asad air base in Iraq. US and coalition troops were warned of the incoming missiles and were able to take cover, but more than 100 US service members received traumatic brain injuries as a result of the blasts.

The Iran attack was in response to the US drone strike earlier that month near the Baghdad airport that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis.

Two months after the Al-Asad assault, US fighter jets struck five sites in retaliation, targeting Iranian-backed Shiite militia members believed responsible for the January rocket attack.



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