

# UN tells Israel to abandon threats of West Bank annexation

Wed, 2020-05-20 17:29

UNITED NATIONS: The UN's special Mideast envoy called Wednesday on Israel to drop plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank, joining a growing international chorus of opposition.

Envoy Nickolay Mladenov also called on the Palestinians to resume talks with the so-called Quartet, comprising the US, Russia, the EU and the United Nations.

"Israel must abandon threats of annexation," Mladenov said during a meeting of the Security Council.

"I call on my colleagues in the Middle East Quartet to work with the UN and quickly come forward with a proposal that will enable the Quartet to take up its mediation role and work jointly with countries in the region to advance the prospect of peace," he added.

The unusually direct statement came a day after Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas announced an end to the Palestinians' security arrangements with Israel, which plans to annex territories in the occupied West Bank.

Mladenov said he would speak Thursday with Palestinian leaders about the practical consequences of their announcement, which were not spelled out by Abbas.

"The continuing threat of annexation by Israel of parts of the West Bank would constitute a most serious violation of international law," Mladenov warned.

It would "deal a devastating blow to the two-state solution, close the door to a renewal of negotiations, and threaten efforts to advance regional peace and our broader efforts to maintain international peace and security," he added.

The US ambassador to the United Nations, Kelly Craft, stressed for her part that a solution could only result from the two parties sitting down at the same negotiating table.

"What is needed right now, if we hope to take even a first step in the right direction, is for the parties to sit down with one another," she said.

"This council cannot dictate the end of this conflict. We can only encourage the parties to sit down to determine how they wish to make progress."

The US diplomat once again called on the Palestinians to seize the opportunity offered by a US peace plan that it has previously rejected.

Several Security Council members such as Indonesia and the European countries have warned Israel against the planned annexations.

In a joint statement France, Belgium, Germany and Estonia reaffirmed that they "will not recognize any changes to the 1967 borders, unless agreed by Israelis and Palestinians."

"We strongly urge Israel to refrain from any unilateral decision that would lead to the annexation of any occupied Palestinian territory and would be, as such, contrary to international law," they said, reaffirming their support for a two state solution as the only one capable of bringing peace to the region.



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[Palestinian](#)

[Nickolay Mladenov](#)

Palestinian president declares end to all agreements with Israel and US PLO official: Israel has 'destroyed 2-state solution'

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## [Egypt registers 720 new coronavirus cases in one day](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1589915318439523800

Tue, 2020-05-19 18:26

CAIRO: Egypt on Tuesday registered 720 new coronavirus cases, the health ministry said in a statement, its highest daily toll since detecting the first confirmed case in February.

The new cases brought the total infections to 13,484 cases, the ministry added in a statement.

The country's former daily record was 535 cases on Monday.

Egypt recorded 14 deaths on Tuesday, the statement said, bringing the total fatalities to 659. Nearly 3,740 people have recovered and been discharged from isolation hospitals.

The daily tally of cases has been rising after the government slightly eased a night curfew and other measures.

The most populous Arab country will bring forward the start of its curfew by four hours to 5 p.m. and halt public transport from May 24 for six days during the Eid holiday, as it seeks to curb the spread of the new coronavirus, Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly said on Sunday.



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## [Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque to reopen after Eid holiday](#)

Author:

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1589905672858968200

Tue, 2020-05-19 11:49

JERUSALEM: Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque will reopen to worshippers after the Eid holiday, a statement from its governing body said Tuesday, two months after closing due to the coronavirus.

"The council decided to lift the suspension on worshippers entering the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque after the Eid Al-Fitr holiday," a statement from the Waqf organization said, referring to the three-day holiday expected to begin this weekend.

Islam's third holiest site was closed in late March for the first time in more than 50 years as part of measures across the globe to stem the spread of the new coronavirus.

The mosque's director, Omar Al-Kiswani, told AFP he hoped for no restrictions on the number of worshippers but said the governing body would announce the exact "mechanisms and measures later."

He said the details would be worked out to "ensure we are not subjected to criticism on the pretext we have broken health rules."

The mosque compound, which lies in Jerusalem's Old City, has often been a flashpoint in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Known to Muslims as the Haram Al-Sharif, the mosque compound is under the custodianship of neighbouring Jordan which controlled the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, up until its occupation by Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967.

The site is also holy to Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount and believe it to be the location of the two biblical temples – the second of which was destroyed in 70 AD.

With the number of COVID-19 cases declining, in recent days both Israel and the Palestinian territories have eased restrictions.

The Western Wall, the holiest site at which Jews are permitted to pray, is one of the outer walls of the Al-Aqsa mosque compound.

It was closed by Israeli authorities but reopened earlier this month, though with only 300 people allowed at a time.

In total, Israel has recorded 16,650 coronavirus infections in its population of nine million and 277 deaths.

On the Palestinian side, fewer than 400 cases have been confirmed in the West Bank and Gaza – which have a combined population of more than 4.5 million.

Beaches in Israel are due to reopen from Wednesday, with restaurants and bars to follow from the 27th.

Flights are also due to resume from various locations in the coming weeks.



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Al-Aqsa to remain closed until after Eid Al-Fitr Muslims in Jerusalem pray outdoors amid virus lockdown

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## [UN team reports new evidence against Daesh in Iraq](#)

Author:

AP

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1589901421708691100

Tue, 2020-05-19 01:29

UNITED NATIONS: A UN investigative team says it has made “significant progress” in collecting new sources of evidence in Iraq against Daesh extremists, including over 2 million call records that should strengthen

cases against perpetrators of crimes against the Yazidi minority in 2014. The team also reported progress in its investigations of the mass killings of unarmed cadets and military personnel from the Tikrit Air Academy in June 2014 and crimes committed by Daesh extremists in Mosul from 2014 to 2016. In a report to the UN Security Council obtained by The Associated Press, the investigative team said it is continuing to engage with the Iraqi government on pending legislation that would allow the country to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide allegedly committed by Daesh.

"In the coming six months, the team will continue its work with the government of Iraq in order to capitalize on this opportunity, with a view to securing the commencement of domestic proceedings based on evidence collected by the team," the report said.

The Daesh group's self-declared "caliphate" that once spanned a third of both Iraq and Syria, has been defeated on the ground but its fighters are still staging insurgent attacks.

The atrocities its fighters and supporters committed have left deep scars. Thousands of members of Iraq's Yazidi minority, mainly women and girls, were raped and enslaved, while men were killed. Suspected homosexuals were pushed off roofs to their deaths. Captured Americans and other Westerners were beheaded, and an unknown number of suspected opponents were killed.

A Security Council resolution backed by more than 60 countries to refer the Syrian conflict to the International Criminal Court was vetoed by both Russia and China in May 2014.

The General Assembly established an independent panel in December 2016 to assist in the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for war crimes or crimes against humanity in Syria.

In September 2017, the Security Council voted unanimously to ask the UN to establish an investigative team to help Iraq preserve evidence and promote accountability for what "may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide" committed by Daesh extremists, both in Iraq and the Levant which includes Syria.

The latest report by the investigative team said that as a result of its expanded cooperation with the Iraqi judiciary, security services and Directorate of Military Intelligence, it stands "at a pivotal moment in its work."

Cooperation with the Iraqi judiciary in obtaining call data records and with Iraqi security services in extracting and analyzing data from cellphones, SIM cards and mass storage devices previously used by Daesh "have the potential to represent a paradigm shift in the prosecution of ISIL members," the investigators said.

The data has provided "access to a wide range of internal Daesh documents, cell data, videos and images," they said.

The team said it is already identifying evidence that can fill gaps in ongoing proceedings as a result of the cell phone data as well as from putting documents held by Iraqi authorities in digital form, and using enhanced discovery and evidence-management systems.

In its investigation of attacks committed by Daesh against the Yazidis in Sinjar district in August 2014, the team said the recent receipt of more than 2 million call data records from Iraqi cell phone service providers "relevant to time periods and geographic locations connected to this investigation provides a significant opportunity to strengthen case files in relation to

alleged perpetrators.”

As for the investigation into the mass killings at the Tikrit Air Academy in June 2014, the team said its work has been helped by continuing cooperation from the Iraqi national commission established to investigate the crimes, including reports on the exhumations and autopsies of victims. The team said it has also obtained accounts from survivors and is seeking additional call data records.

The investigators said cooperation with Iraqi domestic courts and non-governmental organizations has further advanced its collection of evidence of Daesh’s crimes in Mosul between 2014 and 2016. Exhumations at two mass grave sites close to Mosul that began in March have been temporarily halted due to the COVID-19 outbreak and “will provide a significant focus of upcoming investigative activity,” the team said.

Looking ahead, the team said it has established two additional field investigation units to look into crimes committed by the group against Christian, Kakai, Shaba, Sunni and Turkmen Shia communities in Iraq.



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Daesh prisoners riot again in northeast Syria

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# Syrian government orders seizure of assets of Assad's cousin Makhlouf

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1589897340848441100

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BEIRUT: The Syrian government ordered the seizure of assets belonging to President Bashar Assad's cousin Rami Makhlouf, one of Syria's richest men, as well as his wife and children, according to a government document reviewed by Reuters.

The document, stamped May 19 and signed by the Syrian finance minister, said the "precautionary seizure" aimed to guarantee payment of sums owned to the Syrian telecom regulatory authority.

Once at the heart of Assad's inner circle, Makhlouf has quarrelled with the authorities over funds which the government says are owed by his mobile phone company Syriatel. The unprecedented public tussle has uncovered a rare rift in the ruling elite.

Makhlouf has addressed the dispute in three extraordinary online video messages in which he has appealed to Assad himself to help save his firm. In his last message, released on Sunday, Makhlouf said he had been told to quit as the head of Syriatel.

The government says Syriatel owes 134 billion pounds, around \$77 million at the current exchange rate on the parallel market.

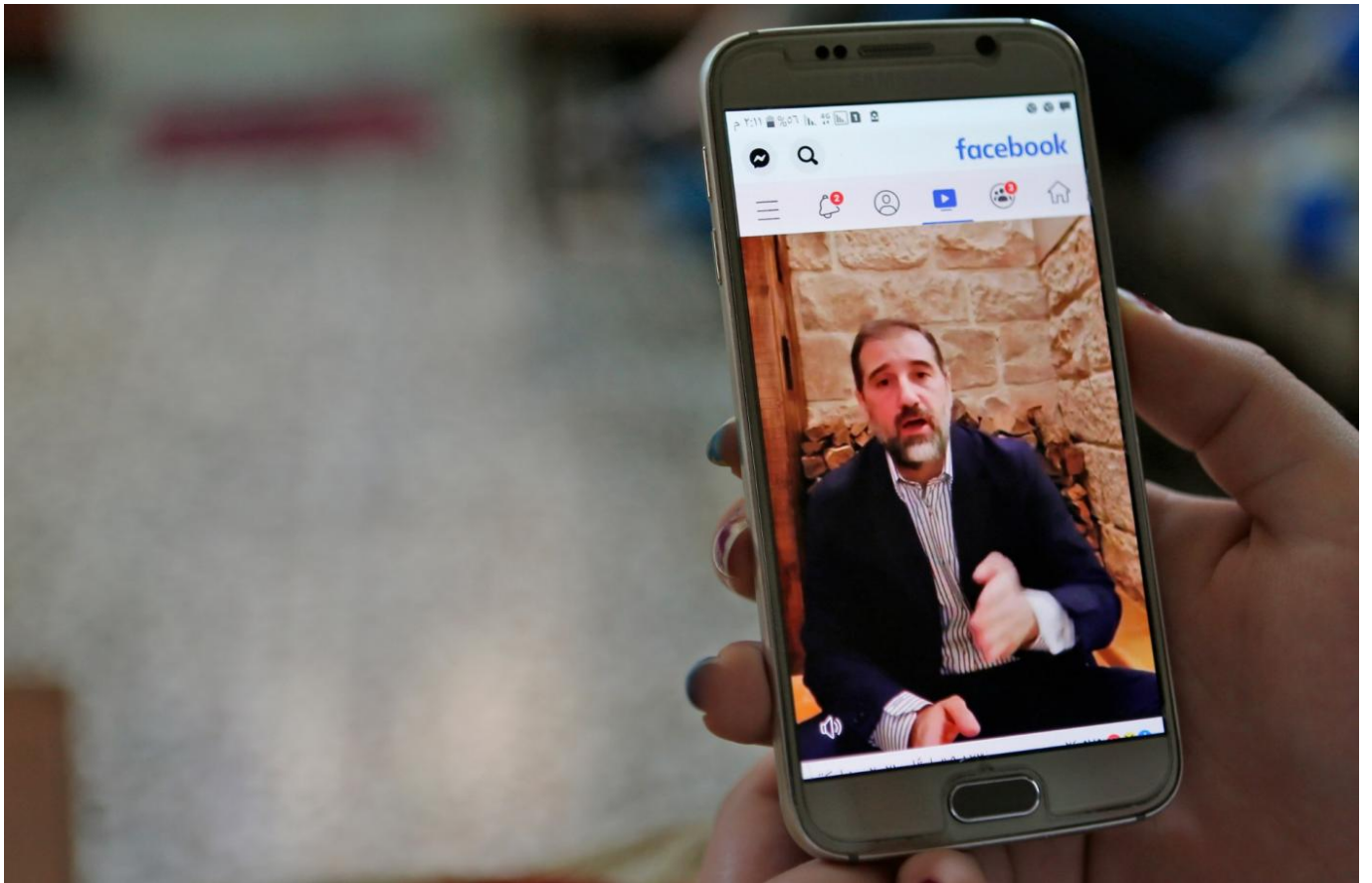
Makhlouf on Tuesday posted a letter dated May 18 denying allegations by the Ministry of Telecoms that Syriatel had rejected payment of amounts it was required to pay in a dispute over its license.

Makhlouf, a maternal cousin of Assad, played a big role in financing Assad's war effort in the conflict under way since 2011, Western officials have said. He is under US and EU sanctions.

In addition to telecoms, his business empire spans real estate, construction and oil trading.

Syria experts say the row could mark the first major rift in decades within the family that has ruled the country since Assad's father Hafez took power 50 years ago.





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