

Once Again this Year, the UN General Assembly Repeatedly Voted Overwhelmingly to Criticize Israel. Why?

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In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

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Again in 2021, the United Nations General Assembly [overwhelmingly passed 14 resolutions](#) aimed at criticizing Israel (and supporting the Palestinians). On every resolution, only a handful of countries (among them the USA, Canada and a sprinkle of small Pacific island nations) stood with Israel. Some others abstained.

The assembly debates the SAME (or nearly the same) motions every year, and all of them denounce Israel’s repeated violations of UN General Assembly resolutions.

Example:

- Condemning the settlements
- Affirming Palestinian right to self determination
- Rejecting Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem
- Support for Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA)

Since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the UN General Assembly has passed more resolutions criticizing Israel than ALL OTHER STATES COMBINED!!

WHY??

Palestinians: “Israeli human rights abuses are well documented”

For Palestinian activists and human rights supporters around the world, the answer is obvious.

Israeli human rights abuses of Palestinians are flagrant and well documented.

Reports from a wide range of organizations including the UN, the International Court of Justice, B’Tselem, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, leave no doubt that

Israel's actions deserve condemnation. Repeated reports from the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories have highlighted abuses in the West Bank, in Jerusalem and in Gaza. Even Israeli organizations like the Association for Human Rights in Israel (ACRI) and Breaking the Silence are critical of Israeli actions. So it's not surprising that the UN is vocal in its condemnation.

Israelis: "This is Israel bashing. Why only Israel?"

Israel's defenders are indignant. "Why so much focus on Israel when there are many other countries in the Middle East and elsewhere whose human rights abuses are at least as bad as those in the West Bank?", they ask. "Surely Saudi Arabia's public floggings and beheadings, Egypt's feared prisons and Jordan's secret police deserve as much criticism as Israel."

Furthermore, point out Israel's supporters, many of the countries voting against Israel are themselves serial human rights offenders. So why the double standard?

The underlying suspicion of course, sometimes stated, sometimes only hinted at, is that the UN applies a double standard, perhaps revealing an underlying antisemitism.

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UN Resolution in December 2021, on "UNRWA". All of Israel's New "Abraham Accord" Partners Voted to Support UNRWA over Israeli Objections. Only 4 Countries Supported Israel. Source: UN Watch

Yet there are reasons for the special focus. Let's explore them.

The global south: "It's European colonialism"

There are 193 member states in the United Nations. Three quarters of them were still colonies in 1947 when the decision was made to give part of Palestine to European Jewish refugees to form a state of their own. The global south does not feel any responsibility for the Holocaust, nor does it share the European guilt. The UN General Assembly is the biggest

forum where the global south gets to present its anti-colonial case to the world. It sees Israel as a prime case of European colonialism and feels justified in opposing it.

The UN [perspective](#) is clear: “Israel has obligations to the UN and the UN has obligations to the inhabitants of former Palestine”.

As the UN General Assembly stated a year ago:

“The United Nations has a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until the question is resolved in all its aspects in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international legitimacy.”

Israel has a unique relationship to the UN. UN General Assembly resolution 181 of 1947 proposed carving a new Jewish state out of historic Palestine. It was passed by 33-13, with 10 abstentions. Israel quickly embraced UN resolution 181. Its own Declaration of Independence cites UN 181 as recognition of its right to exist.

While “awarding” 55% historic Palestine to the new Jewish State, resolution 181 also included provisions for the protection of minorities inside each of the two new states. These included:

- “No discrimination of any kind shall be made between the inhabitants on the ground of race, religion, language or sex.”
- “All persons within the jurisdiction of the State shall be entitled to equal protection of the laws.”
- “No expropriation of land owned by an Arab in the Jewish State (or by a Jew in the Arab State) shall be allowed except for public purposes.”

But it rapidly became clear to the international community that Zionist forces had no intention of respecting many of UN’s provisions. In fact, by its Independence Day on May 14, 1948, Zionist militias had already seized more land than had been allotted under the UN plan and had driven out over 350,000 Palestinians.

The UN General Assembly responded by voting through another resolution (194) in December 1948 affirming that those refugees have the right to return and to compensation. (The [vote was 35-15](#) with 8 abstentions.)

When Israel sought membership in the UN a few months later, it promised to respect all relevant UN resolutions. The UN was divided on whether Israel should in fact be admitted, but US and European domination of the UN awarded Israel UN membership.

But while Israel adopted the part of the UN proposal giving it a Jewish state, Israel defied the UN proposal in that it:

- Seized much more land than proposed in the partition plan (78% vs. 55% of historic Palestine)
- Took over Jaffa and seized West Jerusalem
- Expelled over 750,000 Palestinians
- Confiscated their property
- Destroyed over 400 villages
- Prevented refugees from returning
- Restricted the civil rights of the Palestinians who remained in Israel

As former General Secretary Kofi Annan said in remarks after leaving the UN in 2006, Israel's defiance of UN provisions is a painful and festering sore for the UN.

"The failure to achieve an Arab-Israeli peace remains for the UN a deep internal wound as old as the organization itself, (...) a painful and festering sore consequently felt in almost every intergovernmental organ and Secretariat body."

"No other issue carries such a powerful symbolic and emotional charge affecting people far from the zone of conflict."

(Kofi Annan, Interventions (2011), p. 254)

Conclusion: both principle and posturing

The repeated UNGA votes condemning Israel and supporting the Palestinians are not based on the claim that Israel is the worst abuser of human rights in the world. There are others that are just as bad or perhaps worse.

Nor is it because the whole world is antisemitic. Many of the countries which vote to support Palestinian rights have never had any significant Jewish communities.

The fundamental reason is that Israel, a UN member, continues to ignore the commitments it made to the UN when it was admitted in 1949 and repeated UN warnings about the occupation of 1967.

But there is also a significant element of political posturing. The annual spate of UN resolutions on "The Question of Palestine" gives the global south a forum for brandishing their opposition to the effects of European colonialism. Even some rather reactionary regimes, like Saudi Arabia and the other Abrahamic Accord states, voted to support the Palestinians in the UNGA resolutions.

Politics is often a mixture of principle and posturing. But if Israel continues to ignore UN resolutions, it can expect mounting frustration in the international community and a continuation of world criticism every year at the UNGA.

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