

Netanyahu: 'No Limit' to United Nations Hypocrisy

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu responded sharply on Friday to remarks by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who suggested that Israel may have violated international law and used excessive force on Palestinian children during Operation Protective Edge last summer.

Writing on his Facebook page early Friday, Netanyahu said: "This is a dark day for the U.N. Instead of highlighting the fact that Hamas made hostages of Gaza's children when it fired at Israel from preschools, the U.N. has again chosen to reproach Israel, which held itself to the highest moral standards in combat, as was determined just this past week by a group of senior American and European generals.

"At the same time, Hamas – a terror organization – is awarded immunity by the U.N., even though it has been proven beyond any doubt that it committed war crimes by firing from hospitals, mosques and from within U.N. facilities. It turns out there is no limit to hypocrisy."

On Thursday, during a U.N. Security Council meeting on a report expressing concern for the welfare of children in war zones, Ban criticized Israel for the death and suffering of Palestinian children during last summer's conflict in Gaza.

Alarmed at the suffering of "so many children" as a result of "Israeli military operations in Gaza last year," the U.N. chief urged Israel to take concrete and immediate steps, including "reviewing existing policies and practices" to protect and prevent the killing and maiming of children and to respect the special protections afforded to schools and hospitals.

"The unprecedented and unacceptable scale of the impact on

children in 2014 raises grave concerns about Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law ... [and] excessive use of force," he said.

Ban did not address the reasoning behind his decision last week not to include Israel on his annual list of parties that kill or injure children in armed conflict. That decision sparked protests from human rights groups and many in the Arab world and elsewhere.

Although formally presented in Ban's name, the report accusing Israel of wrongdoing was prepared by his envoy on children and armed conflict, Leila Zerrougui of Algeria.

In a letter to Ban circulated soon after his speech, Israel's U.N. Ambassador Ron Prosor accused Zerrougui of "widespread, systematic and institutionalized biased conduct against Israel [which] undermines the credibility of the report."

Prosor said Zerrougi and others drafting the report failed to hold Hamas responsible for launching thousands of rockets into Israel while using Palestinian civilians, including children, as human shields. He also criticized Zerrougi and others of preventing Israel from verifying incidents in the report, for giving Israel very little time to comment before the report was finalized, and for ignoring or dismissing most of its remarks and requests.

Prosor called on the secretary-general "to change these working methods to ensure a transparent and credible process in the future."

Ban defended his report, saying the content "should speak for itself."

He said a debate was appropriate "but national interests should not cloud the objective at stake, which is protecting children."

Prosor said Zerrougui's office "repeatedly refused attempts on our part to provide official evidence and facts."

Zerrougui rejected Israel's accusations.

"Israel has been in this report since 2005; every year it's the same process that we apply," Zerrougui told reporters. "Last year I was here. I was not accused of misconduct. The year before I was here; I was not accused of misconduct."

Zerrougui said Israel had been given the standard two weeks and three days to respond.

According to U.N. officials, Zerrougui included Israel on a draft blacklist of violators of children's rights, although Ban decided not to include Israel's army on the final blacklist, which names groups such as the Taliban and Boko Haram.

Prosor said the report disproportionately focused on Israel, even though Iraq, where Islamic State militants control significant territory, had the highest number of child casualties.

The report includes 32 paragraphs on Israel, compared with eight on Iraq, 15 on Afghanistan, 18 on Syria and 11 on Darfur.

Zerrougui's report did not explicitly accuse Hamas of any crimes against children. Several Israeli officials said on condition of anonymity that Israel had told Zerrougui's office how Hamas rockets severely damaged Israeli medical centers and schools – details that were not mentioned.

Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely also responded to the sharp criticism of Israel, saying, "The biased and one-sided approach of the U.N. regarding the IDF's actions during Operation Protective Edge is outrageous.

"At a time when there is ongoing war in the Middle East and

children are being slaughtered on a daily basis, the U.N. decides to mention Israel in the same breath as countries where basic human rights have long since ceased to exist. Hamas uses children for its purposes as it does with civilian institutions, and it intentionally targets human lives.”

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