

His Excellency  
Mr. William C. Eacho III  
Ambassador of the United States of America to Austria  
Boltzmannngasse 16  
1090 Vienna, Austria

23 February 2011

Sir,

The two human rights groups, Women in Black (Vienna) and Critical Jewish Voice (Austria), and others who are standing here in a silent vigil today are thoroughly dismayed by the veto by the United States on 18 February of a United Nations Security Council resolution which sought to affirm the illegality of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories including Arab East Jerusalem.

The settlements are in complete contravention of international law and human rights and there is universal acknowledgement that they are a major factor in preventing peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The U. S. Administration has repeatedly made statements to this effect. By vetoing the Resolution it is therefore going against its own previous attitudes. The proposal made by President Obama to the Palestine Authority for the United States to make instead a declaration criticizing, but not condemning, the ongoing settlement construction by Israel would not have been binding for Israel. It is well known that the State of Israel has never complied with any non-binding declaration or statement coming from the United States or the United Nations. The argument by the United States that the Resolution would damage "direct negotiations" lacks validity since the latter ceased in September due to Israel's refusal to stop settlement construction. A binding resolution may have obliged Israel to comply with this demand and opened the way for a resumption of negotiations which has been the wish of the U.S. Administration. Thus, the U.S. veto proves unmistakably that it has failed to be an honest broker for peace in the Middle East.

The fact that the Resolution, which had 120 co-sponsors, was approved by all of the other States Members of the Security Council, even close allies of the United States, shows that the United States and Israel are becoming increasingly isolated because of present policies towards Israel. Further, the contradictory attitude of the U.S. Administration, by vetoing a Resolution that is in keeping with its own previous statements, is most likely to affect its standing in the Arab world at a time when this region is going through an unprecedented upheaval which in the long run will not be without influence on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In addition, more groups and individuals in the United States, Jewish and non-Jewish, are increasingly disturbed by Israel's colonisation and occupation of Palestinian land and the massive human rights violations which Israel continues to commit in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The United States has virtually guaranteed Israel impunity in the United Nations and in other global fora. In the United Nations alone the United States used its veto 32 times to protect Israel from reprimand between 1972 and 1997. This one-sided support of Israel has drawn growing criticism worldwide, and contributed to the diplomatic isolation of the United States. U.S. policy has also proven ineffective. While there have been decades of a so-called peace process and round after round of negotiations there is still no peace between Israel and the Palestinians and more and more facts on the ground to prevent it.

Consequently, we strongly urge the U.S. Government to rethink its policies toward the Middle East since the United States itself recognizes all settlements are illegal and constitute the principal obstacle to peace.

Yours faithfully,

Ursula Sagmeister  
Member, Women in Black (Vienna)  
[www.fraueninschwarz.at](http://www.fraueninschwarz.at)

Paula Abrams-Hourani  
Member, Critical Jewish Voice (Austria)  
[www.nahostfriede.at](http://www.nahostfriede.at)