

Palestine solidarity now just empty talk: NGOs
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Last year's rally held in solidarity with Palestine, which was led by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, will now be perceived as just empty rhetoric, a group of NGOs said in response to a recent visit to Malaysia by Israeli diplomats.

In support of the Palestinian cause, Malaysia has refused to enter into diplomatic relations with Israel. Until last week, it has barred the entry of all Israelis into the country.

"Malaysia's stance in condemning Israel for violating international law should have been expressed by denying entrance to the Israeli delegates," the group of NGOs said in a joint statement.

The NGOs are Citizens International, Majlis Perundangan Pertubuhan Islam Malaysia (Mapim), Pertubuhan Rakyat Sejagat (Sejagat) and Sekretariat Himpunan Ulama Rantau Asia (Shura).

Commenting further on the Israeli diplomats who had attended a UN conference in Malaysia this week, the NGOs said allowing the diplomats to enter the country was in contradiction to the staunch pro-Palestinian policy of the Malaysian government.

"The decision by the Malaysian government to issue visas to the senior-level delegates to enter Malaysian ground is shocking and most regretful.

"If Malaysia was required to grant visas to all delegates without exception in order to hold this UN international conference, then the Malaysian government should have just declined to host (the event)."

The NGOs added that it was even "more disturbing" to know that David Roet, Israel's former deputy ambassador to the UN and the one who had led the delegation, had met with Malaysian officials.

"This, to us, reflects an attempt towards a normalisation policy that Israel is pursuing with Malaysia."

Roet, in a series of tweets after his visit, expressed hope for good relations between Malaysia and Israel.

The group urged the Malaysian government to be firm and adamant about "its policy towards Israel as an illegal state".

"We demand that the trade relations between Malaysia and Israel be ceased immediately, lest Malaysia be seen as applying a hypocritical policy between Israel and the Palestinians.

"We urge that the Malaysian government should lead the Asean community to oppose the atrocities being committed by the Israeli government against the Palestinians," the group added.

Diplomatic passports

The visit by the delegation of Israeli diplomats to Kuala Lumpur was the first of its kind in conjunction with a week-long conference in Kuala Lumpur hosted by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, also known as UN-Habitat.

The delegates were attending the ninth Urban World Forum, which was held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre from Feb 7 to 13.

By sponsoring a UN-affiliated event, Malaysia became obligated by its commitment to the UN to allow participants from all countries.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry had said that Roet entered Malaysia with an Israeli diplomatic passport, participated in the conference with other Israeli representatives, and also met with Malaysian officials.

The “Save Jerusalem” solitary rally held in December last year in Putrajaya was to protest US President Donald Trump's announcement that the US now considered Jerusalem to be the capital of Israel.

The status of Jerusalem, which is home to holy religious sites and has particular significance for Muslims, Christians and Jews, has long remained a sensitive topic and one of the core issues in the Israeli-Palestine conflict.

Israel occupied East Jerusalem in 1967 and proceeded to effectively annex it, in breach of international law.

However, the Palestinian leadership in the occupied West Bank sees East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

Today, 86 percent of East Jerusalem is under the direct control of the Israeli authorities and Jewish settlers.

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