

Israel's annexation plans 'illegal': UN

AFP | Geneva

Israel's aim to annex parts of the occupied West Bank was clearly "illegal", the UN's human rights chief said on Monday, warning that the consequences could be "disastrous".

Just days before Israel intends to kick-start plans to annex its West Bank settlements and the Jordan Valley, Michelle Bachelet added her voice to the chorus urging Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to drop the proposal.

"Annexation is illegal. Period," the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights said in a statement.

"Any annexation. Whether it is 30 percent of the West Bank, or five percent," she said, urging Israel to "listen to its own former senior officials and generals, as well as to the multitude of voices around the world, warning it not to proceed along this dangerous path."

International condemnation of the possible Israeli annexations has mounted ahead of July 1, when the Jewish state could take its first steps toward implementing part of a US-proposed Middle East peace plan.



Michelle Bachelet

'Shockwaves'

Bachelet urged Israel to shift course, warning that "the shockwaves of annexation will last for decades, and will be extremely damaging to Israel, as well as to the Palestinians."

"The precise consequences of annexation cannot be predicted," she said.

"But they are likely to be disastrous for the Palestinians, for Israel itself, and for the wider region."

The UN rights chief warned that "any attempt to annex any part of the occupied Palestinian territory will not only seriously damage efforts to achieve lasting peace in the

region, it is likely to entrench, perpetuate and further heighten serious human rights violations that have characterised the conflict for decades."

Her statement cautioned that such a move would almost certainly lead to increased restrictions on Palestinians' right to freedom of movement, as their population centres would become enclaves.

In addition, significant tracts of private land would likely be illegally expropriated, and even in cases where this does not occur, many Palestinians could lose access to cultivate their own lands.

And Palestinians who founded them -

selves living inside the annexed areas would likely experience greater difficulty accessing essential services like healthcare and education, while humanitarian access could also be blocked.

'Highly combustible mix'

Bachelet's office warned that Palestinians inside the annexed area would come under heavy pressure to move out, pointing out that entire communities currently not recognised under Israeli planning would be at high risk of "forced transfer".

And settlements, which are already recognised as a clear violation of international law, would almost certainly expand.

"This is a highly combustible mix," Bachelet said.

"I am deeply concerned that even the most minimalist form of annexation would lead to increased violence and loss of life, as walls are erected, security forces deployed and the two populations brought into closer proximity."

The UN rights chief warned that "the existing two-tier system of law in the same territory will be-

US President Donald Trump's proposals, rejected outright by the Palestinians, pave the way for annexing key parts of the West Bank, including settlements long considered illegal by the majority of the international community.

come embedded, with devastating impacts on the lives of Palestinians who have little or no access to legal remedy".

Bachelet said illegal annexation would not change Israel's obligations under international law as an occupying power towards the occupied population.

"Instead, it will grievously harm the prospect of a two-state solution, undercut the possibilities of a renewal of negotiations, and perpetuate the serious existing human rights and international humanitarian law violations we witness today."



UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet warned that "the shockwaves of annexation will last for decades"

Russian mining giant admits waste 'violations' at Arctic

Moscow

A Russian mining giant behind an enormous Arctic fuel spill last month said Sunday it had suspended workers at a metals plant who were responsible for pumping wastewater into nearby tundra.

Norilsk Nickel cited a "flagrant violation of operating rules" in a statement announcing it had suspended employees responsible for dumping wastewater from a dangerously full reservoir into wildlife.

The incident occurred at the Talnakh enrichment plant near the Arctic city of Norilsk, the company said, one month after the unprecedented fuel leak sparked a state of emergency declared by President Vladimir Putin.

More than 21,000 tonnes of diesel leaked from a fuel storage tank at one of the company's subsidiary plants near Norilsk. The fuel seeped into the soil and dyed nearby waterways bright red.

A source told Interfax news agency Sunday that in the most recent case, around 6,000 cubic meters of liquid used to process minerals at the facility had been dumped and that the discharge had lasted "several hours".

It was impossible to deter-



Employees of Russia's state-owned oil pipeline monopoly Transneft take part in the clean-up operation after the massive fuel spill in the Ambarnaya River last month



Independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta published videos from the scene showing large metal pipes carrying wastewater from the reservoir and dumping foaming liquid into nearby trees.

The journalists claimed the factory deliberately funnelled the wastewater into wildlife areas and hastily removed their pipes when investigators and emergency services arrived on the scene.

The Investigative Committee, which probes serious crimes, said it had received reports of "unauthorised dumping of liquid waste into the tundra" on the site of the facility, and had opened an enquiry.

Heavy machinery used to clear the pipes crushed a car delivering officials to the scene, Novaya Gazeta reported.

Interfax said no one was injured in the incident which was also being probed.

Norilsk Nickel spokeswoman Tatiana Egorova earlier Sunday said that employees of the factory had pumped out "purified water" and that an internal investigation was under way.

Russia's natural resources agency said the decision to remove water from the reservoir was taken to avoid an emergency after heavy rains and recent

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Polish voters take part in Poland's Presidential election at a polling station in Warsaw, Poland

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