

Palestinians Cheer UN General Assembly Vote

From VOA Learning English, this is IN THE NEWS in Special English.

This week, the United Nations General Assembly voted to recognize the Palestinian Authority as a "non-member observer state." The vote came a year after the General Assembly denied the Palestinian Authority full membership. There was excitement at the UN's headquarters in New York on Thursday as the voting came to an end.

"The voting has been completed. Please lock the machines...(applause)."

One hundred thirty-eight UN members voted for the resolution. Nine nations were opposed. Forty-one others chose not to vote.



Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas speaks during a meeting of the U.N. General Assembly prior to a vote on a resolution on the issue of upgrading the Palestinian Authority's status to non-member observer state in the United Nations, Nov. 29, 2012.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas spoke to the assembly before the vote. He said the Palestinian people would not accept anything less than an independent Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

"We did not come here seeking to delegitimize a state established years ago, and that is Israel. Rather we came to affirm the legitimacy of a state that must now achieve its independence, and that is Palestine."

He added that supporters of the resolution are showing what he called their "principled and moral support for freedom and the rights of peoples and international law and peace."

The United States, Israel and seven other countries opposed the measure. American Ambassador Susan Rice spoke after the vote.

"Today's grand pronouncements will soon fade. And the Palestinian people will wake up tomorrow and find that little about their lives has changed, save that the prospects of a durable peace have only receded."

The Israeli government denounced the UN decision. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed the assembly vote as meaningless. Israel's UN ambassador, Ron Prosor, said the new status will not help the peace

process. Yet some Palestinians say they hope the move will lead to new peace talks between the Palestinian Authority and Israel.

Talks between the two sides were last held in September of twenty ten. The negotiations stopped when Israel refused to extend its ban on new settlement activity in occupied Palestinian territory.

Being a non-member observer state gives the Palestinian Authority the right to seek the help of United Nations agencies. For example, the Palestinian Authority could ask the International Criminal Court to investigate Israeli actions in Palestinian territories.

There was great celebration in the West Bank and Gaza Strip after the General Assembly vote. Palestinians cheered, saying the vote added support to their claim of statehood. However, the cheers could soon disappear if critics of the resolution take new economic or political action against the Palestinians.

On Thursday, some American Senators threatened to halt aid to the UN if the Palestinian Authority uses its non-member status to bring cases against Israel to the International Criminal Court.

Separately, Israel could hold back tax money it collects and passes along to the Palestinian Authority. Israel could also decide to expand Jewish settlements in Arab areas.