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Norway Becomes 10th European State to Reject Israel's Blacklisting of Palestinian NGOs

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Norway says it will restore its funding to the Palestinian groups after deeming Israel's evidence for the controversial designation as 'not sufficient'

Norway will continue to support the Palestinian organizations blacklisted by Israel over alleged terror ties, following on the heels of nine other European countries that rejected the controversial designation, Oslo's embassy in Israel said.

"In Norway’s view, the information we have received from Israel is not sufficient to justify the designation of the six organizations as ‘terrorist organizations.' … Norway will continue its cooperation with and support to civil society in the occupied Palestinian territories," the embassy told Haaretz.

It said Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt had raised concerns during her visit to Israel in March.

Norway, either directly or through partner groups, funds three of the six Palestinian nongovernmental organizations – Al-Haq, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees and the Palestinian branch of Defense for Children International.

One of the organizations, rights group Al-Haq, had sent a letter to Huitfeldt at the end of June calling on her "to take action against Israel's baseless designations."

Citing the joint statement by nine EU states last week, the Norwegian Embassy said: "Like Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden, Norway considers that the information provided at present is not enough to warrant reconsideration of our cooperation with the Palestinian civil society organizations involved."

It added: "A vibrant civil society is key to maintaining and promoting democratic development in Palestine, and to supporting a two-state solution."

In October, Defense Minister Benny Gantz signed an order declaring the six NGOs terror groups, accusing them of funneling money and supporting the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a now largely inactive group once known for plane hijackings and attacks on Israelis.

The blacklisting, which was harshly criticized by a raft of rights groups and countries including the United States, outlawed affiliation with the six groups on both sides of the Green Line and held up funding as donors examined the evidence.

This week, the Defense Ministry demanded that lawyers for the six NGOs secure permission from the finance and defense ministers to represent them – or face a prison sentence of up to seven years.