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Australia Criticizes Netanyahu Over Palestinian Recognition

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Australia has pushed back against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu following his criticism of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese after Canberra announced plans to recognize a Palestinian state at the United Nations General Assembly in September.

Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke told ABC News on Wednesday that Netanyahu had “lashed out” at countries supporting Palestinian statehood, but Australia would not be intimidated by such remarks.

“Strength is not measured by how many people you can blow up or how many children you can leave hungry,” Burke said. “Strength is much better measured by exactly what Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has done, which is when there’s a decision that we know Israel won’t like, he goes straight to Benjamin Netanyahu.”

Netanyahu’s office had posted on the social media platform X on Tuesday, labeling Albanese a “weak politician who betrayed Israel and abandoned Australia’s Jews.”

Burke also defended Australia's recent decision to cancel the visa of far-right Israeli Knesset member Simcha Rothman, who had planned a speaking tour in the country this month. The cancellation followed Rothman's public comments referring to children in Gaza as the "enemies" of Israel.

"If anyone wanted to come on a public speech tour and had expressed those views about Israeli children, I would block the visa," Burke said. "I am not going to have a lower bar for the protection of views that are bigoted against the Palestinian people."

The Australian government formally canceled Rothman's visa on Monday, barring him from entering the country for three years. In November 2024, Australia also denied a visa to former Israeli Interior and Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked over her support for settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank.

In retaliation, Israel canceled visas for Australian representatives to the Palestinian Authority. Foreign Minister Penny Wong described Israel's action as an "unjustified reaction" to Australia's decision to recognize a Palestinian state and to bar entry to a far-right politician.

Several other countries, including France, the United Kingdom, Malta, Canada, and Portugal, have also announced plans to recognize Palestinian statehood at the UN General Assembly in New York next month.

The recognition occurs amid ongoing conflict in Gaza, where military operations have resulted in significant civilian casualties. According to reports, more than 62,000 people have died since October 2023.

In November 2024, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant over alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza. Israel also faces a case at the International Court of Justice concerning its actions in the enclave.

Australia's decision to recognize Palestine and bar entry to Rothman underscores the government's commitment to both human rights considerations and international diplomatic engagement. Burke emphasized that Australia's approach reflects a consistent standard for protecting human rights and ensuring public discourse does not condone bigotry or violence.

The developments have highlighted growing international attention on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with Australia positioning itself alongside other nations taking formal steps toward Palestinian recognition while maintaining diplomatic channels with Israel.