

Hanson, WCC criticize U.S. veto of UN resolution on Israeli settlements

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Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America said he was "dismayed" that the United States vetoed a UN Security Council resolution that would have condemned the illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian land.

Hanson and 12 other leaders of Christian churches and organizations had written to President Obama urging his administration to support the UN resolution days before the UN vote February 18. Fourteen other Security Council members voted in favor of the resolution, which was cosponsored by 130 countries.

U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice said the United States agrees with the rest of the council "about the folly and illegitimacy of continued Israeli settlement activity." But she said, as reported by Associated Press, the U.S. believes "it is unwise" for the UN's council to attempt to resolve key issues between the Israelis and Palestinians.

In his statement shortly after the UN voted, Hanson said, "I am now concerned that this action will increase a despondent mood about the future of such talks and will possibly strengthen extremist voices in the region." Palestinians have said they will not resume negotiations until Israel halts settlement building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The World Council of Churches Central Committee added on February 21 its "deep concern and disappointment" at the U.S. veto during a meeting in Geneva of the WCC's main governing body. The Central Committee called the veto "a deeply regrettable mistake."

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U.S. veto, the WCC said, "contradicts the statement" made by Obama in Cairo last June that "the United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements."

John Jillions, a U.S. priest in

the Orthodox Church in America, opposed the WCC statement. "There is no reference in the text [as to] why the U.S. voted against the [UN] resolution," he said, "so it is unbalanced and makes me uneasy."