

## **‘There is a form of apartheid’: LNP backbencher urges PM to face facts on Israel**

*Ken O’Dowd wants the government to take Amnesty International’s report on Israel on board after Morrison said ‘no country is perfect’*



*‘It confirms what I’ve seen on my two trips to Palestine.’ Nationals MP Ken O’Dowd said Amnesty International’s report on Israel came as no surprise.*

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4<sup>th</sup> Feb 2022

The Morrison government is being urged by one of its own backbenchers to “face facts” and accept the use of the term apartheid in relation to Israel.

The prime minister, Scott Morrison, said that “no country is perfect” in response to a new Amnesty International report that concluded Israel had “perpetrated the international wrong of apartheid, as a human rights violation and a violation of public international law”.

But Ken O’Dowd, a Queensland Liberal National party MP, said he would encourage the Australian government to take the report “on board” and act on some of its findings.

“The report has come as no surprise to me,” O’Dowd said.

“It confirms what I’ve seen on my two trips to Palestine ... I’ve seen it with my own eyes and you can’t deny what you see with your own eyes.”

Asked whether the Australian government should accept the use of the term apartheid, or whether that was too politically difficult, O'Dowd said: "I don't think it's too difficult. Let's face facts – the fact is there is a form of apartheid existing and it should be corrected. It's not fair at the moment."

O'Dowd, who first used the term apartheid in a speech to parliament in November and is a member of Parliamentary Friends of Palestine, said in an interview on Thursday that human rights were being neglected and new settlements were "eating into Palestinian lands".

O'Dowd's position on the term apartheid puts him at odds with the federal government's official stance.

It is not thought to be a widely shared view within Coalition ranks, although the Nationals MP for the NSW seat of Parkes, Mark Coulton, told parliament in November he thought the situation was "a level of apartheid, with a suppressed people".

A spokesperson for the foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, said on Wednesday in response to the Amnesty report: "We do not agree with the report's characterisations of Israel, and we remain a firm supporter of the State of Israel."

Labor, too, has stopped short of applying the apartheid label, arguing it was "not a term that's been found to apply by any international court" and "not helpful in progressing the meaningful dialogue and negotiation necessary".

But the opposition's foreign affairs spokesperson, Penny Wong, said the findings of the Amnesty report were concerning, and the government should "review it closely, assess the situation on the ground and make representations about Australia's view".

On Thursday Liberal senator Eric Abetz and Labor senator Kimberley Kitching issued a joint statement to reject the report's "attempts to equate Israel's efforts to the abhorrent historical practice of apartheid in South Africa".

Abetz, who chairs the Australian Parliamentary Friends of Israel, and Kitching, the deputy chair, said: "Amnesty does such good work, which we support. But pretending Tel Aviv in 2022 is like Cape Town in 1976 is demonstrably wrong and needs to be called out, without rancour, just sadness."

"The misappropriation of hateful words does nothing to aid the peace process for a mutually negotiated and enduring two-state solution where Israel and a future Palestinian state can coexist in peace and security," they said.

The comments came after Amnesty called on the international community to "urgently and drastically change its approach" and "recognise the full extent of the crimes that Israel perpetrates against the Palestinian people".

"Indeed, for over seven decades, the international community has stood by as Israel has been given free rein to dispossess, segregate, control, oppress and dominate Palestinians," Amnesty said in its 280-page report.

The London-based human rights organisation said it had concluded “almost all of Israel’s civilian administration and military authorities, as well as governmental and quasi-governmental institutions, are involved in the enforcement of the system of apartheid against Palestinians”.

Amnesty said it had identified acts that “amount to the crime against humanity of apartheid” under the Apartheid Convention and the Rome Statute of the international criminal court.

Israel’s government has strongly dismissed the report, saying the findings were “divorced from reality” and Amnesty “quotes lies spread by terrorist organisations”.

Israel’s foreign minister, Yair Lapid, said if Israel were not a Jewish state, “nobody in Amnesty would dare argue against it”.

Morrison said on Wednesday all countries were subjected to “criticisms” but his government would “remain a staunch friend of Israel”.

The Australian government’s position is to support “a two-state solution, with Israel and a future Palestinian state establishing internationally recognised borders”.

Australia urged “all parties to refrain from actions and statements that undermine the prospects for peace”, said a spokesperson for Payne.