

Chile says it recognizes a Palestinian state

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Chile recognized Palestinian statehood on Friday, joining other South American nations in a push for Palestinians and Israelis to keep negotiating toward a lasting peace in the Middle East. Foreign Minister Alfredo Moreno says Chile is following U.N. resolutions with its decision to recognize the existence of the state of Palestine as "a free, independent and sovereign state, coexisting in peace with the State of Israel".

Chile's decision follows a meeting in Brazil between Chilean President Sebastian Pinera and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who has been lobbying his counterparts to show their support. Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia and Ecuador recognized Palestinian statehood last month, and Uruguay and Paraguay are expected to join them in the coming weeks. Chile, whose Palestinian population of about 400,000 is among the largest outside the Arab world, also had been lobbied intensely Israeli representatives. About 100 other countries have recognized statehood - most after Palestinians declared "independence" in 1988, and a few others, mostly former Soviet republics, did so after the 1993 Oslo peace accords. In recent years, Venezuela (2005) and Costa Rica (2008) also provided recognition. Israeli officials have reacted to the declarations by calling them meaningless and counterproductive to the peacemaking process. Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki recently told The Associated Press that the aim is to persuade more countries to endorse the 1967 boundaries, before Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. "We are making efforts so that the rest of the countries will first recognize a Palestinian state in the '67 borders and secondly raise the level of Palestinian diplomatic representation to that of an embassy," he told the AP. But Chile's only mention of borders Friday came in support of Israel, noting that Chile "has completely supported the right of the state of Israel to exist within secure and internationally recognized frontiers." Recognizing pre-1967 borders for a Palestinian state could undermine Chile's own position in a dispute over its maritime border with Peru, now before the International Court of Justice in the Hague. Chile maintains that the border was established by treaty after an 1879 war in which Chile seized a large slice of southern Peru and left Bolivia landlocked, and should not now be changed. The government's resolution also noted that both Jewish and Palestinian communities have been key to Chile's social, cultural, political and economic development for many years, working in harmony that should serve as a model for their both the Israeli and Palestinian states. It's a message that Pinera plans to make personally during a visit to the Middle East in March. By Eva Vergara /AP