Palestinians appeal to ICC to halt alleged Israeli crimes

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The Palestinian Authority on Saturday called on the International Criminal Court in The Hague to execute its authority to prevent crimes it said were being perpetrated against the Palestinian people, particularly children.

Marking three years since ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda launched a “preliminary examination into the situation in Palestine,” PA Foreign Minister Riyad al-Malki issued a letter to the prosecutor in which he denounced what he described as an escalation of unlawful practices by Israel, the PA’s official Wafa news agency reported.

Preliminary examinations establish whether there is probable cause to conduct a full criminal investigation and whether the court has jurisdiction. Such probes can drag on for years.

Earlier this month Israel’s National Security Council reportedly warned members of the Knesset’s Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that the ICC could this year move from the examination phase and open investigations into the 2014 Gaza war, as well as West Bank settlement construction.

In his letter, Malki  said 16 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli forces in the last month, with thousands injured and over 700 arrested, of which 184 were children.

The West Bank and Gaza Strip have seen frequent violent protests since US President Donald Trump announced that he was recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital on December 6. Israeli security forces have mostly used non-lethal means to deal with unrest, though officials have said live fire is used when soldiers’ lives are in danger.

Malki drew particular attention to the much-publicized arrest of 16-year-old Palestinian Ahed Tamimi — who was arrested after being filmed slapping and shoving IDF soldiers last month — claiming her arrest violated international conventions.

An Israeli military court judge ruled Wednesday that Tamimi would remain behind bars until the end of legal proceedings.

“These widespread and systematic practices form an integral part of the system of oppression and racism the Israeli government employs against the Palestinian people,” Malki said. “Ahed’s case merely serves as further proof of well-established Israeli policies of severe and discriminatory deprivation of fundamental rights of Palestinians.”

He called on the ICC to stop Israel violating international laws “in respect of children that may amount to a violation of Israel’s obligations” under global conventions.

Bensouda in a December report said her office has “progressed in its analysis of the alleged crimes committed by both parties to the 2014 Gaza conflict, as well as certain alleged crimes committed in the West Bank and East Jerusalem since 13 June 2014.”

Israel’s 50-day summer 2014 campaign against Hamas in Gaza originally began as a predominantly aerial campaign in response to repeated rocket attacks from the Strip, similar to the 2012 Operation Pillar of Defense. But after Hamas made use of its cross-border tunnel network to carry out attacks inside Israel, the focus shifted to tackling the subterranean threat.

A total of 74 people — 68 IDF soldiers, 11 of whom were killed in cross-border tunnel attacks; and 6 civilians — died on the Israeli side of the conflict. In Gaza, more than 2,000 people were killed, with Israel putting the number of civilians killed at approximately 50 percent, the rest being combatants. Gaza itself was badly damaged by the fighting.