Family of dead Palestinian activist Nizar Banat to submit claim against PA to ICC

December 15, 2022

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The Times of Israel

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/family-of-dead-palestinian-activist-nizar-banat-to-submit-claim-against-pa-to-icc/>

The family of Palestinian activist Nizar Banat will submit a case Thursday to the International Criminal Court accusing top Palestinian officials over his death in custody, relatives told AFP.

Banat, a leading critic of the Palestinian Authority led by Mahmoud Abbas, died in June 2021 after being dragged from his home in the West Bank by PA security forces.

A post-mortem found he had been beaten on the head, chest, neck, legs and hands, with less than an hour elapsing between his arrest and his death.

“We demand justice for a man who was doing nothing but speaking the truth to power,” said the family’s lawyer Hakan Camuz.

Any person or group can file a complaint to The Hague-based ICC prosecutor for investigation, but the court is not obliged to take them on.

The case to be lodged at ICC accuses seven Palestinian officials of responsibility for Banat’s death.

The decision to take the case to the ICC comes after 14 members of the Palestinian security forces were released on bail, pending their military trial in the West Bank over Banat’s death.

The activist’s brother, Ghassan Banat, said their release earlier this year left him believing “there is no justice enforcement.”

“At that time, we understood that the regime of the Palestinian Authority, the police, the security officers, have more authority than the court, that they were above the court,” he said.

“That is why we have decided to move on to the international arena.”

**Palestinians suspect officials**

The move marks the first time a Palestinian will lodge a complaint at the ICC against another Palestinian, according to the family’s lawyer.

Banat’s death sparked rare protests in Ramallah, seat of the Palestinian Authority, with demonstrators shouting “Justice for Nizar” and pressing Abbas to quit.

A poll last year by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research found 63 percent of Palestinians believe Banat’s death was “a deliberate measure ordered by the PA political or security leaders.”

The dissident’s brother said he was killed when he “challenged Mahmoud Abbas and was telling people the truth about the real situation of the Palestinian Authority.”

Abbas has held office since 2005 and last year canceled long-delayed elections.

The step by the Banat family follows the Al Jazeera broadcaster taking a case to the ICC last week over its slain reporter Shireen Abu Akleh, arguing she was deliberately shot dead by Israeli forces.

Abu Akleh was killed in May while covering a firefight between the IDF and Palestinian gunmen that broke out during an Israeli military raid in the northern West Bank city of Jenin.

Israel is not an ICC member, disputes the court’s jurisdiction and denies intentionally targeting Abu Akleh.

More broadly, the court’s chief prosecutor announced last year that she has opened a full investigation into the actions of all parties in the 2014 Gaza war as well as other incidents such as the killing by Israeli forces of protesters in the coastal enclave.