Palestinian UN envoy lauds Islamic Jihad member who died on hunger strike

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NEW YORK — The Palestinian ambassador to the United Nations told a UN panel on Wednesday that the senior Islamic Jihad member who died while hunger striking in an Israeli prison on Tuesday was a “hero prisoner.”

Speaking at a meeting focused on Palestinian rights, Riyad Mansour accused Israeli authorities of failing to provide proper medical care to Khader Adnan, a day after he was found dead in his cell following an 86-day hunger strike. The death set off a round of fighting between Israel and terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip.

“We are satisfied that the [secretary general] and the UN were alarmed about the fate of Adnan Khader, the hero prisoner who lost his life after 44 years of his life,” Mansour said.

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“I believe that the UN is seeking some kind of credible investigation as to why his life was taken away from him through negligence from the Israeli occupying authorities, negligence in health care, not addressing the needs of prisoners,” he added.

Adnan had refused any medical care, the Israel Prisons Service said. The Physicians for Human Rights group said it had examined Adnan shortly before his death, and warned Israeli authorities that he was in critical condition, but said those warnings “fell on deaf ears.”

Adnan was accused of being a spokesperson and senior leader of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, an Iran-backed group designated as a terror organization by the US, EU, Israel and other countries.

Though Adnan had been charged with terror offenses and was awaiting trial, Mansour falsely claimed that he was being held in administrative detention, a controversial practice in which detainees suspected of terror offenses are held without charge or trial.

“There has been a massive onslaught against our prisoners,” Mansour said. “He was among the hundreds who have been spending a long period of time under administrative detention.”

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Adnan had been held under administrative detention in the past and a 2015 hunger strike he launched while in custody had helped bring international attention to Israeli use of the measure.

Mansour also decried airstrikes Israel carried out against Gaza terrorists overnight in response to dozens of rockets fired into Israel, without mentioning the rocket attacks.

Rockets fired by Palestinian terrorists toward Israel, in Gaza City, May 3, 2023. (AP Photo/Fatima Shbair)

“Yesterday there was a night of hell against our people in the Gaza Strip in which there was aggression by the Israeli army and their aircraft,” he said during a meeting of the UN Committee on Palestinian rights at UN Headquarters in New York.

Mansour thanked Egypt for mediating a ceasefire between the sides, without mentioning Qatar, which was also reportedly involved in brokering the truce, along with the UN.

A UN spokesperson said Wednesday that the UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, Tor Wennesland, was actively engaged “with all concerned parties, including the Palestinian Authority.”

Two UN special rapporteurs, independent investigators for the UN, also linked Adnan’s death to administrative detention in a Wednesday statement calling Israeli policies “cruel” and “inhumane.”

Francesca Albanese, a special rapporteur for rights in the Palestinian Territories who has been accused of antisemitism, and Tlaleng Mofokeng, a UN expert on physical and mental health, called for an investigation into Adnan’s death.

The special rapporteurs’ statement also said Israeli authorities refused to provide Adnan with medical care, without mentioning Israel’s claim that he had refused treatment.

The statement accused Israel of carrying out “colonial” policies meant to “control and subjugate” Palestinians and accused Israel of war crimes. It did not mention Adnan’s membership in Islamic Jihad or Palestinian rockets fired at Israel in response to his death.

UN special rapporteurs are supposed to be unbiased, but Albanese has repeatedly justified violence against Israelis, made statements that sympathized with terror groups and dismissed Israel’s right to self-defense.

US Congress members, Jewish groups, and Israeli officials have repeatedly called for her removal from office.

The UN is set to hold its first official “Nakba” commemoration at UN Headquarters in New York later this month. “Nakba” is the Arabic word for “catastrophe,” and is used by Palestinians to recall the displacement and dispossession they experienced during Israel’s creation and the 1947-1949 War of Independence.