Palestinian PM: We’re prepared to fully cooperate with ICC war crimes probe

March 9, 2021

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The Times of Israel

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinian-pm-were-prepared-to-fully-cooperate-with-icc-war-crimes-probe/>

Ramallah is prepared to cooperate with the International Criminal Court’s probe against Israel and Hamas over alleged war crimes in 2014 in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh told his cabinet ministers on Tuesday.

“We will cooperate with the investigation and provide the prosecutor with every detail, which will accelerate the investigations and bring the perpetrators of crimes to justice,” Shtayyeh said.

Outgoing ICC Chief Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda announced last week that she would open an investigation into actions committed by Israel and the Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem in the summer of 2014, but excluding the terrorist murder of three Israeli teens that started that escalation.

Her announcement was immediately welcomed by the Palestinian Authority and furiously condemned by Israel.

“The prosecutor’s decision reflects her belief in justice and fairness, which the court was founded to implement,” Shtayyeh said.

The announcement of the investigation came less than a month after the court ruled it had the jurisdiction to open a probe. A preliminary investigation to settle the justiciability question took more than five years.

“The investigation will cover crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court that are alleged to have been committed in the situation since 13 June 2014, the date to which reference is made in the referral of the situation to my office,” Bensouda said in a statement on Wednesday.

“Any investigation undertaken by the office will be conducted independently, impartially, and objectively, without fear or favor,” she added.

Bensouda indicated in 2019 that a criminal investigation would likely focus on the 2014 war between Israel and Hamas, Israeli settlement policy, and the 2018 Great March of Return protests, a series of violent demonstrations along Gaza’s border with Israel that left dozens of Palestinians dead.

Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Riad al-Maliki announced on Sunday night that he was planning a trip to The Hague to meet with Bensouda in order to help coordinate the investigation with the Palestinian side.

In an interview with Palestine TV, the official PA mouthpiece, al-Maliki said the discussions will center around the technicalities of the ICC’s investigation into war crimes in the West Bank and Gaza and how and when Ramallah is to present its case.

“We are now in the stage of evaluating matters and developing an integrated plan of action, developing a complete strategy for how to work with the court,” al-Maliki said.

A PA Foreign Ministry official confirmed to The Times of Israel on Tuesday that a date for the visit had not yet been set.

Ramallah has been gearing up for the investigation for years, preparing documents and submitting files to the ICC on what it deems to be Israeli war crimes.

“We submitted three main dossiers to the court in our proposal — documentation relating to the 2014 Gaza war, settlements, and various homicides committed by Israeli soldiers against Palestinian civilians,” said senior Palestinian Authority official Ahmad Majdalani.

Majdalani said that Israel and the United States had pressured and threatened the Palestinian Authority after its decision to turn to the court. The Palestinians, whose request granted the ICC jurisdiction, could theoretically withdraw their approval at any moment, should they choose to do so.

“If Israel fears the results of the court’s investigations, it ought not to commit crimes against the Palestinian people. Israel should either recognize that it is a regime of occupation…or end the occupation and move toward two states for two peoples,” Majdalani told The Times of Israel.