**Despite U.S. misgivings, UN Gaza flotilla probe to begin**

Former International Criminal Court president Philippe Kirsch to head committee investigating deaths of nine Turkish citizens in clash with Israeli naval commandos.

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NEW YORK - A former president of the International Criminal Court, Canadian Philippe Kirsch, will head the committee investigating the deaths of nine Turkish citizens aboard the Gaza-bound flotilla, on behalf of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Kirsch, well known in the community of international law, has been involved in international investigations of war crimes and maritime terrorism in the past.

The committee will begin its work today after the its full membership is announced.

The decision to set up the committee was made by the Human Rights Council in a lightning-quick process, 48 hours after news broke that the Israel Navy intercepted the Gaza-bound flotilla and on-board clashes led to the deaths.

Diplomatic sources in New York expressed criticism and reservations at the timing for the start of the committee's work.

The U.S. is opposed to an international probe into the events, and had welcomed the formation of an independent committee of inquiry in Israel under former justice Jacob Turkel. France and Britain share Washington's view on the issue.

Diplomats describe the relationship between the UN headquarters in New York and the Human Rights Council in Geneva as one "short on trust."

The UN's media site did not announce Kirsch's appointment as the head of the committee and ignored any reports of the start of the committee's work.

"As far as the U.S. administration is concerned, at a time when it is trying to resume the peace process, the investigation into the events of the flotilla at this time could not have come at a worst time," a diplomat in New York said yesterday.

The flotilla raid earned Israel international condemnation, with the harshest criticism coming from Turkey, which cut some ties with Jerusalem and has adamantly demanded an apology and compensation for the killed activists.

Turks blast 'irrational' Israel

The Turkish foreign minister renewed that demand yesterday and criticized his Israeli counterpart's approach to the issue.

"What Avigdor Lieberman says has no value for us," Ahmet Davutoglu said in an interview with Turkish television network TGRT. The foreign minister said he did not view his Israeli counterpart as a proper go-between "owing to his rhetoric and attitude."

Lieberman has ruled out any chance of an official apology.

Turkish President Abdullah Gul said yesterday that Israel was acting outside its interests in not repairing ties with Ankara.

Gul said Israel's apparent readiness to become more isolated by ditching relations with a country that had been its only Muslim ally was irrational.

"They don't have many friends in the region, " Gul said. "Now it seems they want to get rid of the relationship with Turkey."

The United States, a mutual ally of Israel and NATO-member Turkey, has quietly encouraged the two governments to overcome their differences.