**Head Of UN Gaza Inquiry Quits, Cites Israel’s Bias Claims**

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http://www.timesofisrael.com/head-of-un-gaza-inquiry-steps-down/

The head of the United Nations inquiry into the 2014 Gaza conflict between Israel and Hamas announced on Monday that he was stepping down.

Canadian international law professor William Schabas sent a letter to the UN commission, citing Israeli allegations of bias over consulting work he did for the Palestine Liberation Organization, [Reuters reported](http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/02/us-un-israel-gaza-idUSKBN0L628L20150202).

In 2012, Schabas was paid $1,300 for a legal opinion he wrote for the PLO. He said it was no different than services he provided to other organizations.

Casting himself as a victim of “malicious attacks,” Schabas wrote that he did not want the charges to cast a cloud over the investigation.

“My views on Israel and Palestine as well as on many other issues were well known and very public,” he wrote. “This work in defence of human rights appears to have made me a huge target for malicious attacks.”

“I believe that it is difficult for the work to continue while a procedure is underway to consider whether the chair of the commission should be removed,” Schabas added.

The UN Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict , commissioned by the UN Human Rights Council, is scheduled to release its report in March. Schabas said in his letter that most of the research was done, and the writing phase was underway.

The other two experts on the commission are Doudou Diene of Senegal, who served as the UN’s watchdog on racism and on post-conflict Ivory Coast, and former New York Supreme Court judge Mary McGowan.

While the report is expected to focus on Israeli violations during the summer war between Israel and Palestinian fighters in the Gaza Strip, a [press release](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15456&LangID=E#sthash.8piW5Rfo.dpuf) issued in late December indicated the scope would include “investigations of the activities of Palestinian armed groups in Gaza, including attacks on Israel, as well as the Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip and Israeli actions in the West Bank including East Jerusalem.”

The commission has been widely derided by Israeli officials as unfair and a “kangaroo court.”

The appointment of Schabas to the body in August infuriated Israel, which accused him of holding views highly critical of the Jewish state. Schabas has said in the past he would be happy to see Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu prosecuted for war crimes.

Jerusalem said it would not cooperate with the probe or send officials to testify, though the commission has sought Israeli statements.

Last month [a group of Israelis, including the mother of a 4-year-old boy killed by Gazan mortar fire, testified before the Geneva-based panel](http://www.timesofisrael.com/israelis-testify-before-gaza-war-crimes-inquiry/).

Their account was meant to tell the Israeli side of the story of the 50-day conflict with Hamas, to counterbalance what is expected to be an account highly critical of Israel.

Gila Tragerman, mother of 4-year-old Daniel who was killed in his home on Kibbutz Nahal Oz in the later days of the conflict, testified via Skype. Others flew to Geneva.

After the 2008-09 Operation Cast Lead, Judge Richard Goldstone authored an UN-commissioned report highly critical of Israel, parts of which he later retracted — including the allegation that Israel deliberately targeted civilians — because he had learned about facts he was unaware of at the time.