

ICC rules jurisdiction over Palestinian territories, to investigate Israeli military actions



The headquarters of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is seen in The Hague, the Netherlands

The Hague, February 6 (RHC)-- The International Criminal Court (ICC) has confirmed that the territories occupied by Israel in the 1967 Arab–Israeli War are subject to its jurisdiction, paving the way for The Hague-based intergovernmental organization to open a war crimes investigation into Israeli military actions.

“Today, Pre-Trial Chamber I of ICC decided, by the majority, that the Court's territorial jurisdiction in the Situation in Palestine, a State party to the ICC Rome Statute, extends to the territories occupied by Israel since 1967,” ICC said in a statement. Israel occupied East Jerusalem al-Quds, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, territories the Palestinians want for their future state, during the six-day Arab-Israeli war in 1967.

About 700,000 Israelis now live in over 230 illegal settlements built in the West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds since then. The international community views the settlements as illegal under international law but has done little – if any - so far to pressure Israel to freeze or reverse their exponential growth.

The United Nations General Assembly in Resolution 67/19 “[reaffirmed] the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to independence in their State of Palestine on the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967,” the ICC statement further read.

Back in 2019, the ICC’s chief prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, had maintained that there was a “reasonable basis” to launch a war crimes investigation into Israeli military actions in the Gaza Strip – tightly besieged by Israel since 2007 - as well as Israeli settlement activity in the occupied West Bank. But she had asked the court to determine whether she has territorial jurisdiction before proceeding.

Palestinians, who warmly welcomed the ICC decision, joined the court in 2015, a year after they asked it to open a probe into Israeli crimes during its 2014 bloody war against Palestinians in the blockaded Gaza Strip, as well as the regime’s construction of settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh warmly welcomed the ICC’s decision, describing it as a victory for justice, humanity, and freedom, as well as a redress to the victims of the Israeli war crimes and their families, Palestine's official Wafa news agency reported. “The resolution is a message to the perpetrators of crimes, that their crimes will not be subject to a statute of limitations, and that they will not go unpunished,” he said, hailing the decision as a victory for the court itself, which has thwarted Israel’s attempts to politicize its deliberations.

Separately, Nabil Shaath, a senior aide to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, hailed the ruling, saying that it proved the Palestinians were right to go to the court. “This is good news, and the next step is to launch an official investigation into Israel’s crimes against our people,” he said.

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