

Israel claims no crime committed in killing Shireen Abu Akleh



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Tel Aviv, May 24 (RHC)-- Israel says there is “no suspicion of crime” in the killing of Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh despite an international outcry, two weeks after Israeli forces shot dead the veteran

reporter in the occupied West Bank.

Shireen Abu Akleh, a veteran of the Qatar-based Al Jazeera network's Arabic service, was shot in the head on May 11th, when she was reporting on an Israeli raid on the Jenin refugee camp.

Her tragic death sent shockwaves across the region, drawing global condemnation. The United Nations and the European Union, among others, called for a full investigation into what has been described as a deliberate killing "in cold blood."

The Israeli regime too promised to launch a probe into the appalling killing of the iconic journalist. It even called on Palestinian Authority, which rules the occupied West Bank, to cooperate in its so-called investigation.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, however, rejected a joint investigation by Israel on May 12, saying, "They committed the crime and we do not trust them."

In a speech addressing thousands of Palestinians at a memorial for Abu Akleh, he also stressed that Palestinians "hold the Israeli occupation authorities totally responsible for her killing," vowing that "This crime cannot go unpunished."

The leader also said that instead of participating in a joint probe into her killing, the PA would "turn immediately to the International Criminal Court to prosecute the criminals."

On Monday, Israel's Military Advocate Yifat Tomer-Yerushalmi said in a statement that "Given that Ms Abu Akleh was killed in the midst of an active combat zone, there can be no immediate suspicion of criminal activity absent further evidence."

Tomer-Yerushalmi, whose comments will definitely infuriate Palestinians, will ultimately be responsible for determining whether any individual Israeli soldier will face disciplinary action over the fatal shooting.

She noted that the Tel Aviv regime does not yet know whether the journalist was killed by stray Palestinian gunfire or by an Israeli bullet aimed at an armed Palestinian, meaning that she does not consider the intentionally targeting Abu Akleh by Israeli troopers even as a possibility.

The military "is taking every effort to examine the circumstances of the incident in order to understand how Ms Abu Akleh was killed," Tomer-Yerushalmi said.

A Palestinian journalist who was with Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh on the day when she was shot dead by Israeli regime forces has recounted how the crime was committed. Eyewitnesses and journalists who were with Abu Akleh on the day she was shot described the shooting as a "deliberate attempt" to kill journalists.

Shatha Hanaysha, a news correspondent and an eyewitness to the shootings, said they were not caught up in crossfire with Palestinian fighters like the Israeli army claimed, stressing, "It was an Israeli sniper" that shot at them.

"We made ourselves visible to the soldiers who were stationed hundreds of meters away from us. We remained still for around 10 minutes to make sure they knew we were there as journalists," she wrote in a blow-by-blow account of the shooting incident.

As no warning shots were fired, the journalists, all wearing press helmet and body armor, felt safe enough to move towards the camp, Hanaysha further said. However, "Out of nowhere, we heard the first gunshot."

Soon after the incident, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett also claimed at first that “it appears likely that armed Palestinians — who were firing indiscriminately at the time — were responsible for the unfortunate death of the journalist.”

However, the latest footage, which was filmed by a Jenin resident, shows quiet moments, with no sounds of fighting between Israeli forces and Palestinians, confirming that Abu Akleh was shot dead by Israeli snipers on purpose, and not accidentally by a stray bullet as Tomer-Yerushalmi trying to suggest.

More than 50 US lawmakers have so far called for an investigation into the crime as Tel Aviv is refusing to launch a probe.

Over 100 leading artists from across the world have also condemned Israel’s killing of Abu Akleh, demanding accountability for the regime’s crimes.

The ICC has already opened an investigation into possible war crimes by Israel in both the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip. However, Israel does not recognize the court’s jurisdiction and has called the war crimes probe unfair and anti-Semitic.

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