

Shireen Abu Akleh's family welcomes news of U.S. investigation



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Ramallah, November 16 (RHC)-- The family of Shireen Abu Akleh say they are “encouraged” by the United States announcing an investigation into the Palestinian American Al Jazeera correspondent’s killing in May. In a statement released on Tuesday, the family said the US decision, first reported on Monday, was necessary considering Abu Akleh’s citizenship and the fact that she was killed “by a foreign military.”

Israeli forces shot and killed Abu Akleh, 51, in the northern occupied West Bank town of Jenin where she was reporting on an Israeli raid. Video footage, several witnesses and multiple investigations by independent media outlets showed there were no armed Palestinians in the area where Abu Akleh and

other journalists were standing before Israeli soldiers started firing at them, despite initial Israeli claims that Abu Akleh may have been shot in crossfire between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters.

Israel eventually admitted in September that one of its soldiers likely killed Abu Akleh, but said that no criminal investigation would be conducted. The U.S. had initially resisted attempts to start an investigation into Abu Akleh's killing, arguing that Israel was able to conduct its own investigation.

But the US Department of Justice has now informed its counterpart in Israel that the FBI is opening a probe into the incident, according to a report by Axios on Monday. Details about the investigation are unclear, and a justice department spokesperson did not respond to an Al Jazeera request for comment on Monday.

The Israeli government has responded by criticising the US and insisting it will not cooperate with the investigation. "The decision taken by the US Justice Department to conduct an investigation into the tragic passing of Shireen Abu Akleh, is a mistake," said Benny Gantz, Israel's outgoing defence minister.

Israel is set for a new government after former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was given the mandate to form a government after his coalition won elections held on November 1st.

In their statement, Abu Akleh's family said they were "ready to support" the investigation, and added that they hoped it would be "truly independent" and "[follow] the evidence where it leads ... toward accountability." The family have conducted an international campaign over the six months since the killing of the veteran reporter, who was one of the biggest names in Arab journalism.

That campaign has involved meetings with US government officials, an official complaint at the International Criminal Court, and a meeting with Pope Francis in the Vatican. Speaking to Al Jazeera on Monday, Bruce Fein, a constitutional lawyer and former justice department official, said the decision to launch an FBI investigation indicates that the US has "credible evidence" to believe an assassination was committed.

Fein added that the US could put pressure on Israel in various ways to get it to cooperate, including military aid and regional geopolitics. "Those kinds of levers can change the minds of the Israelis," Fein said.

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