

Senator urges public revelation of U.S. report on killing of Shireen Abu Akleh



The body of Shireen Abu Akleh, shot dead by an Israeli sharpshooter. ??

Washington, June 7 (RHC)-- A U.S. senator has called on President Joe Biden's administration to make public a government report on the killing of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. Democrat Chris Van Hollen said that he had reviewed the report by the U.S. Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority (USSC) — weeks after he requested it from the State Department.

"I strongly believe that its public release is vital to ensuring transparency and accountability in the shooting death of American citizen and journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and to avoiding future preventable and wrongful deaths — goals we should all support," the senator said in a statement.

Abu Akleh, a veteran Palestinian-American correspondent, was killed on May 11, 2022, while covering an Israeli raid in Jenin, a city in the occupied West Bank. At first, Israeli officials falsely accused Palestinian gunmen of fatally shooting Abu Akleh before acknowledging months later that she was likely killed by an Israeli soldier.

Still, Israel has dismissed the incident as unintentional and has not opened a criminal probe into the killing — prompting calls for the United States, a staunch Israeli ally, to conduct its own investigation and seek accountability in the case.

Van Hollen said that the USSC, which oversees and encourages security coordination between Israeli and Palestinian officials, was not granted access to key witnesses and was “unable to conduct an independent investigation” into the killing.

Still, the senator said the report provides “very important insights” into the incident, including on the Israeli unit involved in the operation that led to Abu Akleh’s death, “as well as other [Israeli military] units operating in the West Bank.”

The report is described as a “summation” document on other investigations of the incident. In July 2022, the State Department cited an initial USSC summary of the probes conducted by Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA), which said that Israeli gunfire was “likely responsible” for Abu Akleh’s death, though it found no reason to believe the shooting was intentional.

The assessment angered Palestinian rights supporters who noted that US authorities did not interview witnesses and ignored the PA’s conclusion that the shooting was deliberate. The USSC report, which Van Hollen said on Monday he had reviewed, is believed to be a more thorough accounting of the US government’s findings. Specific details of the report, including when it was finalised and what it includes, remain unclear.

Witnesses, video footage and investigations by numerous media outlets have concluded there was no fighting in the immediate vicinity of where Abu Akleh — who was in full press gear — was fatally shot. In the months since, Van Hollen and other American legislators have called for a US probe into the incident.

Late last year, Israeli and U.S. media outlets reported that the FBI was investigating the killing, but US authorities — including the Justice and State departments — have refused to confirm or deny the existence of the purported probe.

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