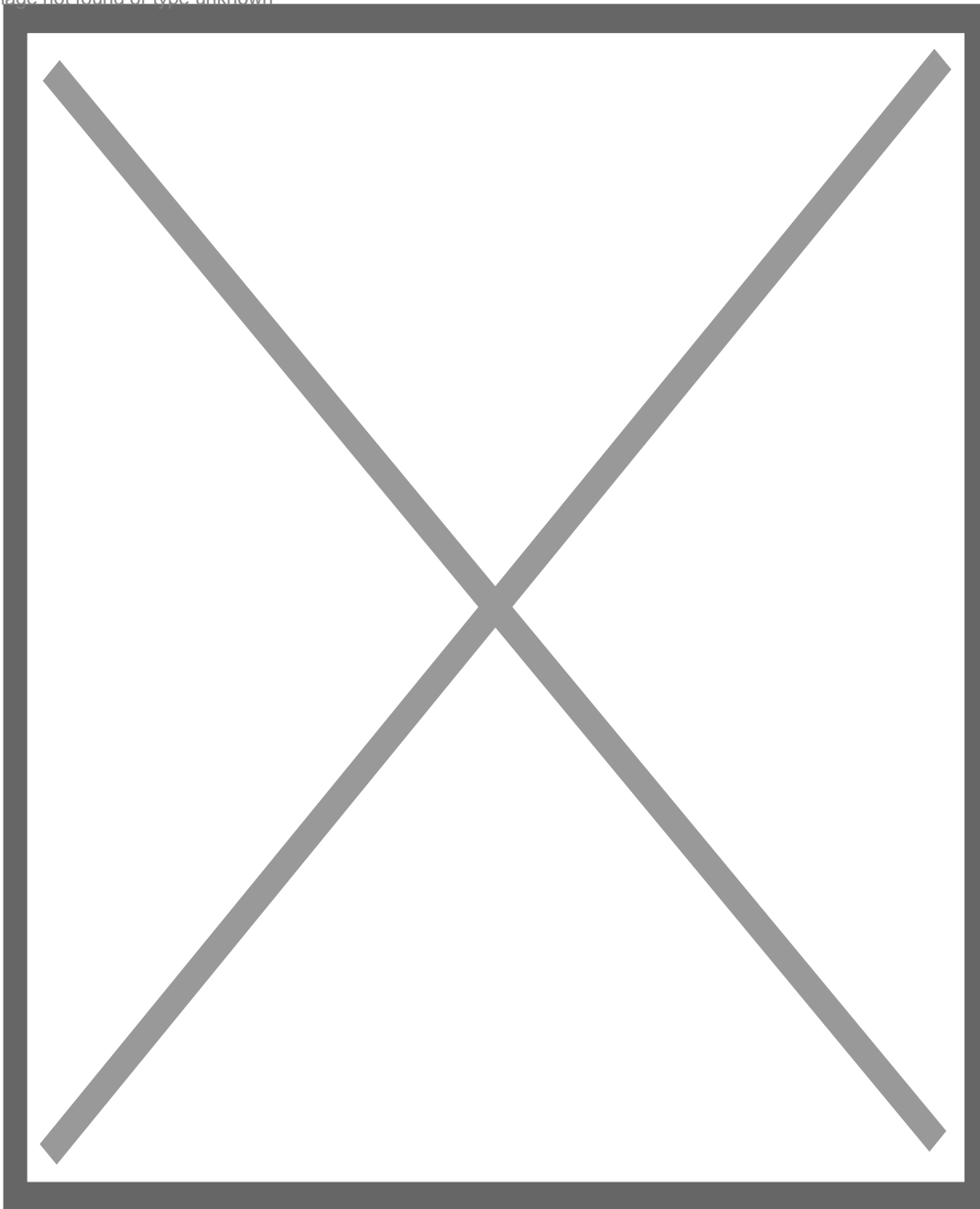


Israeli inquiry into Shireen Abu Akleh killing draws condemnation

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Shireen Abu Aqla, periodista de Al Jazeera.

Ramallah, September 6 (RHC)-- Palestinian officials, human rights campaigners, and the family of Shireen Abu Akleh have criticised the Israeli military investigation, which said there is a "high possibility" that the Al Jazeera journalist was "accidentally hit" by an Israeli soldier.

The Israeli army, however, said it would not be launching a criminal investigation into the killing of the veteran Palestinian-American journalist after releasing the results of their own inquiry on Monday.

The announcement came despite the fact that Al Jazeera Media Network, and several other inquiries by leading human rights groups and media organisations, have lent support to witness accounts that Abu Akleh was shot by an Israeli soldier.

Abu Akleh, 51, was killed on May 11 while covering an Israeli raid in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin, despite wearing a helmet and flak jacket clearly marked "PRESS." Palestinian witnesses told Al Jazeera's The Take podcast that they were never contacted by Israel as part of the investigation.

In a statement, Abu Akleh's family rejected the results of the Israeli investigation findings and said it would continue to call on the US government to carry out a "thorough, independent, and credible" investigation. Israel tried to "obscure the truth and avoid responsibility for killing Shireen Abu Akleh," the statement read.

"As expected, Israel has refused to take responsibility for murdering Shireen. Our family is not surprised by this outcome since it's obvious to anyone the Israeli war criminals cannot investigate their own crimes. However, we remain deeply hurt, frustrated, and disappointed," the statement added. "We will continue to demand that the US government follow through with its stated commitments to accountability."

B'tselem, an Israeli human rights group, said Abu Akleh's killing is part of Israel's "outrageous open fire policy." "It's not an investigation, it's whitewash; it was no mistake, it's policy," the group said in a statement. "Enormous public and international pressure was needed to make Israel spurt a faint confession that one of its soldiers had killed journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, while at the same time shaking off any responsibility for her death," it said.

"The killing of Abu Akleh is the predictable result of Israel's outrageous open fire policy in the Occupied Territories. This policy claims more and more victims while the whitewash continues undisturbed."

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, a spokesman for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, said the report is yet another attempt by Israel to avoid responsibility for Abu Akleh's murder. "All evidence, facts and investigations that have been conducted proved that Israel was the perpetrator and that it had killed Shireen and it should bear responsibility for its crime," Abu Rudeineh was quoted as saying by the state-run Wafa news agency.

He said the Palestinian leadership will continue to "follow up" with the "relevant international bodies," including the International Criminal Court, on all files related to Abu Akleh's killing. Israel will not be allowed to "escape punishment" for its ongoing crimes against the Palestinian people, Abu Rudeineh added.

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