

Shireen Abu Akleh's family submits complaint to ICC

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The Hague, September 20 (RHC)-- The family of slain Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh has submitted an official complaint to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to demand justice for her killing. Abu Akleh, who was with Al Jazeera for 25 years and known as the “voice of Palestine”, was shot in the head and killed by Israeli forces on May 11 while she was covering an army raid in the Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank.

She was wearing a flak jacket and helmet that clearly identified her as a member of press. Al Jazeera's cameraman Ali al-Samoudi, who was standing near her along with a group of Palestinian journalists, was also shot in the back but recovered.

Speaking in front of the International Criminal Court in The Hague on Tuesday, Abu Akleh's brother Anton said that they would do whatever was necessary to ensure accountability for her killing. "Like we said before, and like other reports said previously, there were more than 16 shots fired towards Shireen and the media and her colleagues who were standing in that ally," Anton Abu Akleh said. "They even targeted the person who was trying to pull her into safety after she was shot down."

He went on to say that the Israeli soldiers were able to identify who Abu Akleh was. "She was in full gear, and she was clearly noted as press," he said. "Any person shooting at the press is intentionally trying to kill them."

According to Al Jazeera's Step Vaessen, the ICC decided in 2021 that it has jurisdiction over violence and war crimes that have occurred in the occupied Palestinian territories. "That's why there is some hope here by Palestinian journalists and the government that there will be a start into the investigation here into these cases, including the case of Shireen Abu Akleh," Vaessen said, speaking at The Hague in the Netherlands.

The complaint is supported by the Palestinian Press Syndicate and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). Jim Boumhelha, the former president of the IFJ, said it was a "historic day" not just for Abu Akleh's family, but for Palestinian journalists who have been on the receiving end of attacks by Israeli forces.

"We do hope that people inside the prosecution will take very seriously the document that we have given them," he told Al Jazeera. "This is the first stage, and we are going through the motions." Boumhelha said that pursuing justice for Palestinian journalists within Israeli courts has never worked, due to the lack of an honest and credible due process.

"Every single case that some of the journalists took to Israeli court came to nothing," he said. "This is an international court, which is in the hands of all the countries and all the people in the world." In late May, Al Jazeera filed a case at the ICC to address the killing of Abu Akleh.

Abu Akleh was also a United States citizen, but President Joe Biden – who has snubbed the family's request for a face-to-face meeting twice – and his administration have refused to conduct an independent investigation.

"It seems that the reason her case has not been a priority for the US government is because of who she was and who she was killed by," Anton Abu Akleh said. "There is no mystery regarding what happened to Shireen except for the actual name and identity of her killer."

Anton referred to the multiple investigations carried out by the United Nations, Israeli and Palestinian human rights organisations, and major news outlets which concluded that Abu Akleh was killed by an Israeli soldier.

"Israel cannot investigate their own crimes and it is time for the international community to take a stance and hold these responsible accountable," he said. "We need a US and ICC investigation to hold Israel accountable."

In early September, Israeli authorities said that there was a "high possibility" that its forces had killed Abu Akleh, but said it would not be launching a criminal investigation.

One of the Abu Akleh family's lawyers, Jennifer Robinson, told the media that the ICC must end Israel's impunity. "There's been no independent investigation and this investigation and the prosecution of those

responsible for Shireen Abu Akleh's death will provide deterrence for the targeting of journalists in the future," she said. "The killing of journalists is an attempt to cover up and prevent their work in documenting human rights abuse and fosters impunity for the injustices that they are seeking to cover."

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