**PA Urges ICC to Investigate Israel**

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The Palestinian Authority (PA) foreign affairs bureau on Thursday called on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to launch an official investigation into ‘the ongoing crimes of the Israeli occupation and the settlers.’

In a statement, the bureau condemned what it called the ‘deliberate escalation by the settler gangs and their armed militias, which is causing additional crimes against the Palestinian residents, their land, property, facilities and holy sites.’

The statement specifically criticized ‘settler break-ins’ to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and their religious worshiping on the Temple Mount. It described the Jewish presence on the Temple Mount as ‘a very dangerous escalation against the Al-Aqsa Mosque.’

According to the foreign affairs bureau, attacks on Palestinian Arab residents by settlers and Jewish prayers on the Temple Mount reflect the Israeli government's strategy to Judaize large areas of Judea and Samaria and to enforce Israeli law on the area in a manner that will broaden the base of support for the extreme right and strengthen its hold on the centers of power in Israel.

Such a reality, if realized, warned the statement, will put an end to any possibility of resolving the conflict by diplomatic means and negotiations.

The PA officially joined the ICC on April 1, 2015, and immediately filed a series of legal complaints with the court. In addition to claiming that Israel committed war crimes during the 2014 Gaza war, it also claimed that Israeli ‘settlements’ are ‘an ongoing war crime’.

The PA has had standing at the court since the UN General Assembly recognized the ‘state of Palestine’ as a non-member observer in 2012.

In May, the PA official in charge of foreign affairs, Riyad al-Maliki, met with the ICC chief prosecutor to push for an investigation of Israeli war crimes after more than 60 Gazans, most of them members of Hamas, were killed during violent riots along the border.

Later, however, the Chief Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, refused the PA’s request to open an immediate investigation against Israel, saying, ‘The mere submission of the request does not automatically lead to the opening of an investigation.’

Regardless of the moves the PA takes, Israel is not a member of the ICC and is not subject to its rulings.