UN commission resumes ‘kangaroo court’ hearings on Israeli-Palestinian conflict

March 24, 2023

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Jewish News Syndicate

<https://www.jns.org/un-commission-resumes-kangaroo-court-hearings-on-israeli-palestinian-conflict/>

A controversial United Nations commission that is purportedly investigating the entire Israeli-Palestinian conflict is holding hearings this week in what the Israeli mission in Geneva called a ‘kangaroo court.’

From the moment the U.N. Human Rights Council created the group—officially the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and Israel—it has come under fire by Israel, the United States and a host of other U.N. member states.

They have blasted the commission for several reasons. Among them: The commission has an unprecedented and never-expiring mandate. It has unlimited scope. It covers the entirety of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It has an oversized budget and amount of staffing. And, critics note, all three of the commission’s members have been credibly [accused of antisemitism](https://www.jns.org/the-united-nations-is-not-antisemitic-its-point-man-on-antisemitism-says/) and rabid anti-Israel bias.

‘The hearings held by the commission of inquiry are yet another kangaroo court, where witnesses are preselected to fit a predetermined narrative against Israel,’ Nathan Chicheportiche, a spokesman for the Israeli mission to the United Nations in Geneva, wrote in a statement to JNS.

Last November, the commission held a set of public hearings on the killing of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh during an Israeli counter-terror operation and on Israel’s decision to label six Palestinian non-governmental organizations as terror organizations.

The Israeli government was not invited to speak at either set of hearings. This time, the commission did not even seek evidence from Israel, and it provided Israel with neither the agenda nor a list of topics and speakers for the week, said Chicheportiche.

‘There is no transparency at all,’ he said.

In a [press release](https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/03/commission-inquiry-occupied-palestinian-territory-including-east-jerusalem), the U.N. Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner described this week’s hearings, which are set to conclude on Friday, as focusing on ‘the shrinking space for civil society in the Occupied Palestinian Territory including East Jerusalem and in Israel.’

The commission will hear from ‘human rights defenders and activists, women human rights defenders, cultural activists, journalists, lawyers and witnesses who have been subjected to or witnessed attacks, restrictions and harassment by authorities and non-state actors,’ the release added.

The November hearings consisted largely of invited speakers bashing NGO Monitor, an organization that compiled the evidence that the six Palestinian NGOs, which were a subject of the hearings, were supporting terror activities. NGO Monitor was not invited to present evidence, despite submitting materials in writing to the commission.

The Israeli mission was asked during the November hearings only to submit documentation. This time around, it found out about the hearings the way many others did—through public notices.

**‘They bring shame to the United Nations’**

Tuesday’s hearing featured far-left Israeli journalist Israel Frey, who was arrested in December and briefly held after failing to appear for prior questioning. Frey was suspected of inciting terrorism last September when he praised a Palestinian man, whom Israeli police nabbed in Jaffa with weapons and an explosive device in his possession. He was allegedly planning to carry out a terror attack.

Frey tweeted at the time that the suspect was a ‘hero’ for making it ‘all the way from Nablus to Tel Aviv’ and looking for ‘legitimate targets.’ The commission questioned him about the circumstances surrounding his arrest over the course of an hour and 15 minutes, but not about his reasons for lauding a would-be terrorist.

Monday’s opening speaker was French Palestinian lawyer Salah Hamouri, who was deported to France in December. His Jerusalem residency was revoked on charges that he was active in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, classified by Israel and several Western nations as a terror group. The U.S. State Department has classified it as such [since 1997](https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/).

‘The commission of inquiry chose as its guest of honor for its hearings a convicted terrorist, who has been a senior member of the PFLP terror organization, been personally engaged in planning attacks against civilians and conspired to murder Israel’s former chief rabbi,’ the Israeli mission wrote.

‘Whitewashing Palestinian terrorism and defaming Israel are the only objectives of this commission of inquiry,’ it added. ‘They bring shame to the United Nations.’

Closed hearings were held on Wednesday and Thursday, with 12 witnesses giving testimony confidentially for what the commission felt were reasons related to safety and security. Friday’s closing session is scheduled to include testimony from Rodney Dixon, who serves as *Al Jazeera’s* counsel in the case of Abu Akleh’s death, and Walid Al-Omari, *Al Jazeera’s* bureau chief in Israel and the Palestinian territories. The lawyer for Muhammad Halabi, a Gazan aid worker whom Israel convicted of supporting terror, is also set to speak.

Reports and commentary that the commission has issued thus far have criticized Israel nearly exclusively, already labeling the ‘occupation’ the root cause of the conflict.

**‘Presented in a very convoluted way’**

Danny Ayalon served as Israel’s deputy foreign minister when, in the wake of the 2009 Israel-Hamas war, the United Nations launched its ‘Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict.’ That became the infamous Goldstone Report, which accused Israel of intentionally and systematically targeting Gazan civilians. The mission head, Richard Goldstone, later recanted the claims.

Over the years, it was a dilemma for Israel whether to cooperate with the United Nations, as well as to share materials and try to influence reports, which would only work if U.N. officials acted in good faith, Ayalon told JNS.

‘We did not have any trust in them to stick to the truth. Things can be presented in a very convoluted way,’ he said. ‘We know the result was already pre-judged, and we’re not going to play this game.’

Ayalon believes that the commission that is conducting hearings this week is a repeat offender in this regard. But he does not believe the Israeli government will necessarily engage in a prolonged campaign to discredit it.

‘I don’t think they’ll bother with it unless there will be a public or political impact,’ he said. ‘Then, of course, they’ll have to come after the report and expose the facts, not to the committee, but in a transparent way to the press and to other governments, mostly to the American government.’