Jerusalem group urges ICC probe into Palestinian leaders' 'crimes against humanity'

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The Jerusalem Institute of Justice, a nonprofit organization advocating democracy in the Middle East, aims to urge the International Criminal Court in the Hague to investigate the conduct Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas political bureau chief (and former Prime Minister) Ismail Haniyeh for crimes against humanity.

In their request, to be submitted in the coming weeks, the group says Hamas and the PA are responsible for a host of human rights violations against the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank, including torture.

"Haniyeh, as the political bureau chief of Hamas, has been systematically engaged in torture and unlawful killing using the organization's internal security apparatus in the Gaza Strip," the institute contends.

According to the group, the request aims to help the Office of the Prosecutor to the International Criminal Court in a preliminary examination it launched some two years ago into the "situation in Palestine in order to determine whether a full investigation should be opened for crimes committed within the Palestinian territories."

This is not the first time the Jerusalem Institute of Justice turns approaches the international court seeking action against the Palestinian leadership. In March 2017 the institute urged the ICC to launch proceedings against Haniyeh, saying that "that a full investigation should be pursued and a case should eventually be lodged against Ismail Haniyeh for his role in the commission of war crimes during the 2014 conflict with Israel."

Jerusalem Institute of Justice CEO Flavia Sevald told Israel Hayom that Haniyeh should be charged with two major crimes: "forcing teens younger than 15 to engage in military activity and the systematic use of children as human shields and military targets."

The institute says Abbas should also be included in the inquiry because of his actions between June 2014 and April 2018, when Abbas was allegedly responsible for severe beating, arbitrary arrests, illegal detention and psychological torture.