**Defense Minister Gantz: ICC probe rewards terrorism, conflict can only be resolved by negotiations**

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Defense Minister Gantz, speaking at an IDF graduation ceremony, says the decision to open an ICC investigation against Israel “rewards terrorism and terror organizations.”

“Our enemies act unethically, jeopardizing civilians. Hamas and Hezbollah hide missiles in people’s cellars and yards, using their citizens as human shields.

And while our enemies trample upon their people’s basic rights and while there are regular and horrific violations of human rights around the world, the ICC prosecutor at The Hague has decided to launch an investigation against Israel, the sole democracy in the Middle East,” he says.

“It is a decision that undermines the protection of regional stability and human life.

Israel has strong, independent investigative bodies and some of the highest moral standards in the world,” Gantz stresses.

He says that “the Palestinians need to internalize the fact that the conflict between us can only be resolved by direct negotiations between Jerusalem and Ramallah. The courts aren’t the solution, and The Hague certainly isn’t.”

“We will keep fighting to protect our citizens, wherever necessary, and keep waging a legal and diplomatic battle against the ICC’s outrageous and poor decision. And we will fully back IDF soldiers and commanders, all of whom will continue to scrupulously and faithfully fulfill their duty,” he says.