**Hamas welcomes ICC decision on jurisdiction over Palestinian territories**

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The Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has hailed the International Criminal Court (ICC) for a decision to extend jurisdiction to the territories occupied by Israel since the 1967 Arab–Israeli War.

“Any international decision that leads to supporting the rights of Palestinians, defends their freedom, provides them with justice and prosecutes war criminals is in conformity with human values and international human rights,” said Raafat Marra, the head of the Hamas media department, in a press release on Friday, the Palestinian Information Center reported on Saturday.

The Hague-based intergovernmental organization, the ICC, has announced that Pre-Trial Chamber I of ICC decided, by the majority, that the court’s territorial jurisdiction in the Situation in Palestine, a State party to the ICC Rome Statute, extends to the territories occupied by Israel since the said war.

The statement means that the ICC can now open a war crimes investigation into Israeli military actions in the occupied territories.

The court will have a hard time prosecuting Israelis for the crimes they committed against Palestinians, but it can issue arrest warrants that will make it difficult for Israeli officials to travel abroad.

“We are confident that any court that enjoys integrity, justice and professionalism will stand by the Palestinian people and their rights”, Marra said, calling for the use of all means to stop terrorism and Zionist crimes against the Palestinians.

“The Zionist entity (Israel) and its leaders practiced organized terror against the Palestinians, robbed them of their rights and the international silence encourage them to continue their criminal practices against the Palestinians.”

Palestinians joined the court in 2015, a year after they asked it to open a probe into Israeli crimes during its 2014 bloody war against the blockaded Gaza Strip, as well as the regime’s construction of settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds.

Israel is not a member of the ICC. It says the court has no jurisdiction over the issue because Palestinians do not have statehood.

The ICC has so far affirmed the statehood of Palestine several times.

Arab League lauds ICC decision

Separately on Saturday, the Arab League welcomed the ICC ruling as a “crowning achievement.”

“This decision is the crowning achievement of the diplomatic efforts exerted by the State of Palestine's various official and legal institutions with full Arab support and solidarity by friendly international institutions in their serious and relentless pursuit for achieving prompt justice,” said Arab League Assistant Secretary-General for Palestine and the Occupied Arab Territories Affairs Saeed Abu Ali said in a press statement.

He also expressed hope that the ruling would contribute to the full restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

Israel occupied East Jerusalem al-Quds, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip – territories the Palestinians want for their future state – during the six-day war in 1967.

About 700,000 Israelis now live in over 230 illegal settlements built in the West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds ever since. The international community views the settlements as illegal under international law but has done little – if any – so far to stop Israel.