30,000 Sign Online Petition to Arrest Netanyahu in UK Next Month

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<http://www.timesofisrael.com/online-petition-calls-for-netanyahus-arrest-in-uk/>

Some 30,000 people have signed a petition on the website of the British Parliament calling on the government to arrest Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for war crimes. Netanyahu is due in London on a state visit next month. Israel rejected the petition as meaningless.

Blaming Netanyahu for the deaths of Palestinians during the war in the Gaza Strip last year, [the text of the petition](https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/105446) reads, “Benjamin Netanyahu is to hold talks in London this September. Under international law he should be arrested for war crimes upon arrival in the U.K for the massacre of over 2000 civilians in 2014.”

According to the website, the government will be forced respond to the petition, since it passed a 10,000 signature threshold. If it passes 100,000 signatures, Parliament could be required to debate the issue.

During the war in Gaza, more than 2,000 Palestinian were killed in the Gaza Strip, most of them civilians, according to Hamas and UN figures. Israel says almost 1,000 of the fatalities were combatants, and blames Hamas for all civilian deaths, since it fought from within residential areas.

The Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the petition was “a PR exercise with no real meaning. Bilateral ties between Britain and Israel are closer than ever before, as evidenced by data on mutual trade, doubled in recent years, and by cooperation in academic studies, culture and science between the two countries.”

The ministry said that “any person can initiate such a petition on the website of the British Parliament,” adding that “currently, there are running petition on legalizing drugs [with 200,000 signatures] and regulating the price of milk [40,000].”

UK lawyers representing pro-Palestinian groups have repeatedly taken advantage of legal loopholes and sought to have Israeli officials visiting the country arrested for alleged breaches of international law under terms of universal jurisdiction.

But in 2011, Britain changed the law to make it more difficult to obtain arrest warrants against Israeli figures by requiring the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions. The amended law helps those visiting Britain in an official capacity. Those making trips of a personal nature are left vulnerable.

A favorite target before the law was amended was former justice minister and head of the Hatnua party Tzipi Livni, who several times avoided efforts by activists to have her arrested while on trips to the UK.

In late June, former defense minister and chief of staff Shaul Mofaz was nearly arrested when he visited London. At the time, Mofaz was greeted at the airport by two Israeli diplomats. His arrest was avoided after swift action by the Israeli Embassy in London and the British Embassy in Israel.

Netanyahu is to meet with his British counterpart, David Cameron, considered one of Israel’s staunchest allies in Europe. Among other issues, Netanyahu is planning to present the grounds for his objections to the nuclear deal with Iran.