ICC's 'war crimes' warning gives Israel pause over razing Bedouin village

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A recent warning by the International Criminal Court ‎in The Hague that razing a West Bank village that ‎has been illegally built may amount to a war crime ‎has the Israeli government facing a dilemma, Israel ‎Hayom learned Thursday.‎

The planned demolition of Khan al-Ahmar, 6 miles ‎east of Jerusalem‏,‏‎ had garnered extensive ‎international attention. Israel has offered to ‎relocate the 180 Bedouin residents of the village to ‎a location some 7 miles away, but the Palestinian ‎and other critics argue that the demolition aims to ‎displace Palestinians in favor of Israeli settlement ‎expansion. ‎

The High Court of Justice recently rejected a ‎final appeal against plans to raze the village. ‎

ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda warned Wednesday that ‎as the village’s demolition “appears imminent, it ‎bears recalling, as a general matter, that extensive ‎destruction of property without military necessity ‎and population transfers in an occupied territory ‎constitute war crimes” under the Rome Statute treaty ‎that established the ICC.‎

Israeli officials criticized Bensouda’s statement.‎

‎”It’s very troubling that the prosecutor’s office, ‎which reiterates its commitment to independence and ‎impartiality, ignored the [Palestinian] rocket fire ‎that targeted Israeli civilians just hours before ‎releasing the statement about Khan al-Ahmar,” one ‎official said. ‎

A senior Jerusalem official noted that “these and ‎other actions by the prosecutor’s office raise ‎serious questions as to whether the ICC’s professed ‎‎’independence and impartiality’ are mere hollow ‎slogans or principles to which they are committed.‎

‎”Israel will continue to spare no effort to protect ‎its citizens from terrorist attacks and uphold the ‎rule of law in accordance with Israeli and ‎international law,” he said.‎

A third official stressed that given the sensitivity ‎of the issue and its potential repercussions, Prime ‎Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will have to make the ‎final decision on whether or not to go ahead with ‎Khan al-Ahmar’s demolition.‎

Israel is not a member of the ICC and does not ‎accept its jurisdiction. However, Israeli forces ‎could face charges if they are suspected of ‎committing crimes on Palestinian territories.‎

The Palestinian Authority signed the Rome Statute in ‎December 2014, becoming a member in April 2015.‎