**Delegate to UN flotilla probe named**

Yosef Ciechanover, former director-general of Foreign Ministry who has headed probe that cleared Netanyahu of blame for failed attempt to assassinate Khaled Mashaal, will represent Israel at UN inquiry on IDF flotilla raid

By Roni Sofer

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Yosef Ciechanover will be Israel's representative at the UN inquiry committee on the IDF flotilla raid in May, the government announced Saturday.

Ciechanover has previously served as director-general of the Foreign Ministry as well as legal advisor to the Defense Ministry. He also headed an investigation against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the late '90s.

His appointment to the UN committee, which will be headed by former prime minister of New Zealand, Geoffrey Palmer, and outgoing Colombian president, Alvaro Uribe, was decided by Netanyahu, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, and Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman.

"Ciechanover represents diplomatic freedom, and he is a man of great personal and international caliber as someone who received titles from the US Defense Department and the French Foreign Legion," a state official said after the appointment.

In 1997, Ciechanover headed a committee that probed a failed Mossad attempt at assassinating Hamas commander Khaled Mashaal in Jordan. The fiasco led to diplomatic tension with the kingdom and its leader at the time, King Hussein.

Netanyahu, then in the midst of his first term as prime minister, green-lighted the Mossad operation. He was also the one to appoint Ciechanover to head the inquiry.

The committee concluded the investigation with no personal criticism against any officials involved, including Netanyahu himself.

"After probing the prime minister's conduct according to the criteria we have set, we concluded that he handled the incident satisfactorily," the committee stated in early 1998.

"He considered and examined the plans submitted to him from all possible angles. He showed interest in the plans' details, and asked that the operation be coordinated with all intelligence heads. We reached the conclusion that the prime minister's conduct was in keeping with the norms and procedures acceptable in similar cases in the past."

Ciechanover, who is 77 years old, is a married father of three. He was director-general of the Foreign Ministry between the years 1978-1980, after having served as legal advisor to the Defense Ministry. He also chaired Discount Bank's board of directors from 1986-1991. In 1995 he was named El Al's chairman.

Over the years Ciechanover received two honorary titles: from the US Defense Department and the French Academy's Humanities Department in Paris. His brother has received the Nobel Prize in Chemistry.