Report: UN anti-racism panel to probe claims of Israeli apartheid in West Bank

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A UN panel dedicated to fighting racism has decided to review Palestinian complaints that Israel’s policies in the West Bank amount to apartheid, despite the global body’s legal adviser having previously said it doesn’t have the authority to deal with the matter, Channel 13 news reported Monday.

Senior Foreign Ministry sources told the station that Israel has not yet decided if it will cooperate with an expected summons to a hearing at the Geneva-based United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), or boycott the proceedings.

The report said the CERD decided last week to look into Palestinian claims filed last year. After the complaints were first raised the CERD sought the opinion of the UN’s legal adviser, who ruled it did not have the authority to handle the subject. However, on December 12 the committee decided to accept the Palestinian complaints and probe the issue.

The committee is expected to attempt mediation between Israel and the Palestinians on the claims, the report said. Both sides are likely to be summoned for a hearing, after which the committee will rule on the matter and publish recommendations.

A Foreign Ministry source noted that Israel had fully cooperated with the committee on the question of its authority “but after the committee didn’t accept the opinion of the UN legal adviser, it is not clear if there is any point in cooperating with this process.”

The development came after last Friday [International Criminal Court](https://www.timesofisrael.com/topic/icc-international-criminal-court/) chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda’s announced she may open a probe into alleged Israeli war crimes.

Bensouda said there was a “reasonable basis” to open an investigation into alleged war crimes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Before opening the probe, she said she would ask the court to determine the territory over which it has jurisdiction, as Israel is not a member of the court. The Palestinian Authority is a member of the court, though it is a topic of ongoing legal debate if it qualifies as a state, a question that could prevent the ICC from launching its probe.

Bensouda’s announcement was met with widespread condemnation from Israeli leaders and a legal opinion published by Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit, arguing that the court has no jurisdiction to launch the probe.