PA accuses Israel of ‘shoot-to-kill policy’ in Gaza, asks for UN protection

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The Palestinian ambassador to the United Nations has appealed to the Security Council for immediate international protection for Palestinian protesters in the wake of the deadly clashes along the Israel-Gaza border last week.

Palestinian Authority Ambassador Riyad Mansour claimed in his letter to the council on Tuesday that Israel has adopted “a shoot-to-kill policy” during what he called peaceful protests.

Mansour said Ramallah strongly backed Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’s call for an independent investigation of the killings.

He accused Israel of violating international law and “intentionally, grossly and systematically” violating its legal obligation to protect civilians.

On Friday, some 30,000 Palestinians took part in demonstrations along the Gaza border, during which rioters threw rocks and firebombs at Israeli troops on the other side of the fence, burned tires and scrap wood, sought to breach and damage the security fence, and in one case opened fire at Israeli soldiers.

The Hamas-run Gaza health ministry said 16 Palestinians were killed in subsequent clashes with IDF forces.

The IDF on Saturday named and detailed 10 of the dead as members of terror groups including Hamas. (Hamas, an Islamist terror group that avowedly seeks to destroy Israel, had earlier acknowledged five of them were its members.) Islamic Jihad later claimed an 11th.

IDF Spokesman Brig. Gen. Ronen Manelis said on Saturday that all those killed were engaged in violence. Manelis said on Friday evening that the army had faced “a violent, terrorist demonstration at six points” along the fence. He said the IDF used “pinpoint fire” wherever there were attempts to breach or damage the security fence.

After the clashes Friday, the Security Council held a closed meeting to discuss the violent flare-up along the border despite a request from the US and Israel to postpone deliberations until after the Passover holiday.

Kuwait, which represents Arab countries on the council, presented a proposed statement which called for an “independent and transparent investigation” of the violence.

The draft council statement also expressed “grave concern at the situation at the border.” And it reaffirmed “the right to peaceful protest” and expressed the council’s “sorrow at the loss of innocent Palestinian lives.”

On Saturday, the Unites States blocked the resolution, sparking backlash from the PA government.

Yusef al Mahmoud, spokesperson for the PA government in Ramallah, said the move turned the US into an “accomplice in the horrific massacre committed by the Israeli occupation army against our defenseless people.”

But Israeli officials have largely rebuffed international criticism of its handling of the protesters. On Tuesday, Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman said Israel would not be changing its policies toward Palestinians rioting along the Gaza security fence.

“We have set clear rules of the game and we do not intend to change them. Anyone who approaches the fence endangers his life, and I would recommend that Gaza residents put their efforts not into protesting against Israel, but into regime change within the Strip,” Liberman said during a tour of Israeli communities just outside the coastal enclave.

“I think the [Israel Defense Forces] operated exceptionally well, as expected, and I have no doubt that we will continue to act in the same way in the days to come,” he added.

Speaking to local leaders and the heads of security for the communities, the defense minister defended the army’s actions. “It needs to be understood that the majority of the people killed were terrorists whom we know well, operatives in the military arm of Hamas, as well as in the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. These weren’t innocent civilians who came as part of a civil protest,” Liberman said.

The defense minister put the blame for Friday’s violence solely on Hamas.

“We didn’t initiate any provocations against the residents of Gaza; we protect our residents,” he said.