Netanyahu Weighs International Criminal Court Prosecutors' Request for Israel, West Bank Visit

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Israel is weighing the possibility of permitting representatives of the prosecution of the International Criminal Court to visit Israel and the Palestinian Authority in the coming weeks, senior officials in Jerusalem told Haaretz.

The visit would be in the context of a preliminary inquiry into Palestinian complaints against Israel's 2014 Operation Protective Edge in Gaza, and settlement construction in the West Bank, according to the officials, who requested anonymity due to the issue's sensitivity.

The aim of the visit by representatives of ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda's office would be to engage in a dialogue about the prosecution's work, Israel's legal system and the preliminary inquiry process, the officials said.

The officials stressed that the delegation would not gather any evidence or look into the Palestinian complaints. Their goal, instead, was what the prosecutors call "outreach and education."

"We have nothing to hide and we would be happy to show the court at The Hague how serious, professional and independent the Israeli legal system is," one of the Israeli officials said.

"This is an additional opportunity to make clear that Israel believes there is no room for the intervention of the court at The Hague and that it has neither the authority nor the justification to handle the Palestinians' complaints."

The possibility of a visit has been discussed for more than a year, but an official request was submitted in the past few days only .

It is not yet clear whether the ICC delegation will be able to visit Gaza or the West Bank, the officials said. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has not yet given official approval to the visit; a decision is expected soon.

Israel views the proposed visit as an explanatory trip by the delegation to build confidence with Israel, ahead of a future visit to look into the Palestinians' complaints.

Another possible reason for the visit could be the prosecutor's wish to relieve Palestinian pressure on her office and show that their complaints are being dealt with.

But the officials in Jerusalem said that even if the visit is approved, it will have no significance regarding the process of the preliminary inquiry.

The ICC representatives may also hold briefings for Israeli and Palestinian media during their visit, as well.

Haaretz reported exclusively in July 2015 that Israel had decided to reverse its previous policy and open talks with the ICC prosecutor over the preliminary examination of the Gaza War and the situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Israel's reason for the policy shift was solely to make its position clear that it feels the ICC lacks the authority to hear Palestinian complaints on the matter, a senior official said at the time.