

Israeli attorney general will not intervene in Sheikh Jarrah case



Israel forces push away activists near the Israeli checkpoint at the entrance of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in occupied East Jerusalem [File: Ahmad Gharabli/AFP]

Tel Aviv, June 8 (RHC)-- Israel's attorney general has informed the Supreme Court that he will not intervene in the legal proceedings of a high-profile Sheikh Jarrah case in which four Palestinian families in occupied East Jerusalem are facing imminent forced expulsion in favour of Israeli settlement organisations.

In a statement issued on Monday, Avichai Mendelblit said “there is no place” for him to intervene in the proceedings.

Last month, the Supreme Court gave the attorney general until June 8 to submit his legal opinion on the case. In a letter sent to the court, Mendelblit wrote that in light of the numerous legal procedures that had been conducted regarding the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood over the years, he concluded that there was no need for him to appear in court.

The attorney general’s decision leaves the Supreme Court free to decide whether to hear the four Palestinian families’ appeal of two lower court verdicts that they must leave their homes.

The four families are part of a group of more than 500 Palestinians – comprising 28 families – facing forced expulsion from the neighbourhood.

Sami Irsheid, a lawyer who is part of the defence team for the Sheikh Jarrah residents threatened with forced expulsion, told Al Jazeera that Mendelblit’s decision does not mean the case is no longer political. “The attorney general’s response was brief, where he said he feels there is no need for his intervention since this is a legal issue,” Irsheid said. “But we will not back down from arguing the case from the international law aspect either.”

According to Israeli daily Haaretz, a source close to Mendelblit said that the Israeli political leadership supports his decision to refrain from arguing before the court on behalf of the state.

Haaretz also reported that officials in Mendelblit’s office said the case of the Sheikh Jarrah families is weak, and that “his legal opinion would not be able to prevent their pending eviction”.

A statement by the Sheikh Jarrah families rejected Mendelblit’s explanation of his non-intervention, saying their case is not a legal matter but one of forced expulsion. “We affirm that the Israeli occupation government – across its entire spectrum from the prime minister to all Israeli institutions and activities – is seeking to displace the residents of Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, thus perpetuating the crime of Israeli settlement in East Jerusalem,” the statement published on social media said.

“In turn, we affirm that this crime flouts all international conventions and human rights, and we also affirm that these attempts will not weaken our will to persevere in our lands.” Irsheid said that the ball is now in the court’s corner.

“It is up to the Supreme Court to decide whether it wants to hear from the attorney general or be satisfied with the arguments of the case,” he told Al Jazeera. The court is expected to rule widely in favour of the Israeli settler organisations, but Irsheid said he does not agree that Mendelblit’s decision will affect the speed of the court’s ruling.

“At the end of the day, his decision is a continuation of the same political approach that the Israeli state has adopted over the past 20 years, where they have tried to reduce the Sheikh Jarrah cause to a legal dispute between two sides,” he said.

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