

Shireen Abu Akleh family's letter to Joe Biden: Full text



As Joe Biden prepares to embark on his first trip to Israel as U.S. president, the family of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh has sent him a letter laying out a list of demands to ensure accountability for her killing in the occupied West Bank in May.

The letter on Friday berated Biden for what it called efforts by his administration to “whitewash Shireen’s killing and perpetuate impunity” for Israeli forces who killed the journalist in May.

The Biden administration infuriated Palestinian rights and press freedom advocates when it released a statement saying the bullet that killed Abu Akleh “likely” came from an Israeli military position but dismissed the incident as the unintentional “result of tragic circumstances”.

Abu Akleh’s family called on the US administration to retract that statement, expressing “grief, outrage and sense of betrayal” with Biden.

Below is the full text of the family's letter.

Dear Mr. President:

We, the family of Shireen Abu Akleh, write to express our grief, outrage and sense of betrayal concerning your administration's abject response to the extrajudicial killing of our sister and aunt by Israeli forces on May 11, 2022, while on assignment in the occupied Palestinian city of Jenin in the West Bank.

Shireen was a prominent, beloved Palestinian journalist. She was a role model and a mentor to aspiring Palestinian female journalists, and a trusted colleague of many in the local and international media. She was also a United States citizen. Despite wearing a protective helmet and blue bulletproof vest clearly marked as "PRESS," Shireen was murdered by an Israeli-fired bullet to the head. Israeli forces continued to fire live rounds as bystanders—including other members of the press—tried to render assistance. Then, as we and hundreds of others gathered to begin her funeral procession, Israeli forces attacked us, beating mourners and pallbearers, violently disrupting the dignified burial procession she deserved.

In the days and weeks since an Israeli soldier killed Shireen, not only have we not been adequately consulted, informed, and supported by U.S. government officials, but your administration's actions exhibit an apparent intent to undermine our efforts toward justice and accountability for Shireen's death.

Investigations conducted by the United Nations, the New York Times, the Washington Post, CNN, the Associated Press, Bellingcat, and B'Tselem all concluded an Israeli soldier fired the shot that killed Shireen. All available evidence suggests that Shireen, a U.S. citizen, was the subject of an extrajudicial killing, yet your administration has thoroughly failed to meet the bare minimum expectation held by a grieving family—to ensure a prompt, thorough, credible, impartial, independent, effective and transparent investigation that leads to true justice and accountability for Shireen's killing.

Instead, the United States has been skulking toward the erasure of any wrongdoing by Israeli forces.

From the failure to immediately ensure an independent and impartial investigation, to the rushed hand-off of the bullet that killed Shireen without consultation let alone allowing us to have a representative present, which culminated in the July 4 statement adopting the conclusions and talking points of the Israeli government, your administration's engagement has served to whitewash Shireen's killing and perpetuate impunity. Little information has been shared on who oversaw the American "summation" of investigations, who participated in the ballistics assessment, or any specific individual qualifications or findings leading to the conclusions issued by your administration. It is as if you expect the world and us to now just move on. Silence would have been better.

You have made clear that your administration is willing to abdicate its responsibility concerning Israel's extrajudicial killing of Shireen. The July 4 press statement by Department of State Spokesperson Ned Price announced that Shireen's killing was likely unintentional, yet when pressed by reporters during the July 5 press briefing, Mr. Price conceded that nobody present was qualified to reach a conclusion about intent. He also clarified that the United States government did not, in fact, conduct its own investigation, let alone legal analysis, and that the Department of State was content with merely "summarizing"—and adopting—Israeli authorities' investigation. Nonetheless, your administration deemed it necessary to include and perpetuate the baseless and damaging conclusion that the killing was not intentional, seemingly choosing political expedience over actual accountability for a foreign government's killing of a U.S. citizen.



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