

Meeting with Shireen Abu Akleh's family not on Biden's schedule



Palestinians hold pictures of slain Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh. Shireen Abu Akleh's family previously accused the Biden administration of whitewashing the killing [File: Raneen Sawafta/Reuters]

Ramallah, July 14 (RHC)-- U.S. President Joe Biden has rejected a request by Shireen Abu Akleh's family to meet with him during his visit to Israel and the occupied West Bank this week, as pressure mounts on the United States to ensure accountability for the journalist's killing by Israeli forces.

The White House released a public schedule of Biden's visit on Wednesday, and it did not include a meeting with the slain Al Jazeera journalist's relatives. The New York Times also reported earlier in the day that Biden has "sidestepped" the family's demand for a meeting. Abu Akleh was an American citizen.

Before Biden landed in Israel on Wednesday, U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters that Secretary of State Antony Blinken had invited Abu Akleh's family to the United States to talk. "Secretary Blinken actually spoke with Shireen's family a short while ago," Sullivan said.

"He has invited the family to the United States to be able to sit down and engage with them directly. The administration, at the president's direction, has been very much engaged in helping try to determine what exactly happened around the tragic circumstances of her death."

He added that Abu Akleh's killing "will be one of the subjects at play" during Biden's talks in Israel. Sullivan also called for "accountability and making sure that we find a way to conclude this chapter justly."

The White House did not respond to Al Jazeera's request for comment on whether Biden would be willing to meet the family in Washington, DC.

Abu Akleh's family berated Biden's response to the killing last week, accusing his administration of whitewashing what it called "the extrajudicial killing" of the journalist by Israeli forces.

"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," the family said in an open letter to the U.S. president. The letter called on Biden to meet the family and push for meaningful accountability for the killing.

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