

U.S. journalists renew calls for justice for Shireen Abu Akleh



The body of Shireen Abu Akleh, shot dead by an Israeli sharpshooter. ??

Washington, May 12 (RHC)-- Journalists in the United States have renewed calls for justice in the shooting death of Palestinian-American reporter Shireen Abu Akleh by Israeli forces, stressing the need for an independent investigation one year after her killing. More than two dozen journalists gathered for a moment of silence to honor the veteran Al Jazeera correspondent in Washington, DC, on the first anniversary of her killing on Thursday.

"Saying the shot came from the direction of the Israeli [military] or that there was no intent is not justice," Eileen O'Reilly, president of the National Press Club (NPC), said later at a briefing, urging an impartial probe into the incident. "We do not want to live in a world where a journalist like Shireen, who devoted her career to public good, is killed without any accounting or explanation."

Abu Akleh, who was fatally shot by Israeli forces while covering an Israeli raid on the occupied West Bank city of Jenin on May 11, 2022, posthumously received the NPC President's Award last year. At first, Israel falsely suggested that Palestinian gunmen killed the journalist before eventually concluding that an Israeli soldier likely shot Abu Akleh and dismissing the incident as accidental.

The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden has repeatedly praised Abu Akleh and condemned her killing. But despite calls for accountability, Washington has not officially carried out its own investigation into the incident and has adopted the Israeli position that the shooting was unintentional.

U.S. officials have said they are pushing for accountability in Abu Akleh's killing by urging Israel to review its military rules of engagement to ensure that similar shootings do not occur in the future — a demand that has been openly rejected by Israeli leaders.

Asked whether pressing Israel on rules of engagement amounts to accountability, NPC Executive Director Bill McCarren said: "It's not enough, but for there to be nothing — which is where we are now — that is unacceptable."

Still, he added that addressing the military's rules of engagement is important to protect journalists covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "We want more ... We want full accounting; we must know the truth," McCarren told reporters on Thursday.

Abderrahim Foukara, Al Jazeera's Washington bureau chief, said pushing Israel to change its rules of engagement would be good if it happens, but he added that the US position appeared to hinge on "ambiguity." "Saying that you will force the Israeli military to change its rules of engagement does not absolve you of the responsibility to seek justice for the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh or any other journalist," Foukara said.

Washington has rejected efforts to seek accountability for the killing of Abu Akleh at the International Criminal Court (ICC). Israel, which rights groups have accused of imposing a system of apartheid on Palestinians, receives at least \$3.8 billion in U.S. security assistance annually.

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