

Palestine urges ICC arrest warrant for Smotrich over call to starve Gaza

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The Hague, August 8 (RHC)-- The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has called on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to issue an arrest warrant for Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich for saying it may be "justified and moral" to starve Palestinians in Gaza.

In a statement on Thursday, the Foreign Ministry described Smotrich's comments as an "explicit admission of adopting and bragging about the policy of genocide."

"The Ministry further affirmed that such [a] statement is considered a direct disregard for international legitimacy decisions and international consensus on protecting civilians and securing their basic humanitarian needs," the statement said. "It called on the International Criminal Court to issue an arrest warrant against Smotrich for approving and supporting the policy of genocide."

The ministry also urged countries around the world to condemn Smotrich and ban him from entering their territory. Smotrich had said earlier this week that Israel has "no choice" but to allow aid into Gaza in order to maintain what he called "international legitimacy" for the war.

"We can't, in the current global reality, manage a war. No one in the world will allow us to starve two million people, even though it might be justified and moral in order to free the hostages," he said.

Israel has imposed a suffocating blockade on Gaza bringing it the territory to the verge of starvation. Relentless bombing by the Israeli military has also made it difficult to distribute the aid that does enter Gaza.

Nearly 40,000 Palestinians have been killed in 10 months, mostly women and children, and more than 91,600 others injured, according to Gaza's health authorities.

ICC prosecutors are seeking arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his Defence Minister Yaov Gallant, but not for Smotrich.

The far-right finance minister often makes anti-Palestinian statements that stir international outrage. For example, last year, he said the Palestinian village of Huwara in the occupied West Bank should be "wiped out" – a statement that Washington called "repugnant."

Several countries condemned Smorich's latest comments on Gaza. British Foreign Secretary David Lammy called on the Israeli government to retract and condemn the remarks. "International law could not be more clear – the deliberate starvation of civilians is a war crime," Lammy said in a social media post.

The European Union echoed that position. "We expect the Israeli government to unequivocally distance itself from the words of Minister Smotrich, as well as to establish transparency on the reported acts of torture in the Sde Teiman prison," the bloc said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Israeli media outlets have also published footage purporting to show Israeli soldiers sexually assaulting Palestinian detainees at the Sde Teiman prison. Numerous reports have documented horrific abuse at the facility, including rape, torture, starvation and extrajudicial killings.

On Wednesday, the United States urged Israel to investigate allegations of sexual assault against Palestinian detainees. "There ought to be zero tolerance for sexual abuse, rape of any detainee, period. It's a fundamental belief of the United States," said State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller.

"And if there are detainees who have been sexually assaulted or raped, the government of Israel and the [Israeli military] need to fully investigate those actions and hold anyone responsible accountable to the full extent of the law."



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