

*Moshe Yaalon, former Israeli
army chief, admits Israel
committing Gaza war crimes and
ethnic cleansing*



Moshe Yaalon, right, is a former army chief of staff who served as defence minister under

**Netanyahu from 2013 to 2016, and has been a fierce critic of the prime minister ever since
[File: Ronen Zvulun/EPA Pool]**

Tel Aviv, December 2 (RHC)-- Former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon has accused Israel of committing war crimes and ethnic cleansing in the Gaza Strip, echoing the allegations by the International Criminal Court against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former defense minister, Yoav Gallant.

Yaalon, a former army chief of staff, told Israeli media that hardliners in Netanyahu's far-right cabinet were looking to chase Palestinians from northern Gaza and wanted to re-establish Jewish settlements there.

"I am compelled to warn about what is happening there and is being concealed from us," Yaalon told public broadcaster Kan on Sunday. "At the end of the day, war crimes are being committed."

In an interview with the private DemocratTV channel, Yaalon said, "The road we are being led down is conquest, annexation and ethnic cleansing."

Pressed on the "ethnic cleansing" appraisal, he said: "What is happening there? There is no more Beit Lahiya, no more Beit Hanoon, the army intervenes in Jabalia and in reality, the land is being cleared of Arabs."

Yaalon served as defense minister under Netanyahu from 2013 to 2016 and has been a fierce critic of the prime minister ever since. Netanyahu's Likud party accused him of spreading "slanderous lies," while Foreign Minister Gideon Saar, head of a small rightist party, said his accusations were baseless.

The ICC last month issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Gallant for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza conflict.

Palestinians have long accused Israel of carrying out ethnic cleansing in Gaza during the ongoing conflict.

In an interview with Al Jazeera, Palestinian-American historian Rashid Khalidi, the Edward Said professor emeritus of modern Arab studies at Columbia University, said the "genocide" happening in Gaza since October 2023 is "worse than any phase of Palestinian history."

In recent weeks, the Israeli military has intensified attacks on northern Gaza, saying they are targeting Hamas fighters who have regrouped, forcing civilians to flee the area. United Nations agencies say Palestinians are suffering from more than a month of military siege in the north.

On Thursday, Housing Minister Yitzhak Goldknopf visited the Gaza border and backed an initiative to re-establish settlements in the enclave.

"Jewish settlement here is the answer to the terrible [October 7, 2023] massacre and the answer to the International Criminal Court in The Hague," Goldknopf was quoted as saying in Israeli media.

Most world powers deem settlements built in territory Israel seized in the 1967 war as illegal and see their expansion as an obstacle to peace, since they eat away at land the Palestinians want for a future state.

On Sunday, leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) reiterated their calls for an "immediate and permanent" ceasefire in Gaza during their meeting in Kuwait. The leaders "condemned in the strongest terms the shocking and horrific crimes committed by Israeli occupation forces in the Gaza Strip as part of a genocide and ethnic cleansing agenda" against Palestinians. They also welcomed the ICC arrest warrants against Netanyahu and Gallant.

As negotiations continue for an elusive ceasefire, Israeli forces struck Beit Lahya on Monday, killing at least 10 more Palestinians.

Israel's genocide in Gaza has killed at least 44,429 Palestinians and wounded 105,250 since October 7, 2023.

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