

Security Council rejects special Goldstone report session

The United Nations Security Council said Wednesday it would not hold an emergency session on report that accused Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas of committing war crimes during Israel's offensive in Gaza.

The decision came as a rejection to a request submitted by Libya, the only Arab member on the 15-nation council, to hold a meeting dedicated to discussing the report compiled by Richard Goldstone.

Prior to Wednesday's Security Council meet, the Palestinian UN Mission issued a press release saying it affirmed full support for the Libyan request.

The UNSC, however, did decide to bump up a scheduled monthly meeting on the Middle East from October 20th to the 14th, at which time members could discuss the Goldstone report if they chose to do so.

Speaking after two hours of closed-door council procedural discussions, U.S. Deputy Ambassador Alejandro Wolff made clear Washington would not favor any council action resulting from the Oct. 14 debate.

"The report needs to be discussed by the Human Rights Council, and decisions on what next steps and what is the appropriate disposition of this report are decisions that will be taken in Geneva," Wolff told reporters.

The report itself recommends that both Israel and the Gaza authorities investigate the war crimes allegations and that if they do not do so in six months the Security Council should refer the matter to the International Criminal Court.

Libyan Ambassador Mohammed Abdel-Rahman Shalgam said he was not seeking to involve the ICC. "What we want is an open discussion, so that the people and the politicians should be aware about the importance of this report," he said.

Before the meeting, a top U.S. official reiterated the American positions that said that the Human Rights Council would be a better venue in which to discuss the Goldstone report.

"It's on the agenda of the Security Council, a regular Security Council meeting, to discuss the Libyan request," said the State Department Spokesman Ian Kelly.

"I don't think that they're discussing the overall issue, though, which is the Goldstone report," Kelly said, adding that the U.S. believed "that the report raised some very serious allegations that should be reviewed that - but we also believe that these issues should be discussed in a constructive and non-divisive manner."

"And for that reason, we believe that the place for this kind of discussion is in the Human Rights Council."

"We are at a sensitive time in trying to re-launch these negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians," Kelly said, adding that it was imperative that Israel and the Palestinians address the real issue the Goldstone report presents, which is the stunted peace process.

"We should all stay focused on that objective of addressing the underlying causes of the tragic events that are covered in the Goldstone report, which is the lack of a comprehensive peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians and a solution to this longstanding conflict, which we believe, and which both sides also believe they share the same goal of having two states living side by side in peace and security."

Asked on whether the U.S. would consider using its veto power in the Security Council to block a possible discussion of the Goldstone Gaza report, Kelly said that the U.S. believed that "it was in the interest of all concerned, of all who share this common goal of re-launching these negotiations, to delay discussion of this report."

On whether the U.S. position on Goldstone report might harm the US relations with the Muslim world, Kelly answered that there are serious concerns raised in the report that should be addressed.

"The conflict started because missiles were being fired into Israel and the operation was undertaken to stop these attacks on Israel. What we need to do is get to a point where there is peace between the two communities, between the Israelis and the Palestinians," Kelly said.

New York sources said Tuesday that despite recent efforts by the U.S. to prevent a UN resolution on the report, Libya was "waiting for a push" on the behalf of the Muslim nations or the Arab league to initiate a vote on the report's findings.

Another arena where the Goldstone report could come up for vote in the UN's fourth committee, which deals with political issues and holds sessions within the framework of the General Assembly.

A senior Western diplomat told Haaretz that in principle, Libya could convene a General Assembly session on the Goldstone report, but that he thought that "Libya will hesitate to take such an initiative as long as the Palestinian Authority is not interested in such a UN session. Libya will appear ridiculous if the involved party doesn't want a session, and it calls for one."