

## Goldstone rejects Israel protests

Contributed by Egypt News  
Tuesday, 20 October 2009

UN human rights investigator Richard Goldstone has rejected Israel's claim that the peace process would be harmed by his report on the offensive in Gaza.

Judge Goldstone said there was no peace process at present and Israel's foreign minister did not want there to be one.

The Goldstone report, which has been endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council, accuses both Israel and Hamas militants of committing war crimes.

Mr Goldstone's remarks came in a conference call with American rabbis.

"It's a shallow, utterly false allegation," Mr Goldstone said of Israel's attempt to brand his report as an obstacle to peace.

"What peace process are they talking about? There isn't one. The Israeli foreign minister doesn't want one," Mr Goldstone said.

"If the Israeli government set up an appropriate, open investigation, it will really be the end of the matter. That's where the report would end as far as Israel is concerned," he added.

He was speaking days after Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman spoke of his belief that the Arab-Israeli conflict would not be resolved in the coming years, and people should "learn to live with it".

Palestinians and human rights groups say more than 1,400 Gazans were killed in the 22-day conflict that ended in January, but Israel puts the figure at 1,166. Thirteen Israelis, including three civilians, were killed.

In the report, Mr Goldstone calls for the war crimes allegations to be referred to the International Criminal Court at The Hague unless the parties to the Gaza war investigate them.

If the report comes before the UN Security Council, the US is expected to veto any call for ICC action against Israel.

On Tuesday, Israeli ministers met to discuss whether to appoint an independent commission, although until now Israel has rejected the Goldstone recommendations out of hand.

The subject came up at a meeting of the Israel's Security Cabinet, a group of ministers with security-related portfolios.

Defence Minister Ehud Barak, one of the architects of the Gaza invasion, opposes such a probe, saying the military investigations currently being held are sufficient.

Other ministers are more favourable towards the Goldstone proposal, in the hope of defusing an international row which is widely seen to have done damage to Israel's reputation.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is reported not to have made up his mind about a commission of inquiry.

Separately Palestinian Authority President and Fatah party leader Mahmoud Abbas has been holding talks in Cairo with Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak.

It is the latest in a long-running process attempting to reach a reconciliation deal between Fatah and the other main Palestinian faction, Hamas.

Aides of Mr Abbas have accused Hamas, which runs Gaza, of shirking a commitment to sign the Egyptian-mediated agreement after Fatah signed it.

Hamas says it will sign the document as long as there are no clauses added that have not been agreed.

It said its previous request for a postponement was to give it time to study new Egyptian proposals, and to comment on the Goldstone report.

EGYPT NEWS