

# Serious threats against human rights activist in The Netherlands

## International Criminal Court

Nada Kiswanson has been receiving death threats related to her work on the International Criminal Court

Leonie van Nierop 10 August 2016 at 21:08



**The Jordanian-Swedish lawyer Nada Kiswanson – Photo David van Dam**

A foreign lawyer has been receiving serious threats on Dutch soil for half a year. The death threats relate to her work in support of the International Criminal Court, based in The Hague. The lawyer provides the Court with information toward one of its so-called 'preliminary examinations,' which the Court is conducting to assess possible war crimes committed in Palestine by Israel.

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Because the threats relate to her work, and because of the advanced techniques employed by those threatening her, the lawyer suspects that the Israeli services are behind the threats. We "do not wish to respond to such allegations," responded the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

The Dutch authorities are taking the threats very seriously, as evidenced by their interviews with those who have been directly and indirectly impacted. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Security and Justice are aware of the matter, as is the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism. The Dutch Public Prosecution Service (OM) takes the matter, in its own words, "very seriously." The lawyer should receive "protection and security."

As far as is known, this is the first time a human rights activist working with the International Criminal Court has come under threat in the Netherlands.

### **Threatening phone calls**

The lawyer in question is 31-year-old Nada Kiswanson, who works for the Palestinian organization Al Haq. Kiswanson holds Jordanian and Swedish nationalities and resides near The Hague with her Dutch husband and daughter.

She has received threatening phone calls at home. In one instance, she even received flowers accompanied by an intimidating message. Those who have been threatening her have consistently been able to trace Kiswanson's anonymous phone numbers and have contacted her from several different countries.

Prosecutor Simon Minks of the District Public Prosecutor's Office in The Hague, who specializes in international crimes like war crimes and terrorism, is heading the investigation. The prosecution is investigating "various scenarios," and although it cannot draw any conclusions while the investigation is ongoing, at this stage it has not excluded the possibility that Israel is behind the threats. There are several international legal assistance requests outstanding in relation to the investigation.

### **The Netherlands as Host State**

An International Criminal Court spokesperson called the threats "very worrying." Non-governmental organizations like Al Haq are "crucial to the work of the Court." The Court relies on NGOs, among others, to provide information that can trigger the decision to open a formal criminal case.

The Court has contacted Dutch authorities to help "take the necessary steps and to underline that the Court takes the threat seriously." The Court spokesperson stressed that The Netherlands as the host country is "legally obliged to protect NGO staff members who work with the Court."

NGOs are also themselves very concerned. Amnesty International temporarily closed its office in The Hague after an email account was hacked, an attack that appears related to the

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threats against Kiswanson. Three other NGOs working with the ICC also recently closed their offices as a precautionary measure.

"This is a very sensitive issue," said a spokesperson for Amnesty. "The Netherlands is rightfully proud of its good support to human rights abroad. That a human rights activist is now threatened on its own soil is very bad for the Dutch reputation."

Minister of Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders (Labour Party) in May called the threats "serious" and "unacceptable" in a non-public letter to the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH).