

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2024  
7:00 p.m.  
VIRTUAL (Zoom)

Members Present

Marc Bendick, Vice Chair  
Lisl Brunner  
April Breslaw  
Iulia Fratila  
Matt Harris  
Manisha Maniyar  
Elisabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson, Vice Chair  
Megan Prince  
Tom Reeder, Jr.  
David Rigsby  
Scott Schwartz  
Jon Thompson, Chair

Staff Present

Anna McClure, Investigator/Acting Director  
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez, Admin. Support  
David Miller, Investigator/Acting Director

Members Unexcused

Conrad Sylvanus

**1. Call to Order/Introductions by Chair Jon Thompson**

Chair Thompson called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

**2. Approval of the Minutes of the November Meeting**

Commissioner Schwartz requested a correction to reflect that he was a no vote on re-sending the Palestinian support letter to City Council. Upon a motion by Commissioner Harris, seconded by Commissioner Prince, the Commission approved the minutes of the November meeting, with the correction. All Commissioners present voted aye.

**3. Executive Committee/Old & New Business**

Community Policing Review Board ordinance update

Chair Thompson shared that Kim Neal, the Independent Policing Auditor, passed away on December 13. He suggested sending condolences to the Auditor's Office staff and to the Board. Chair Thompson will draft the condolences send it to Investigator/Acting Director McClure.

Chair Thompson gave an update on the Community Policing Review Board (CPRB). He said that it had been the Executive Board's understanding that the CPRB and Auditor were on the same page about the subpoena power. However, he and Commissioner Schwartz attended a public meeting, hosted by the Auditor's office, at which it was apparent, from questions asked by CPRB members attending in their individual capacities, that the Auditor's office shares the City's view that the CPRB should not have subpoena power and that it should reside with City Council. The CPRB members disagree and want the Board and the Auditor to retain subpoena power. Chair Thompson said that it is not clear whether the new Acting Auditor will have that viewpoint, but it is clear that the CPRB strongly supports retaining subpoena power. He said another proposed edit to the ordinance would restrict the CPRB's ability to initiate investigations; specifically, the wording was changed to say the CPRB can *request* an investigation.

Commissioner Schwartz said the discussion got heated, and he saw a big gap on two issues. One was whether the CPRB could direct an investigation, rather than the Auditor directing it, and the other was subpoena authority. CPRB members were vocal in expressing that the proposed revision to the ordinance appears to take away their authority to initiate an investigation. He thinks they have to reassess the various roles and the relationship between the Auditor and CPRB. He said he was under the impression that the CPRB wanted the Auditor to have authority to subpoena witnesses. The Auditor's Office representative expressed her belief that the Auditor does not need that authority. Commissioner Schwartz said he believes subpoena authority is important, because it gives teeth to the ability to conduct an independent investigation.

Commissioner Brunner asked what the Commission's capacity is to influence this decision. Commissioner Schwartz said they have talked to several Council members, and they are waiting for the outcome of public meetings and listening sessions the Auditor is conducting. Commissioner Schwartz stated that he has a meeting with the new Mayor, on January 23. Chair Thompson stated that the Commission's point going forward is to support the CPRB members in their view that they should retain investigatory power.

Chair Thompson said that, from his conversations with Council members, the majority support the Commission having a non-voting seat on the CPRB. The CPRB is ok with this proposal, as well, but the Auditor's office is clear that they do not support it. Chair Thompson said the objection is that, as a public meeting, anyone can attend or send someone, so what would the Commission get by having a liaison seat? Chair Thompson and Commissioner Schwartz responded that the Commission would get access to certain correspondence and be kept in the loop. Chair Thompson also told them it is important because the Commission represents many diverse communities. Chair Thompson said he can draft a letter in support of investigative and subpoena authority to send to Council before the public hearing on the ordinance. Upon the motion by Vice Chair Bendick, seconded by Chair Thompson, the Commission will support the position that CPRB should have the ability to initiate investigations, in addition to the positions of support previously voted on regarding the CPRB. The motion passed unanimously.

#### Resolution on Immigrant Protections

Chair Thompson stated that, since the last meeting, Governor Youngkin released a budget proposal listing Alexandria as a jurisdiction he is threatening to remove state funding from, because of existing ordinance that he believes qualifies it as a sanctuary city. Commissioner Harris drafted a resolution to City Council, requesting they bolster their efforts to protect immigrant communities. After discussions with some Council members, Commissioner Harris thinks the Commission should step back to allow Council to assess the situation. Vice Chair Bendick introduced the resolution to be voted on next month. He stated that the resolution is to renew support for the previous ordinance in support of immigrants, which is dated 2007, so is not recent. He said that, while this might not be the moment to do anything, it is important to put the issue on the table and start thinking about it, so that when the new federal administration comes in and more clarity emerges about what will happen at the state level, the Commission will be prepared to make a statement. Vice Chair Bendick asked the Commission to place this draft resolution in the meeting minutes and to table it, pending further developments and discussion. Chair Thompson stated that the goal is to first defer to City Council, which will ultimately decide on any resolution or letter that the Commission sends. Vice Chair Bendick withdrew his motion.

### January Human Rights Panel

Chair Thompson said next month's meeting is planned as a small panel discussion with Jean Kelleher, an ACLU representative, and possibly someone from the City Attorney's office, about what to expect from the new federal administration and some of the issues that we might face in the coming years. He asked Anna McClure to send an invitation to all City Council member. She explained that this would require the meeting to be noticed as a City Council meeting and stated she would seek guidance. Commissioner Schwartz suggested inviting Tenant and Workers. Commissioner Breslaw will a representative from the State Delegation.

### Rainbow Crosswalks – Del Ray

Commissioner Harris stated that he had been put in touch with Lauren Fisher, President of the Del Ray Business Association. He will be meeting with her after the holidays to map out a strategy and to get needed support from City Council, if they can get past funding issues.

### Follow up on ceasefire resolution

Chair Thompson stated that Acting Director McClure circulated the draft ceasefire letter that the Commission will re-send to City Council. Because the new Council is not yet in session, the Executive Committee has decided to wait until January to send the letter. Commissioner Breslaw suggested making some small changes to the letter before sending it.

### ACPS Invitation - March

Chair Thompson said he circulated a draft letter to Alexandria City Public Schools to see if they can send someone from their Human Resources Department and someone from Administration who deals with student discipline. The thought is to send the invitation for the March meeting.

## **4. Liaison Reports**

Commissioner Reeder reported that the Commission on Aging is gearing up to revise and update their Alexandria Age Friendly plan. There is a kickoff meeting, on January 17, and he encouraged Commissioners to complete the survey to provide input for the plan. He said they heard from Birmingham Green, a senior living facility in Manassas that, Alexandria is a co-owner of and has 17 spaces there.

Commissioner Prince said the Commission on Persons with Disabilities did not have a quorum.

## **5. Public Comment**

The Commission heard from several community members, who provided statements on the conflict between Palestine and Israel. They expressed concerns about taxpayer dollars being used to fund the Virginia Israel Advisory Board and asked the Commission to recommend to City Council that the City divest from all investments in Israel.

## **6. Announcements /Adjournment**

**MOTION:** Adjourn the meeting.

Chair Thompson/Commissioner Schwartz **PASSED** unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:53 p.m.

Rose Esber, Human Rights Commission Meeting, December 17, 2024

The City of Alexandria invests in weapons manufactures. Those investments make Alexandria complicit in genocide and ethnic cleansing in Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria.

Amnesty International found **that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. Amnesty concluded**, “Our damning findings must serve as a wake-up call to the international community: this is genocide. It must stop now.

The International Court of Justice found that Israel is committing plausible genocide. The ICJ also found Israel is guilty of apartheid and racial discrimination. The court has placed responsibility with all states and the United Nations to end these violations of international law. The ICJ also ruled that Israel’s occupation of Palestinian lands is unlawful and must end.

The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Does Alexandria value Palestinian lives?

Palestinian writer Susan Abulhawa asks what if the roles were reversed. “What if Palestinians had spent the last eight decades stealing Jewish homes, expelling, oppressing, imprisoning, poisoning, torturing, raping and killing Jews; if Palestinians had killed an estimated 300,000 Jews in one year, targeted their journalists, their thinkers, their healthcare workers, their athletes, their artists, bombed every Israeli hospital, university, library, museum, cultural center, and synagogue.”

“If Palestinians had corralled Jews by the hundreds of thousands into flimsy tents, bombed them in so-called safe zones, burned them alive, cut off their food, water, and medicine; if Palestinians made Jewish children wander barefoot with empty pots; made them gather the flesh of their parents into plastic bags; made them bury their siblings, cousins, and friends; made them sneak out from their tents in the middle of the night to sleep on their parents’ graves; made them pray for death just to join their families and not be alone in this terrible world anymore.”

We ask the Human Rights Commission to recommend that The City of Alexandria **screen all its investments to uphold international human rights laws and environmental safeguards.** Investing in a genocidal apartheid occupying state is illegal, immoral, anti-Arab, anti-Muslim, anti-Christian, and anti-Jewish. Maintaining Alexandria’s current investments is profiting from genocide, ecocide, and crimes against humanity. Please recommend that City Council adopt a human rights and environmental screen for **all city investments.** Thank you.

## **ISRAELI APARTHEID EXPLAINED**

### **Excerpt from International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion (July 1, 2024)<sup>1</sup> finding apartheid perpetrated by Israel in East Jerusalem and West Bank:**

224. *A number of participants have argued that Israel's policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory amount to segregation or apartheid, in breach of Article 3 of CERD [International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination].*

225. *Article 3 of CERD provides as follows: "States Parties particularly condemn racial segregation and apartheid and undertake to prevent, prohibit and eradicate all practices of this nature in territories under their jurisdiction." This provision refers to two particularly severe forms of racial discrimination: racial segregation and apartheid.*

226. *The Court observes that Israel's policies and practices in the West Bank and East Jerusalem implement a separation between the Palestinian population and the settlers transferred by Israel to the territory.*

227. *This separation is first and foremost physical: Israel's settlement policy furthers the fragmentation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the encirclement of Palestinian communities into enclaves. As a result of discriminatory policies and practices such as the imposition of a residence permit system and the use of distinct road networks, which the Court has discussed above, Palestinian communities remain physically isolated from each other and separated from the communities of settlers (see, for example, paragraphs 200 and 219).*

228. *The separation between the settler and Palestinian communities is also juridical. As a result of the partial extension of Israeli law to the West Bank and East Jerusalem, settlers and Palestinians are subject to distinct legal systems in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (see paragraphs 135-137 above). To the extent that Israeli law applies to Palestinians, it imposes on them restrictions, such as the requirement for a permit to reside in East Jerusalem, from which settlers are exempt. In addition, Israel's legislation and measures that have been applicable for decades treat Palestinians differently from settlers in a wide range of fields of individual and social activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem (see paragraphs 192-222 above).*

229. *The Court observes that Israel's legislation and measures impose and serve to maintain a near-complete separation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem between the settler and Palestinian communities. For this reason, the Court considers that Israel's legislation and measures constitute a breach of Article 3 of CERD.*

### **Conditions in 1985 South Africa which compelled HRC and City Council to issue divestment resolutions ("the Sullivan Principles"), compared to conditions in Occupied Palestinian Territories**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/186/186-20240719-adv-01-00-en.pdf>

The Sullivan Principles are a code of conduct developed by Reverend Leon Sullivan in the 1977 to determine if South Africa was committing apartheid.

<b>Deprivations in 1985 South Africa (per HRC and City Council Resolutions) (Sullivan Principles)</b>	<b>Deprivations in Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories (before and after October 2023)</b>
Right to vote	The 5.5 million Palestinians living under Israeli occupation in West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza cannot vote in Israeli elections. <sup>2</sup>
Right to run for political office	Palestinians in the occupied territories cannot run for political office in Israel. <sup>3</sup>
Freedom of movement	In the West Bank, Palestinian communities are continuously displaced, <sup>4</sup> their homes demolished and invaded by settlers (Israel has built more than 290 illegal settlements in the West Bank). <sup>5</sup> The Palestinian communities are cut off from each other and within themselves - including farmers being restricted access to their own olive trees - by Israeli settler communities (whose continuous encroachment is enforced by the Israeli military), checkpoints, and Israel-built walls and fences. <sup>6</sup> Israel requires Palestinians to obtain special, hard-to-obtain permits to travel between West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. <sup>7</sup> Israel further maintains a segregated road system in the West Bank: cars with Palestinian license plates are not allowed on Israeli-designated roads; even on the Palestinian-designated roads, these cars have restricted access, being subjected to checkpoints and roadblocks. <sup>8</sup> The Palestinian-designated roads are long and winding, causing innumerable delays to the drivers. <sup>9</sup> In 2019, Israel established an

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.btselem.org/publications/202210\\_not\\_a\\_vibrant\\_democracy\\_this\\_is\\_apartheid](https://www.btselem.org/publications/202210_not_a_vibrant_democracy_this_is_apartheid)

<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/02/israels-apartheid-against-palestinians-a-cruel-system-of-domination-and-a-crime-against-humanity/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2024/israel-occupation-illustrated-guide/>

<sup>6</sup>

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/israeli-settlements-and-the-expanding-divide-of-settlers-and-palestinians/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.btselem.org/freedom\\_of\\_movement](https://www.btselem.org/freedom_of_movement)

<sup>8</sup> <https://visualizingpalestine.org/visual/segregated-roads-west-bank/>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/200408\\_forbidden\\_roads](https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/200408_forbidden_roads)

	<p>“apartheid highway” which uses a concrete wall to separate Palestinian and Israeli settler traffic.<sup>10</sup> Israel tears down Palestinian homes and villages to build the West Bank road network, the main purpose of which is to connect its settlements to Jerusalem (which is illegally annexed by Israel) so as to legitimize annexing the settlements as well in the future.<sup>11</sup></p>
<p>Freedom of speech</p>	<p>During the overwhelmingly nonviolent Great March of Return demonstrations in 2018-19, when Palestinians protested near the Gaza border fence for an end to the blockade and the right to return to their historical homes, the Israeli military shot and killed approximately 214 protestors, including 46 children, and wounded 8,000 others.<sup>12</sup> Per Amnesty International, Israel committed these killings and maimings despite the unarmed protesters presenting no imminent harm, including shooting protesters in the back and deliberately inflicting life-altering injuries by targeting protesters’ knees.<sup>13</sup> In October 2023, Israeli police arrested over 100 Israeli Palestinians for purely their social media activity.<sup>14</sup></p>
<p>Freedom of the press</p>	<p>Between 2000 and October 2023, Israel murdered at least 20 journalists while they were reporting in the occupied West Bank (18 of the Palestinian), and injured hundreds of others.<sup>15</sup> Among them was Shireen Abu Akleh, a Palestinian and American citizen who was shot and killed by the Israeli military. Israel has not punished any personnel for these killings. Since October 7, 2023, Israel</p>

<sup>10</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/a0c47ad493fb4b31a444bfe432194f2e>

<sup>11</sup>

<https://www.nrc.no/shorthand/stories/in-the-west-bank-segregated-roads-displace-palestinians/index.html>

<sup>12</sup>

<https://www.un.org/unispal/document/two-years-on-people-injured-and-traumatized-during-the-great-march-of-return-are-still-struggling/>

<sup>13</sup>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/04/israel-arms-embargo-needed-as-military-unlawfully-kills-and-maims-gaza-protesters/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67181582>

<sup>15</sup>

<https://www.npr.org/2023/05/11/1175403626/palestinian-american-journalist-shireen-abu-akleh-was-killed-a-year-ago>

	<p>has killed approximately 201 journalists in Gaza (including five on December 25, 2024),<sup>16</sup> and has not allowed in foreign journalists unless accompanied by Israeli military.<sup>17</sup> Many of the killings were targeted strikes on the journalists' homes (at least 56) and clearly marked press vehicles. This is the deadliest conflict for reporters in recorded history, surpassing World War II and the Vietnam War.<sup>18</sup></p>
<p>Right of citizenship</p>	<p>Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza are not given citizenship and are considered stateless. Palestinians in occupied and annexed East Jerusalem are given permanent resident status but not citizenship, and since 1967, over 14,000 Palestinians have had their residency revoked by Israel and expelled from East Jerusalem. Palestinian citizens of Israel are denied a nationality, and are identified as a lower form of citizen than Jews.<sup>19</sup></p>
<p>Total segregation and pervasive discrimination in employment and virtually every day-to-day activity</p>	<p>In addition to the deprivations above: Israel tries Palestinian children in the occupied territories in military court (the only country in the world to do so for children), while Israeli and settler children are tried in civil courts.<sup>20</sup> Israel holds thousands of Palestinians in detention, without trial for years, and rapes and tortures many prisoners, some to death.<sup>21</sup> In the West Bank, Israel restricts Palestinians' access to water (while settlers have unrestricted access), and forbids them from constructing wells or other water installations or even collecting rainwater. As such, Israel forces Palestinians to buy their own water (which Israel illegally occupies) from Israeli companies at exorbitant prices.<sup>22</sup> Israel further designs its settlements so that their wastewater flows into the Palestinian</p>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/info/infographic/42899>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2024/12/26/g-s1-40026/israeli-strike-kills-5-palestinian-journalists-gaza>

<sup>18</sup> <https://theintercept.com/2024/06/25/israel-gaza-war-journalists-killed/>

<sup>19</sup> See footnote 4.

<sup>20</sup> [https://nwtac.dci-palestine.org/fact\\_sheet\\_palestinian\\_children\\_in\\_israeli\\_military\\_detention](https://nwtac.dci-palestine.org/fact_sheet_palestinian_children_in_israeli_military_detention)

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/publications/202408\\_welcome\\_to\\_hell\\_eng.pdf](https://www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/publications/202408_welcome_to_hell_eng.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/11/the-occupation-of-water/>



communities. <sup>23</sup>
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### **Ethnic cleansing and genocide on top of apartheid**

In order to tighten its grip on Palestinian land and resources, Israel has accelerated its ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and commenced a genocide. While Israel has been ethnically cleansing Palestinians for decades since the 1940s, it has ramped up this war crime to unprecedented levels since October 2023: in the West Bank, by making the biggest land grabs in 30 years<sup>24</sup> for the purpose of illegal settlement building, and arming<sup>25</sup> and giving military protection to settlers as they attack Palestinian communities;<sup>26</sup> and in Gaza, by bombing, starving and forcefully displacing millions civilians so as to depopulate entire regions.<sup>27</sup> Doctors Without Borders found that there are “clear signs of ethnic cleansing as Palestinian life is being wiped off the area” of northern Gaza by Israel.<sup>28</sup>

A growing number of authorities agree that Israel is committing a genocide against Palestinians. South Africa, joined by 14 other countries,<sup>29</sup> brought this charge to the International Court of Justice, which has found it “plausible” as it investigates further.<sup>30</sup> More recently, Amnesty International concluded that Israel is committing genocide, with an “intent to destroy” Palestinians, whom it treats as “subhuman,” and further stated that all states that assist Israel risk being complicit in genocide.<sup>31</sup> Human Rights Watch similarly found that Israel is committing “acts of genocide” by intentionally depriving Palestinians of access to water.<sup>32</sup> Separately, HRW co-founder and Holocaust survivor Aryeh Neier stated that Israel has been committing genocide

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<https://www.nrc.no/news/2024/march/west-bank-israeli-settlement-wastewater-destroys-palestinian-lands-and-livelihoods/>

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<https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jul/04/israel-has-approved-largest-west-bank-land-grab-in-30-years-watchdog-says>

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<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israeli-army-to-give-more-weapons-to-illegal-settlers-in-west-bank-report/3235477>

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[https://www.npr.org/2024/03/23/1236628495/israel-settlers-attack-west-bank-palestinians-settlement-outposts?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR1pruPv88TE03Ygewhti2HuzLjrQL4Bcn1gjLRB23sn7wflYoz0wT1wibA\\_aem\\_L0vLrEFcPX7YfPH4F\\_AybA](https://www.npr.org/2024/03/23/1236628495/israel-settlers-attack-west-bank-palestinians-settlement-outposts?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR1pruPv88TE03Ygewhti2HuzLjrQL4Bcn1gjLRB23sn7wflYoz0wT1wibA_aem_L0vLrEFcPX7YfPH4F_AybA)

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<https://www.cnn.com/2024/12/02/middleeast/israel-idf-gaza-moshe-yaalon-palestinians-ethnic-cleansing-intl/index.html>

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<sup>29</sup> <https://unric.org/en/south-africa-vs-israel-14-other-countries-intend-to-join-the-icj-case/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2024/01/26/1227078791/icj-israel-genocide-gaza-palestinians-south-africa>

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<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/amnesty-international-concludes-israel-is-committing-genocide-against-palestinians-in-gaza/>

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<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/amnesty-international-concludes-israel-is-committing-genocide-against-palestinians-in-gaza/>

by obstructing the delivery of humanitarian assistance.<sup>33</sup> Oxfam International reported that Israel has killed more women and children in the past year than any conflict in an equivalent time frame in the past 20 years.<sup>34</sup> The International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Gaza, including withholding aid and medical supplies, using starvation as a weapon of war, and intentionally attacking civilians.<sup>35</sup>

The above makes clear that Israel is a rouge state, committing some of the worst crimes in human history including apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and genocide, and Alexandria must divest from any businesses complicit in such crimes.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0j1rk0c>

<sup>34</sup>

<https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/more-women-and-children-killed-gaza-israeli-military-any-other-recent-conflict>

<sup>35</sup>

<https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-state-palestine-icc-pre-trial-chamber-i-rejects-state-israels-challenges>