



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on December 21, 2023

South Africa Pressures ICC to Charge Israel With War Crimes

On December 18, South Africa submitted all requisite paperwork to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to charge Israel with war crimes over the latter's operations in Gaza, President Cyril Ramaphosa declared, based on reports by local outlet Eyewitness News.

More than 19,000 people, mostly women and children, have been killed in Israeli air and ground strikes in Gaza since Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged to "eliminate" Hamas in response to the Palestinian terrorist group's October 7 brutal cross-border attacks, in which it killed about 1,200 people and took 240 hostages.



AP Images
Cyril Ramaphosa

Last month, President Ramaphosa denounced the Hamas incursion during an emergency virtual BRICS+ meeting, denouncing the terrorist group for breaching international law.

"We condemn all acts of violence ... including those aimed at Israeli civilians," Ramaphosa said, adding that "civilians must be protected in accordance with international humanitarian law."

The South African leader, nonetheless, maintained that Israel was perpetuating genocide, blaming the ongoing conflict on Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory.

Ramaphosa had hitherto [urged](#) the ICC to launch a probe into Israel for its actions in the conflict with Hamas, and had filed a request for this probe with various other countries.

Since October 7 and the intensification of military clashes between Israel and Hamas, diplomatic relations between South Africa and Israel have taken a nosedive.

Pretoria has long backed the Palestinian struggle for sovereignty, comparing it to South Africa's own efforts against apartheid in the 20th century.

Late last month, the country's lawmakers [backed](#) a motion to suspend ties with Israel until Netanyahu pledges to a cease-fire in the Palestinian territory.

The resolution, put forward by the leftist opposition party Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), obtained a majority vote of 248 during a parliamentary session, with 91 MPs voting against it.

While South Africa's ruling party, the African National Congress, had [promised](#) to support the motion to sever diplomatic ties with Israel, its enforcement ultimately is in the hands of Ramaphosa's government.

"The president and cabinet are engaged over the matter, which remains the responsibility of the national executive," presidency spokesperson Vincent Magwenya said, as reported by Reuters.

Furthermore, African National Congress (ANC) spokeswoman Mahlengi Bhengu-Motsiri said the party would authorize legislation to cut ties with Israel until the latter agreed to a ceasefire in Gaza.



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“We cannot sit back and watch the genocidal actions of the Israeli regime,” the spokeswoman said. “The African National Congress will agree to a parliamentary motion which calls upon the government to close the Israel embassy in South Africa and suspend all diplomatic relations with Israel.”

For its part, Israel recalled its ambassador from Pretoria, quoting remarks made by South African officials against the Jewish state as the reason. Pretoria had previously withdrawn its envoy and diplomatic staff from the country, as had Bolivia, Belize, Bahrain, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Honduras, Jordan, and Türkiye.

Ramaphosa reportedly urged that the ICC start its investigation into alleged war crimes perpetrated by Israel as soon as possible.

“Once a case has been referred to them, they need to take it up seriously. So South Africa, as well as a number of other countries, are presenting their full documentation to the ICC,” Eyewitness News [quoted](#) the South African president as saying.

Meanwhile, Pretoria has [cautioned](#) South Africans against joining the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in the Gaza conflict, citing the risk of breaching domestic and international law.

“Any person joining the IDF without the necessary permission of the NCACC (National Conventional Arms Control Committee) is breaking the law and can be prosecuted,” the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation said in a statement.

[Besides South Africa](#), Iran, which will officially join BRICS next month, has called on the alliance to label the Israeli government and military as terrorist groups over alleged atrocities against Palestinians.



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