

EVAP Ep. 5: Omar Shakir

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SPEAKERS

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall, Omar Shakir



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 00:12

Welcome to Expert voices on atrocity prevention by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. I'm Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall, Research Director at the Global Centre. This podcast features one-on-one conversations with practitioners from the fields of human rights, conflict prevention and atrocity prevention. These conversations will give us a glimpse of the personal and professional side of how practitioners approach human rights protection and atrocity prevention, allowing us to explore challenges, identify best practices and share lessons learned on how we can protect populations more effectively. Our guest on this episode is Omar Shakir, Israel and Palestine Director at Human Rights Watch. Prior to his current role, Omar was a Bertha Fellow at the Center for Constitutional Rights, where he focused on US counterterrorism policies, including legal representation of Guantanamo detainees. As the 2013-2014, Arthur R. and Barbara D. Finberg, Fellow at Human Rights Watch, he investigated human rights violations in Egypt. Thank you for joining us today, Omar.



Omar Shakir 01:15

Thank you for having me, Jackie.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 01:17

Omar, you've been focused on human rights since the start of your education. What drew you to working in this field.



Omar Shakir 01:23

So I grew up as an Arab or Muslim American in the United States, I was in high school and college around the time of not only September 11th, but the immediate aftermath, the Bush administration response, you know, Guantanamo, the war in Iraq, and growing up during that time that sort of sparked, you know, my concern about events that were taking place to involve human rights here and abroad. And that sparked an academic interest. So when I began as a college student, I sort of dove in took classes, read books, found myself at the library, trying to understand more about what was going on in the region. They felt like there was a disconnect between what I had felt I understood, watching sort of mainstream news coverage, knowing what I'd heard at home, you know, from family and friends that were affected by events. And that sparked an interest that has sort of continued since. In university I studied abroad. I did a thesis as an undergraduate on the opposition movement in Egypt. I traveled across the Middle East. When I graduated college, I knew I wanted to dedicate my life to human rights, especially as concerned the Middle East and the US, especially in the kind of post September 11th context. And it was always a matter of figuring out what was the best way to pursue that goal. So after college, I did a Fulbright Scholarship in Syria. So I spent a year living in Damascus. I then did a master's degree in Arab studies, where I really dove into better understanding contemporary political, economic, social issues across the region, before beginning my law degree. And during the course of my law degree, I had the opportunity to work from a tribunal on Lebanon in The Hague, to working for the ACLU to a local public defender to doing human rights work through my university human rights clinic. And ultimately, I left law school and began my career in human rights. I covered Egypt. You know, as you mentioned, looking at human rights abuses there for Human Rights Watch, I worked on Guantanamo representing men detained there. And for the last four and a half years, I've been working on Israel and Palestine.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 03:40

And how did you sort of transition from, I guess, your work on Guantanamo to eventually serving as Israel Palestine director at Human Rights Watch,



Omar Shakir 03:51

My first job out of law school was working for Human Rights Watch covering Egypt. And it was a really difficult time there. It was immediately after the military coup, and where

protesters were being gunned down on the streets. And it was an incredibly challenging experience but it was quite powerful to play a role and documenting one of the world's largest single day killings of protesters in modern times. I had the opportunity to stay at Human Rights Watch thereafter but I was also eager to dive into events in the US, especially towards the end of the Obama administration, when there felt like there was a moment to, you know, move, make progress towards closing Guantanamo, and where there was a need we felt to really make a progress on those issues. I was also eager professionally to experience a different type of organization to work on litigation. So I transition to that work, but all the while, of course, keeping a close eye on events throughout the Middle East throughout the Arab world. When the opportunity presented itself at the end of my fellowship after I'd finished two years at the Center for Constitutional Rights to dive into a role where I could work on Human Rights Watch's advocacy and reporting on Israel/Palestine it felt like a good opportunity. It felt like an opportunity to make progress on human rights issues in the context of, you know, a decade's old situation in which the status quo has gone on for too long, or you've seen cycles of bloodshed and oppression, where the same types of abuses have happened year over year. So I felt there was an opportunity, you know, to sort of dive into that work and see if I could wrap my head around how we can sort of make progress in an intractable situation that felt stuck.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 05:43

I know that two years ago, or almost two years ago, you were deported from Israel for the work you were doing to document these violations. What were the circumstances that led to that?



05:54

So there's a long standing Israeli campaign to really clamp down on the work of human rights organizations and Human Rights Watch very much got caught in the crosshairs. It actually began, in the first weeks of my job at Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch applied for a permit that would allow it to hire a foreign employee. It's a two step process that begins with the organization getting clearance, and then for this specific employee to get a work permit. So the Israeli Foreign Ministry gave an opinion that led to the Interior Ministry denying a work permit for Human Rights Watch in early 2017 on the basis that Human Rights Watch, in their words, were propagandists for the Palestinians. That story went public and the Israeli government, you know, quickly was backtracking and eventually the organization was granted that work permit and I received a work visa under it in April of 2017. A day after though my receiving of the permit, a lawsuit was filed in Israeli civil court, by pro-government NGO that sought to cite a recently passed Israeli

law that authorizes the interior minister to deny entry to those who call for boycotts of Israel. This group alleged that Human Rights Watch, and me as its representative, support boycotts, and that therefore, I should be revoked of my work permit. That lawsuit triggered a, you know, months long investigation at the Interior Ministry. And they made a decision in May of 2018, to revoke my work permit at the time, the allegation was that I had a track record, in their words, of supporting boycotts. They focused mostly on my activism years ago, as a college student. They gave me 14 days to leave the country. We filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of that decision under Israeli law, as well as under international law. We received an injunction by the Israeli courts that allowed me to stay while we fought the issue in the Israeli court system. We spent the next year and a half winding our way all the way up to the Israeli Supreme Court. The Israeli government argument morphed through this process and by the time it reached Supreme Court, the discussion was as much about, if not more about, Human Rights Watch's work, you know, as it was about my own work. There were long debates in Israeli courtrooms about my tweets. Human Rights Watch made clear that everything I've said, you know, they stand by, that I've been promoting the organization's position and work. And that, of course, you know, they have the right to hire whoever, in that whoever is hired, you know, adheres to the organization's mission. And of course, Human Rights Watch takes no position on boycotts of Israel. What we do, as part of our universal work is document human rights abuses, by corporations, like by governments, and we call for those corporations to respect human rights. We don't call for them, those companies, to boycott Israel. We certainly don't call for consumers to boycott companies. So there was really a misrepresentation of our position, even though the Israeli government initially in this process, acknowledge that Human Rights Watch did not call for boycotts. But the Supreme Court upheld the decision by Israel's Interior Ministry, not only supporting my deportation, but making clear that even if you support companies not doing business in settlements, because, you know, that entails rights abuses, that that's a form of boycott, and that's grounds for denying entry and even deporting somebody. And pursuant to that the Israeli government in November of 2019, gave me 20 days to leave the country. And on the ninth night of the 20th day I left. I left Israel and I've been continuing my job across the Jordan River in Jordan since then.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 09:56

And how has that impacted your capacity to do investigations or interviews of populations within Israel and the Occupied Territories?



Omar Shakir 10:08

So on one hand, it certainly affected our work. Human Rights Watch works in nearly 100

countries around the world, and, of course, on the ground investigations are a critical part of our methodology. On the other hand, we found other means to continue doing work, continuing to cover the same issues with the same methodology and intensity. We've done so via several different methods. One is we have a team of local staff on the ground who are very professional, well qualified, worked side by side with me while I was on the ground for two and a half years. In addition, we've supplemented our capacity. So we've had foreign staff fly in when there's particularly sensitive research that we're conducting, of course, that was limited by the pandemic. And of course, especially amid the pandemic, when much of us have sort of adjusted to ways to work virtually, Human Rights Watch has done the same. And we've relied on, you know, of course, phone, video, but also alternative means of verification of information. We've done whole reports in places like Syria, China, where we don't have access on the ground, but yet are able to sort of use various technological means to be able to document facts. And of course, in Israel/Palestine, the information and verification of it is often less difficult than the analysis, then the, you know, sort of credibility, the non partisanship that comes with it. So using these varieties means we've continued our work at the same degree of intensity and covering the very same issues. Where it's been more challenging, candidly, as our interactions with governments because it's harder for our local staff to do that work, especially with the Palestinian authorities, ironically. Where I was the person on the ground that would go and meet with Palestinian officials to press them, for example, on arbitrary arrests or torture or gender related issues, that's harder to do virtually. It's also of course, been a loss for Israeli Palestinian human rights organizations and victims, because while they have access to us virtually in our teams on the ground, it's different having somebody in my position that's able to meet them, you know, face to face in person. Again, with the pandemic. You know, this has been a cost many have faced working remotely, but, you know, we're continuing our work. And we won't give these Israeli government or, frankly, any government that blocks us access to the ability to veto our work or to, you know, hurt our work product. It only, you know, pushes us to double down on the work and to find other ways of ensuring we do it with the same quality and vigor.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 12:49

That's really impressive how I feel like everyone has been able to in some way or another turn the pandemic into a bit of a positive at times, when it comes to doing interviews and research. This is definitely an issue area that we've been interested in for many years, lots of commission's of inquiry, authorized by the UN and panels of experts, similarly are blocked access to countries and we're always interested in in how that verification process works. As you as you mentioned earlier, you know, the situation in Israel and Palestine has been worsening for decades. This isn't sort of a conflict that has emerged in the last couple of years and will swiftly go away. You know, Palestinians have been facing

institutional discrimination and repression, much of which amounts to collective punishment. There are plenty of other crimes occurring in the region. How does the region end up here with such pervasive and systematic violations of international human rights?



Omar Shakir 13:56

I think the sad answer and it's not unique to Israel/Palestine, I mean, it's you can see similar trends in Egypt, which I use to cover Syria across the region, is impunity. It's the failure to hold perpetrators of serious abuses accountable for their actions. The reality here is for 54 years, on every day, you've seen the Israeli government carry out serious abuses against Palestinians. That includes, of course, the buildings of settlements, which are illegal under international law, and the erection of the two tiered system that accompanies settlements, the plundering of Palestinian land, the expropriation of resources, the denial of building permits, the home demolitions while Jewish Israeli settlers receive these things in abundance, the application of dual legal regimes, the draconian nature of the military rule of Palestinians, the discriminatory access to resources, and of course, the, you know, unlawful killings that can sometimes take the form of, you know, use of deliberate and intentional lethal force in situations that go beyond what international law authorizes. And the list frankly goes on. And when these activities take place year after year, and there's no consequences for it, and where much of the international community either turns a blind eye or fails to bring to bear the sorts of tools that a situation of this gravity warrants, things continue. And I think one of the problems has been the framing. For too long people have viewed the situation as a temporary situation as one that a peace process will soon cure. But a 54-year occupation is not temporary, a 30-year peace process cannot on its own dismantle systematic, you know, repression. The idea here, that, you know, there's a situation of parity between two equal parties is frankly belied by the reality on the ground where a single government, you know, rules over an area, the Israeli government between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, where two groups of roughly equal size live and we're one is methodically privileged, Jewish Israeli, and the other, Palestinians, are systematically repressed at varying degrees of intensity. And the basic understanding of that dynamic has been obscured, you know, over the years by the assumptions that are, frankly, just false or fig leaves for the actual underlying reality. Apartheid is no longer a hypothetical or a future scenario as it was in 1974, when Yitzhak Rabin warned about apartheid, or in 2006, when Jimmy Carter did the same, or when John Kerry in 2014, said we were nearing apartheid. Apartheid is the present day reality for millions of Palestinians. I think the reason we are here where we are today is primarily because there's been ongoing series of abuses, impunity, and a failure for the international community to treat the situation as a situation of crimes against humanity of grave rights abuse.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 17:10

Since you mentioned the apartheid, I know that Human Rights Watch has recently sort of framed it as the threshold has been crossed and apartheid is happening there. But Palestinian and Arab organizations have been calling it apartheid for years. As you noted, you know, international actors have been hinting towards, you know, we're reaching that threshold for some time. So what led you to make this determination now in particular?



Omar Shakir 17:39

Absolutely, I mean, Palestinians and other analysts and scholars have been using the term apartheid to describe the reality on the ground for years. For Human Rights Watch, when we look at things through a legal lens, we're not looking at it through a comparative lens or for through historical lens. We don't reach determinations about crimes against humanity lightly. The crime against humanity of apartheid involves three primary elements; an intent to dominate by one group over the other; systematic oppression by the dominant group over the marginalized group; and inhumane acts. Frankly, inhumane acts and the systematic oppression date back years, if not decades. You know, the one element that I think you could have argued about years ago was the intent to dominate. Especially in the 1990s and in the 2000s, there was a sense that this was a temporary situation, that there could be a solution that would resolve some of the core underlying issues, at least an argument could be made. And the Israeli government, meanwhile, in court, is justifying the legality of settlements by saying these are temporary, it's a temporary situation, publicly, they talked about wanting to resolve the underlying issues. But the last few years has seen several major changes. One, of course, is in 2018, when the Israeli Knesset passed the Jewish nation state law, which entrenched as a constitutional principle, the idea that certain key rights or values like self determination, settlement, are solely you know, for the Jewish people, and not for the other, you know, major group living on the ground. This wasn't something that was new, these kind of policies that happened de facto for years, but to enshrine it, as a constitutional principle sort of made it much harder to sort of propagate the myth of the Israeli government that there is a democratic state in the green line and a temporary occupation across the way. Add to that the massive expansion of settlements and the infrastructure connecting settlements to Israel proper, statements by Israeli officials of their intent to rule over the West Bank in perpetuity treating Palestinians as subjects, and then you add to that, of course, the annexation discussion from last year where many were ready to call it apartheid if annexation happened. That was eye opening because, as a legal term, apartheid is about domination, not formal sovereignty. And while annexation would have changed the kind of formal, you know, sovereign arrangements that the Israeli government took, it wouldn't have changed the de facto reality on the ground, at least in the short run. So as a legal matter if you believe it would be apartheid with annexation, you should believe it's

apartheid today. So frankly, Jackie, when you put all these things together, the nation state law, the infrastructure and settlement expansion, the statements by Israeli officials, the annexation drive, the evidence was so overwhelming that it became I think, impossible, as a human rights group whose job is to apply the law to the facts, to deny that the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution are taking place today. The other thing I would add, Jackie, is that we've done a lot of reports over the years that looked at particular dynamics in certain areas, right. 2001 - looking at the school system inside Israel proper, and discrimination between Palestinians and Jewish Israelis. 2008 - the unrecognized villages in the Negev. 2010 - a report called separate and unequal about East Jerusalem in areas of the West Bank. 2016 - Occupation, Inc. These are all massive, you know, 80-100 page reports. But this report, we decided to try to connect the dots. So instead of looking at one area, and you know, one phenomenon to really sort of look at Israel's treatment of Palestinians. So that scope, which was in part driven by a sense that the underlying sort of reality on the ground that I laid out earlier wasn't sort of crystallized in the minds of many, combined with the shifts on the ground led us to this conclusion. Certainly, it's not only Palestinian groups, I should say, several Israeli human rights groups have reached conclusions on apartheid, including Bet'selem the most prominent Israeli human rights group. I should also note that just an early June, two former Israeli ambassadors to South Africa said that the situation and that Israel's treatment of Palestinians rose to the level of apartheid. In addition, in early June, South Africa and Namibia, at an event at the United Nations that I spoke at said the very same thing, endorsing our report's findings. Luxembourg, and France's foreign ministers in recent weeks have also talked about apartheid. So I think there's a growing recognition that the crimes are taking place today. And now the conversation really becomes, you know, can states and individuals find the courage to find a way to fight apartheid, and to ensure that these grave abuses come to an end.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 22:42

Given that you have so much evidence of this and have very clearly connected the dots and established the crime is occurring, you know, the report received considerable backlash, not only from the Israeli government, which is sort of expected, no one likes being told that they're perpetrating crimes and obviously, they they feel that what they're doing is right. But numerous other states and international figures seem to be pushing back on that label. Why do you think that's the case?



Omar Shakir 23:14

I'm actually not sure, Jackie, I agree with that sort of assessment. The Israeli government, of course, it's going to dispute this report but it's interesting to note that they haven't

challenged the report on its merits. You will not find a really serious substantive argument against, you know, the argument about how we applied the laws to the facts. They're either ad hominem attacks that try and sort of shift the debate by slinging mud. Or they try and argue against straw man, you know, saying that we sort of are comparing South Africa or picking up distinctions that are not actually our application of a lot of the facts. And actually, it's interesting to note, I mean, not only the sort of individuals I mentioned earlier, but if you look at prominent progressive Jewish American organizations like J Street, or through our rabbis who have issued statements encouraging people to seriously look, you know, at the report. If you look at statements by parliamentarians or US Congresspeople, you know, apartheid being used by folks like Alexandria Ocasio Cortez or Cory Bush or in the Danish Parliament or European Parliament. If you look at the number of joint letters by different groups, artists, and academics and different groups who have spoken out, even in pop culture, you have major, you know, figures that have sort of come out and uses the term Models, you have John Oliver, comedians, I mean, media commentators, MSNBC hosts, I mean, if you look at the collection of people that have come out and spoken about it's it's eye opening, and even if you want to look at states, even a state like the United States or Germany, yes, they didn't endorse the report's findings, but their statements were quite, you know, mild until in saying this is not a term that you know, we use. And sort of just to pause for a moment and think about, you know how much that marks a shift in apartheid that Israel's two of its closest allies in the world did not issue a forthright, you know, rebuttal of the assessment just so that's not the term we use. And let me just say, Jackie, I've done closed door meetings with, you know, well over a dozen governments, you know, probably way more than that, and not one of them, of course, we haven't met the Israeli government who did not take our invitation to be briefed on this report, not one of them has pointed out of fact, we got wrong and disagreement on the analysis. It's been just questions about whether or not you know, is this the right approach? How does this help? Or we can say that, where can we plug in? So I think that that is powerful in and of itself. That, you know, I think there's an I think, everybody who's been there, and folks who follow the situation, you know, this isn't a surprise, folks know what the reality is on the ground. And it's really the matter of states having the courage to, you know, call a spade a spade to call a thing by its name The first step to solving any problem is to diagnose it correctly, the wrong diagnosis reads leads to the wrong conclusion. And for too long, there's been the wrong diagnosis. I do think there has been a sea change, and only, you know, and less than two months since the report has been issued, and I suspect that things will continue there. This won't be the last report, there will be much more discussion of these issues. And I think, you know, two or three years from now, if not sooner, you know, this won't be very controversial anymore, and may not be controversial anymore today in many quarters.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 26:37

Yeah, I think you're right. But at least, you know, for us based in America, we've definitely felt that shift, if not over the last two months than definitely, since the escalation in Gaza during May. Since you mentioned impunity, and accountability earlier. I'm curious, after the escalation during May, the Human Rights Council established an open ended Commission of Inquiry to investigate the root causes of recurring violations. So not just the escalation, but sort of the longer term problems in the region. How significant is this new open ended mandate?



Omar Shakir 27:21

Yeah, let me first make the connection. I think between these last two points, I think what happened in the escalation, in many cases, this was a new phenomenon. Many journalists, were asking the question about root causes, you know, they didn't just want to know about, you know, the latest airstrike or rocket attack, but rather, what is the larger context? I think that discussion, you know, I think marks that shift. But in terms of the UN Commission of Inquiry, this is one of the recommendations of our report, that the United Nations established a commission of inquiry to look into systematic discrimination based on group identity, that was almost verbatim the language, you know, of the resolution. And the open ended nature is important, because the nature of the root causes and the abuses are open ended, and systematic and ongoing. So it's quite important that the UN has this kind of mechanism. They have one in place for the situation with in Myanmar. And it's worth noting that they're, you know, Human Rights Watch also found apartheid in persecution in the treatment of the Rohingya. So I think this is an important, you know, mechanism. Of course, it's only going to be important to the extent that, you know, of course, that it carries out its mandate independently, and we hope it will. But in addition, that states, and others act on its behalf. I mean, when we're talking about crimes against humanity, as you, Jackie, and your listeners know, maybe as good as anybody, you know, these are crimes against all of us crimes against humanity, and they're odious, they're among the most serious crimes under international law. And it's imperative that they're that we that there is accountability for them that we don't simply accept their commission and wait for a political process that may or may not come anytime soon as the answer to these abuses, they need redress and accountability today. And, you know, our report, also beyond this commission of inquiry calls for the International Criminal Court to investigate and prosecute those Israeli officials implicated in these crimes, as well as for national courts to do so under the principle of universal jurisdiction. We also call for targeted sanctions against those implicated that's the toolkit, among many other recommendations in the report that states bring to bear on their crimes against humanity. But unfortunately, that's not what's happening here. And it's worth also noting that the Commission of Inquiry did not receive the support of European states who have supported

commission's of inquiry every other time they have come to vote over the last decade. It's shameful, it's disgraceful that there's this sort of hypocrisy and double standard. The reality here is yes, there may have been more, you know, UN resolution And actions that have happened in this context compared to others. But the reason for, you know, that is the Security Council is blocked, much of that is, you know, declaratory. And none of these sets have been followed by the Israeli government that flouts international law and continues to commit abuses. And in a situation where you have a strong power, that's an occupying power that's committing apartheid that's sanctioned by one of the world's global superpowers, and where much of the rest of the world, you know, has failed to bring to bear the tools necessary. You need the attention of the international community, it's it's warranted Exactly. For situations like this. This is a test of the international system. And frankly, the international system has failed, is failing, and will continue to fail so long as impunity and the status quo continue.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 30:51

So if the if the commission is able to do its its job and do an independent and thorough analysis of the situation. How do you think we can sort of reconcile that that gap in response and willingness to respond by the international community, there have been Commission's of inquiry, there have been resolutions of the Human Rights Council plentiful resolutions, as you noted, on this situation, and there never seems to be a response to the results. Even the report on the 2018 protests on the Gaza border found there were crimes against humanity perpetrated by Israeli forces, and there never seemed to be sort of adequate, actionable follow up.



Omar Shakir 31:38

Yeah, I mean, I think the problem here is not the resolutions, right? I mean, it's the lack of, you know, the state party concerned respecting international law and norms. That's the underlying problem, the problem needs to be addressed by calling on that state to do so. And using the tools that we can bring to bear. Look, we're in a situation of, you know, imperative power. And we're too long the international community has sanctioned grave abuses. So we have to bring to bear whatever tools we can, you know, these Commission's of inquiry are important, even if they don't lead to accountability, they provide an important historical record. And this is a different commission of inquiry, it's the first time that it has this sort of mandate to look, you know, at issues on a more open ended, you know, nature that that looks at the situation, not only in the Occupied Territory, but also inside Israel. So I think it's an important mechanism. That doesn't mean it's going to have a different fate than previous investigative mechanisms. But those mechanisms, even though they didn't lead to, you know, prosecutions and convictions,

unfortunately, Israel's far from the only state that carries out grave abuses where impunity reigns years or decades in. But it has an important historical record, it is set the information straight about the serious abuses taking place. But of course, it's been focused on particular issues, particularly particular bouts of hostilities, or dynamics in a certain area. But for this particular commission of inquiry, to look at root causes to look at systematic discrimination, which really underscores so much if Israel's rule over Palestinians is quite valuable. I mean, for human rights, watch this conclusion, you know, certainly, you know, lead us to make recommendations that we haven't made before, in this particular context, and maybe it will spur if not action by Israel, but maybe actions by states that claim to, you know, respect the international legal order and these sorts of decisions. You know, I think there is a shift in popular opinion, and, and we hope that will lead to, you know, shifts when it comes to state action as well.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 33:53

And since you mentioned that your report has recommendations regarding the International Criminal Court. Do you think that the pending investigation and case before the ICC could represent a potential watershed moment?



34:07

I think the International Criminal Court cases of tremendous importance because it represents exactly the sort of issue for which the International Criminal Court was created, where the doors to domestic justice have been effectively closed, where victims of serious rights abuses have faced a wall with impunity for decades, where perpetrators not only continue in power, but continue to commit abuses. And this is not only Israeli authorities, but Palestinian armed group and Palestinian authorities as well. And so this is a very important case. I think it's incredibly important that the court found that had jurisdiction over crimes serious crimes committed in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and that the prosecutor opened a formal probe. And now all our eyes turned to Karim Khan, who you know began in the this month his new term as the prosecutor, I think there is significant concern that you know, whether it be the political pressure brought, whether it be the desire of some states to lighten the docket to get more convictions to be more efficient or effective, that the prosecutor will not follow the evidence and take this investigation forward. And that's of tremendous concern, certainly to Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International to many of us that work on issues of international justice. So I think this case could be a watershed moment, but it's not something that's going to lead to a resolution overnight, there are immense challenges. And I think we don't know the medal of Karim Khan, and frankly, it's going to be put, you know, to the test. Can he withstand the pressure the way I think the previous prosecutor did to move forward with this

investigation. And, you know, not only there are evidentiary, there are legal questions, so there will be many obstacles along the way. But of course, should the International Criminal Court find what we believe exists on the ground of apartheid, persecution, war crimes, etc, then it would mark a significant watershed moment, I think, and, and, you know, the end the situation and a real hope that there can be justice brought to victims of serious abuses.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 36:23

Thank you for joining us for this episode of expert voices on atrocity prevention. If you'd like more information about the Global Centre's work on R2P, mass atrocity prevention, or populations at risk of mass atrocities, visit our website at globalr2p.org and connect with us on Twitter and Facebook @GCR2P.