

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

Norwegian diplomatic document urges Oslo to criticize Israel over torture, radio reports

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OSLO, Norway:

The Norwegian Embassy in Tel Aviv has urged the government in Oslo to criticize Israel for the alleged use of torture in prisons, according to the state radio network NRK on Thursday.

The network said it obtained a secret diplomatic document from the embassy urging Norway's government to take action by "expressing our concern that torture is still practiced in Israel."

According to Norway's NRK, the concern stemmed from a report by the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel, a human rights group, claiming that prisoners were sometimes beaten during interrogation, held in painfully tight handcuffs and suffered isolation, threats, humiliation and sleep deprivation.

Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister Raymond Johansen said he was aware of the document, but had not decided whether to act upon the advice.

"We have a number of difficult cases to raise with the Israeli authorities, not in the least in relation to the Israel-Palestinian conflict," Johansen said on NRK. "Every government must exercise good judgment in which matters to raise at any given time."

He said Norway does consider torture and abuse to be serious issues, "but you always have to make a choice."

The Israeli Embassy in Oslo said that, since the claims of torture lacked basic information such as the names of alleged victims, it was impossible to make a specific response.

"A Palestinian former detainee may wish to defame Israel and put forward unfounded accusations, but Israel will not be able to relate to these allegations because of the anonymity of the sources," the Israeli Embassy said in a statement.

Norway has sought to be a peacemaker in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, having secretly brokered the now-tattered 1993 Oslo Agreement Peace accords between the sides.

According to NRK, the secret diplomatic document says "the interrogation methods are seen as legal by Israeli authorities."

NRK said the human rights group report was based on interviews with 82 former prisoners.

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