

Huge progress made in Gulf on human rights issue: UN official



KUWAIT:

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said Tuesday that "huge advances" on the issue of human rights have been made in the Gulf region, and that her office would help this process through talks with Kuwaiti officials. Shortly after being received by Amiri Diwan Advisor Mohammad Abulhassan at Kuwait International Airport late Tuesday, Pillay told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that she will also be addressing areas of concern over human rights with officials in Kuwait if there were any, as well as meeting representatives of the Kuwaiti civil society.

Pillay had arrived on a flight bound from Qatar, within a 10-day tour which started in Saudi Arabia and will also see her making stops in Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. The UN official is set to hold meetings on Wednesday with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Kuwaiti National Assembly (Parliament) Speaker Jassem Al-Kharafi, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Al-Sabah and the Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Dr. Mohammad Al-Ifasi. The Middle East issue is on the agenda of the Human Rights Council (UNHRC), she said, describing Israel as an "occupying force over Palestine." Through her capacity as High Commissioner, Pillay said she was required to provide regular reports to the UNHRC on the effect of settlements and the Israeli blockade on Palestinian refugees. The UN High Commissioner's office along with that of the Secretary General are required to prepare around 12 reports on whether the Palestinians receive adequate health and food supplies. UNHRC has helped and fully supports the Justice Richard Goldstone fact-finding mission on the Israeli assault on Gaza, and more recently last month, Pillay has been directed to set up an expert panel to examine and assess how these investigations are being carried out by Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

She expressed hope that one day the situation will be resolved before the Human Rights Council. "While the occupation continues, it (item 7 on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories) will remain on the agenda," she concluded.

Pillay was appointed to the post by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon following approval by the General Assembly on 28 July 2008. Since 2003, she has served as judge on the International Criminal Court. In 1999, she was elected Judge President of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, which she joined in 1995, having been elected as judge by the General Assembly; her four-year term with the Rwanda Tribunal was renewed in 1998. Judge Pillay was an attorney of the High Court of South Africa from 1967 to 1995, and was appointed acting judge of the High Court in 1995. In 1967, she became the first woman to start a law practice in South Africa's Natal Province, providing legal defense for opponents of apartheid. She exposed the practice and effects of torture and solitary confinement on detainees held in police custody, and successfully established the rights of prisoners on Robben Island.-

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