Human rights jurist gets Peace Nobel

New York: Navi Pillay, a South African human rights lawyer and international judge, was announced on Friday as the recipient of the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize for what the Norwegian Nobel Committee called her efforts to uphold a system of international law that is increasingly under attack.

The committee said that Pillay had been "instrumental in ensuring that war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide are prosecuted". Formerly the UN's top human rights official, and a judge at the International Criminal Court and on an international tribunal investigating the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, she is "one of the most respected international jurists of our time", the committee said.

"Let me dedicate this award to all the survivors of international crimes as well as to practitioners and defenders of international justice," Pillay said at a news conference in Nuremberg, Germany.

A video posted online by Agnes Callamard, the secretary general of Amnesty International, showed Pillay smiling and being applauded by fellow attendees. "Thank you very much," Pillay told the crowd. "If you clap a little bit more, I may share this prize with Trump," she joked, apparently referring to US President Donald Trump, who has long coveted the award.

Pillay said she was "surprised" that some people had praised her courage. "Why would you need courage to speak the truth?" she said. "You interpret the law, you look at all the facts. So it's an impartial, you know, impartial decision-making."

She mused that "perhaps it was meant to be" that she received the news in a city whose famous post-war trials of Nazi leaders were foundational to creating the modern international justice system. But she offered a warning, too, saying that efforts to undermine the system "risk returning us to a world in which power rather than law determines whose suffering matters".



Navi Pillay in Nuremberg on Friday. (Reuters)

Pillay closed out her brief news conference in Nuremberg with a reminder to any heads of state who might be listening: "My message to political leaders is that you are under legal obligation," she said. "You have a legal obligation to protect human rights and refrain from war."

Last year, a UN commission led by Pillay determined that Israel had committed genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, a finding that the Israeli government rejected.

Danny Danon, Israel's ambassador to the UN, told *The New York Times* that honouring Pillay "would not only damage the credibility of the Nobel Committee, but also tarnish the legacy of the distinguished laureates who have received this honour throughout history".

Though the committee did not explicitly mention Gaza in its statement honouring Pillay, its chairman, Jorgen Watne Frydnes, told reporters that her work on the UN commission was "an important part of the reasoning why she received the prize".

Pillay, 85, was recognised "for her long career, from standing up for Nelson Mandela to the present-day work", Frydnes said. Born in Durban, South Africa, to a family of Tamil origin, Pillay defended Mandela and others who confronted apartheid.

US sanctions on ICC

The Trump administration has imposed sweeping new sanctions on the International Criminal Court as part of its campaign to dismantle the tribunal that the US believes has become politicised and attempted to unfairly and illegally prosecute Americans and Israelis on war crimes charges.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced the sanctions Friday.

"We will ban transactions with this rogue court, cutting off their resources and crippling its ability to operate against us," Rubio said in a video address. "The United States and the American people are not subject to the jurisdiction of this fake ICC."

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