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# Mendelblit warns of 'an actual collapse' of legal system

Haaretz

Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit warned Sunday of "an actual collapse" of the legal system, declaring, "Legal security constitutes an inseparable part of national resilience, and when it's under attack or threat it's an interest of the highest order to battle that."

Speaking to the Herzliya Conference, Mendelblit referred to the cases pending against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying, "If one person remains above the law, then others will come after him. If this snowball starts to roll down the hill no one will be able to stop it."

He added, "Recently, to our great regret, it has become legitimate to question, debate and examine the basic principles of the rule of law, first and foremost the principle of equality before the law. So it is with the principle that government authorities are meant to act reasonably and not arbitrarily, based solely on businesslike considerations. The processes I'm referring to have become so blatant and tangible that many among the public understand that a central component of the state's national resilience faces being seriously weakened, which is also why a large and growing number of voices are calling to stop these processes of delegitimization."

Mendelblit stressed, "The need to preserve the legal security of the country's citizens doesn't mean that the legal system must be immune to criticism or changes - on the contrary, the existence of constructive criticism and the making of changes aimed at strengthening these systems are the foundation of the public's faith that the systems of law and order are indeed working to advance the rule of

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law in an honest, effective way. We are open to criticism; we are open to a businesslike discussion about changes, but we will stand firm against acts of personal and systematic delegitimization, and against efforts to weaken the rule of law by undermining the authority of those systems whose job is to preserve it."

Mendelblit noted that one of the initiatives to weaken the status of the attorney general would forbid him to present a legal opinion in court that isn't in keeping with the position of the government.

"Would it occur to anyone that in a democratic country which upholds the law and justice, that the attorney general would be silenced from arguing in a legal proceeding that a certain decision undermines human rights? In the past no one would consider such a thing. In those exceptional instances where there



Mendelblit Nir Keidar

is no choice but to determine that the political echelon's decision doesn't meet legal standards because it undermines human rights or other basic principles, the legal security of the state's citizens requires that the attorney general can attend a legal proceeding and state his professional opinion loudly and clearly."

The attorney general also decried "a bunch of initiatives to change the rules of the game by which the legal system operates, while trying to weaken the status, independence and capabilities of legal and law enforce-

ment agencies to effectively ensure the rule of law in the country." He added, "We aren't talking anymore about this change or the other in the way that legal and judicial bodies work, or about the balance of power between them and the executive and legislative authorities, but an actual collapse of what I define as the lines of defense, on which during the 71 years of the state's independence the legal security of every person in the country is based."

Mendelblit addressed the struggle against government corruption and the Netan-

yahu cases in particular. Regarding the prime minister's cases, he said, "I see great importance in the hearing process, and any argument will be heard with an open heart and mind. I mean it. Things will be weighed deeply, decisions will be made, as they have been until now, solely out of businesslike considerations, based only on the law and the evidence. No one will sway us from the straight path, not the demonstrators on the one hand or the impassioned critics on the other.

"Of course I've heard that there are those who know - before I do, of course - what decision I will make after the hearing, and not only that, they also know that the decision will, by their lights, be based on irrelevant reasons, because of pressures on me of one kind or another," he said. "But whoever claims that is basically seeking to deviate from the principle of equality before the law. ... We're talking about no less than a process that's destructive to the legal security of every citizen."