



Press Release

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Canberra, Australia

Israel's Attacks on Palestinian Civil Society

On October 22, Israel issued an unlawful decision declaring six credible, widely respected Palestinian NGOs and civil society organisations as “terrorist organisations”. For decades, Palestinian NGOs and civil society organisations have played a leading role in monitoring and documenting human rights abuses, as well as strengthening human rights advocacy work in the region and internationally. They have been incredibly successful at exposing Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people, and as such they pose a threat to Israel’s carefully curated false reputation as a democratic country. Israel’s declaration of these groups as “terrorist organisations” is a continuation of its systematic campaign to incapacitate Palestinian civil society and prevent human rights defenders from exposing Israel’s crimes.

Israel has long subjected Palestinian civil society organisations and human rights defenders to unlawful arbitrary detention, death threats, defamation and slander, travel bans, military raids, theft of files documenting Israel’s human rights abuses, violence against individuals and their families, and deportation. Israeli threats against civil society organisations increased after the International Criminal Court initiated its preliminary investigation into the Situation in Palestine in 2015, and escalated further in 2021 when the investigation was officially opened. The Israeli government has also adopted legal measures such as the 2016 NGO Disclosure Law which UN human rights experts have said, “has a chilling effect on human rights work and skews public perception of human rights organisations,” the legislation passed in 2017 banning anyone who advocates for Palestinian rights from entering Israel, and the 2018 report calling on the European Union to stop all financial support and funding to Palestinian and international human rights and humanitarian organisations.

Documentation, advocacy, humanitarian aid, and legal work are essential for the protection of human rights and are the hallmarks of democracy. Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, as democratic countries, will understand that human rights defenders and their work must be protected. Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, their respective governments and civil societies, must not allow such a blatant assault on civil society and human rights defenders to occur without consequence, and should condemn Israel’s decision to declare Palestinian NGOs as “terrorists” in the strongest terms.

The rights of the Palestinian people to legitimate and peaceful resistance against Israel’s occupation must be defended, and Palestinian civil society, human rights defenders, and the Palestinian people as a whole must be provided international protections in accordance with relevant UN resolutions, and funding for Palestinian NGOs must be maintained and enhanced to facilitate their invaluable work in the pursuit of justice.

For more information, please contact the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific: ph. (02) 6286 9193.

