

20 May 2016

STATEMENT

BHRC calls on Israel to protect and safeguard the rights of Palestinian human rights defenders

The Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (“BHRC”) expresses its serious concern at ongoing Israeli threats against and attacks on Palestinian human rights defenders, and attempts to curtail their work.

We note in particular that:

- A Palestinian volunteer for Israeli NGO B’Tselem, Imad Abu Shamsiyeh, who filmed widely circulated footage of an Israeli soldier executing a wounded Palestinian in Hebron in the occupied West Bank on 24 March 2016, has also received death threats for his role in filming and publicising the execution. Abu Shamsiyeh has been physically attacked by Israeli settlers on a number of occasions in recent years, and his home has been attacked with stones since 24 March, making the threats all the more concerning.
- Another B’Tselem volunteer, Raed Abu a-Rmeileh, was assaulted in Hebron by Israeli settlers on 4 May 2016 when he tried to film them harassing Palestinian children. He was knocked to the ground, requiring hospital treatment for a head injury. Israeli soldiers at the scene failed to intervene to stop the attack or to arrest his assailants.

In contrast, Palestinian human rights defenders continue to be arrested and charged by Israel for exercising their human right to peaceful protest against Israeli violations of international law in the West Bank. They include prominent human rights defenders Issa Amro, founder of the Hebron branch of the International Solidarity Movement, and Farid al-Atrash, who were arrested on 29 and 26 February 2016 respectively, following a peaceful demonstration in Hebron calling for the lifting of

discriminatory restrictions on Palestinians in the city. Mr Amro was arrested outside his house, while addressing a tour group from Breaking the Silence, an organisation of veteran Israeli combatants. The men have been charged with offences relating inter alia to the organisation of the protest and with inciting violence against the Israeli Army. The protest itself was forcefully suppressed by the Israeli Army who fired tear gas and stun grenades at protesters and journalists and used physical force against them.

- Al-Haq, the oldest human rights organisation in Palestine, has been the victim of serious anonymous harassment and threats by telephone and email, including death threats against its General Director, Shawan Jabarin, and its staff. We are extremely concerned that the threats have been expressly linked to Al Haq's recent joint submissions to the International Criminal Court alleging war crimes against Israel arising from its Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in 2014 and its ongoing illegal settlement enterprise.
- Israel this week refused to renew the travel document for Omar Barghouti, a prominent Palestinian human rights defender and co-founder of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions ("BDS") movement, preventing him from travelling abroad, in circumstances where Palestinians who are not citizens of Israel require such documents in order to leave and/or reenter Israel or Palestine. Mr Barghouti, who is married to a Palestinian citizen of Israel has been living in Israel for the past 22 years, since being granted permanent residency. He has been informed that his residency status is also under review by the Israeli authorities. If revoked, he will be unable to reside in Israel with his family. Mr Barghouti has previously been prevented by Israeli authorities from travelling abroad on a number of occasions, including to attend conferences on nonviolent responses to State human rights violations.

Against this backdrop, BHRC expresses its serious concern at statements made by Israeli government officials concerning Palestinian human rights defenders. Speaking at an anti-BDS conference in Jerusalem on 28 March 2015. Israeli Minister of Transport, Intelligence and Atomic Energy, Yisrael Katz, called for "sikul ezrachi memukad" against Mr Barghouti. "Sikul memukad" (literally "targeted prevention") is the Hebrew term used by the Israeli military for "targeted killing". The word "ezrachi" means "civil".

At the same conference, Gilad Erdan, Israeli Minister of Public Security, Strategic Affairs and Public Diplomacy, said that Israel would "act at an individual level" against BDS supporters. Erdan said:

"Up to this day, people who have slandered, threatened or acted against Israel did not pay any price for doing so. I promise you that this is about to change. Soon any activist who uses their influence to delegitimize the only Jewish state in the world will know they will pay a price for it".

It appears that the refusal to renew Mr Barghouti's travel document and the review of his residency permit may be part of the "price" envisaged.

BHRC calls on Israel to take immediate steps to ensure the necessary protection for Palestinian human rights defenders to carry out their work without fear of intimidation, attack or reprisal. We also call on Israel to desist from any form of restriction of basic human rights, including of the right to freedom of movement, imposed on human rights defenders as a punitive measure for their lawful activities. BHRC joins the United Nation Human Rights Committee in calling on the Israeli authorities to effectively investigate all incidents of threatened or actual violence against Palestinians by Israeli actors and to prosecute and punish those responsible. Israeli ministers should desist from any inflammatory rhetoric capable of encouraging such attacks and from any implicit or actual threats against Palestinian human rights defenders.

BHRC further joins the United Nations in calling on Israel to guarantee human rights protections to Palestinians living under its control in the occupied Palestinian territory. Israel must promote and protect the rights of Palestinians, including Palestinian human rights defenders, to freedom of expression and freedom of association, and to cease its ongoing criminalisation thereof. BHRC notes that the United Nations Human Rights Committee, echoing the determinations of the International Court of Justice, has repeatedly called for Israel to acknowledge the application of its international human rights obligations to the occupied Palestinian territory, as well as to acknowledge the dual applicability of both international human rights norms and international humanitarian law in those areas.

ENDS.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. For an interview with a BHRC spokesperson, please contact Ed Gillett, Coordinator, on +44 (0)7854 197862
2. For more information on the Bar Human Rights Committee (BHRC), visit our website at <http://www.barhumanrights.org.uk>
3. The Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (BHRC) is the international human rights arm of the Bar of England and Wales, working to protect the rights of advocates, judges and human rights defenders around the world. The BHRC is concerned with defending the rule of law and internationally recognised legal standards relating to human rights and the right to a fair trial. It is independent of the Bar Council.