NEWS RELEASE

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
Occupied Palestinian Territory

UN Human Rights Office in OPT: Conflict and threats severely undermining crucial work of Palestinian NGOs

31 May 2024

Ramallah, the Occupied Palestinian Territory

The UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is deeply concerned about the impact on Palestinian civil society organisations of Israel's escalating military operations in Gaza, as well as the persistent threats and intimidation such organisations face from Israel.

In Gaza, several staff members of local NGOs have been killed, injured or detained, and many employees displaced multiple times, including outside of the Strip since 7 October 2023.

Along with the rest of the population in Gaza, the people running and working for civil society organizations have lost family members, friends and their communities.

They are trying to keep working, in the face of enormous challenges, with much of their organizations' physical infrastructure, including their offices and assets, destroyed by Israel.

It is clear that the ability of NGOs to monitor and report on gross human rights violations that are being committed by Israel and Palestinian armed groups has been severely undermined at a time when their work is needed more than ever.

Across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, staff of civil society organizations face the continued risk of being harassed, arrested, arbitrarily detained, subjected to ill-treatment, and even deportation resulting from their work by all three duty bearers, including the Palestinian Authority and the De facto Authorities. In 2021, six well-known Palestinian human rights NGOs were designated by Israel as "terrorist organizations" without evidence, and the allegations against them remain unproven.

The negative impact of these designations on OPT civil society has been massive, including reduced donor support, loss of staff, fear of working on important human rights issues, and staff morale.

Civil society should be the backbone of any society and must be facilitated to work in an independent manner without interference or threat. Israeli human rights groups working

on the OPT have also been affected by the shrinking space, including proposed legislation to restrict their access to foreign funding. All three duty bearers must create and sustain conditions that are conducive for the work of civil society organizations and member states must continue to support human rights NGOs.

The latest reports that Israel has been interfering in the work of the International Criminal Court, the Commission of Inquiry on the OPT, and prominent Palestinian human rights NGOs are also deeply disturbing.

International institutions mandated to ensure respect for international law, including by ensuring accountability for violations, must be respected. Such abhorrent interference must stop immediately.

#Ends

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