MEDIA STATEMENT

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

UN Human Rights in Occupied Palestinian Territory

Ramallah

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The unprecedented assault on civic space in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the space to monitor and document human rights violations and abuses, seek accountability for injustices, or organise and advocate for human rights, is steadily shrinking. For two years, Israel has intensified its repression against journalists, human rights defenders, anti-occupation activists, as well as local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), severely undermining a range of human rights of Palestinians, including right to freedom of expression, assembly, and association.

Targeting journalism

Between 7 October 2023 and 14 December 2025, the UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has verified the killing of 289 journalists in Gaza by Israeli military operations, including incidents where there were strong indications that Palestinian journalists were deliberately targeted on account of their work.

Israeli security and military forces have also detained at least 202 Palestinian journalists from both Gaza and the West Bank between 7 October 2023 and 31 October 2025, according to the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, 41 of whom remained detained as of 31 October 2025.

Most were held under administrative detention, which in the context of Israel's occupation of Palestine results in arbitrary deprivation of liberty and exposes detainees to torture and other ill-treatment, and enforced disappearance. Released journalists described interrogations focused on their reporting or social media posts, based on vague accusations of "incitement", "support for terrorism", or threats to Israel's "national security", none of which would justify their detention under international law.

The UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory interviewed 15 journalists, including five women, who had been detained in the past two years. They described incommunicado detention, abusive interrogations, degrading treatment, inhumane detention conditions, and the routine use of physical and sexual violence, including two cases of rape.

Since 7 October 2023, at least 85 Palestinians have died in Israeli custody.

As Palestinian journalists face these grim prospects, Israel continues to impose a blanket ban on international journalists' independent access to Gaza, and undue restrictions on the work of international media outlets in the West Bank. In April 2024, Israel passed a law allowing authorities to shut down foreign media outlets deemed a threat to national security— and later issued military orders to forcibly close Al Jazeera's offices in Ramallah and block its broadcasts.

Suppressing Civil Society and Human Rights Work

The shrinking space for independent journalism forms part of a broader clampdown on human rights defenders, anti-occupation activists, and civil society organizations, which has intensified since 7 October 2023.

Israel's 2016 counter-terrorism law and the 1945 Defense (Emergency) Regulations continue to be used against Palestinian NGOs to justify raids of their offices, constrain funding and operations, and arrest staff. The law's vague language, sweeping definitions, and expansive powers granted to the State have facilitated unjustified restrictions on Palestinians engaged in human rights work, including peaceful advocacy and mobilisation.

Over the course of 2025, Israeli legislators have been advancing a bill that would impose up to 46 per cent tax on almost all foreign donations received by NGOs as a penalty for those that engage in 'political activities', which would have a major impact on the operations of almost all NGOs engaged in human rights work on the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Also in February 2025, a bill was introduced to the Knesset that would criminalise the sharing of information with the International Criminal Court (ICC) that could be used in investigations or prosecutions of Israeli officials or citizens. If passed, the law would compound the chilling effect of the sanctions against Palestinian human rights organisations for cooperating with the ICC.

In the meantime, Israel is imposing unjustified restrictions on the work of international NGOs. In March 2025, an Israeli interministerial decision effectively revoked the registration of all international NGOs operating in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, imposing a re-registration process for temporary permits under new, crippling conditions. This poses a new impediment to the operation of the UN-led humanitarian response in Gaza, and the work of many Palestinian civil society organisations across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which rely on cooperation with international NGOs.

Violations by the Palestinian authority:

In the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority is contributing to the tightening chokehold on civic space, through its unnecessary or disproportionate use of force, arbitrary detentions, and torture and other ill-treatment of journalists, human rights defenders, and government critics.

It has also enforced vague legal provisions relating to "incitement" or criticism of public officials, which have enabled prosecutions for acts of peaceful expression. Between January and May 2025, the Palestinian Authority banned Al Jazeera after Israeli security forces shut down its offices in Ramallah, accusing the outlet of "incitement, misinformation, sedition, and interference in Palestinian internal affairs".

Palestinian security forces (PSF) have also used excessive force against demonstrations including those that protest the Palestinian Authority and the conduct of the PSF.

A contracting physical and civic space:

Civic space is being increasingly suffocated while the physical space available to Palestinians also contracts. In Gaza, most Palestinians are confined to less than half of the space of the strip, hemmed in by an arbitrary redeployment line where Israeli ground forces remain positioned. In the West Bank, Israel is forcibly displacing Palestinians at an unprecedented rate, emptying entire Palestinian communities of their Palestinian residents and clearing the way for ever-expanding Israeli settlements.

The geography is being redrawn— and so are the limits of what Palestinians are allowed to say or do about it.

"All duty bearers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory have obligations under international law to ensure the respect of Palestinians human rights, including their rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly," said Ajith Sunghay, head of the UN Human Rights Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

"These violations are creating fear and despair and leave Palestinians with no avenues to convey the reality of their lives to the world, to seek justice for decades of discrimination, violence and oppression, and to defend a future in which their human rights are finally protected and fulfilled."

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