

Criminalizing Dissent in Israel

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Netanyahu's government is its most extremist ever. Fundamental freedoms are threatened.

Repressive Knesset bills target speech, assembly, association, and the right to dissent.

An earlier [Haaretz](#) editorial headlined "Free press in Israel is in danger." It said Israeli democracy has been imperiled for years.

Netanyahu's government assails it relentlessly. Knesset legislation threatens press freedom. Dissent more than ever isn't tolerated.

On June 20, the [Association for Civil Rights in Israel](#) (ACRI) headlined "The Case of Muhammad Amirah and the Criminalization of Protest in the West Bank," saying:

Despite committing no crime, "Amirah was charged with incitement and support for a hostile organization and disturbing a soldier."

During a nonviolent protest near Deir Kaddis village, he was arrested for sitting down in front of a tractor. At issue was stopping illegal settlement expansions on stolen Palestinian land.

Charges against him exclude violence. He's "an important example of the criminalization of all political activity by Palestinians in the West Bank...."

They face Kafkaesque justice. Military orders govern virtually every facet of their lives. Anything Israel wishes can be called hostile or terrorist related. Free speech is an endangered species.

Participating in public demonstrations is deemed disrupting public order. Pouring coffee for members of declared illegal organizations is called supporting terrorism.

Military regulations criminalize displaying Palestinian flags, banners, or symbols. So is criticizing state policy. Anyone charged is judged guilty by accusation. Conviction is virtually certain.

“Amirah’s case exemplifies the extent to which ALL protest action – including explicitly nonviolent actions are criminalized within the Israeli system in the West Bank.”

“Amirah was sitting on the ground in front of a tractor repeating the phrase ‘I am not engaging in violence, I will not commit a violent deed’ and was still arrested and charged.”

His case also reflects the ambiguity of the term “legal demonstration.” Israel considers all nonviolent ones illegal. Prison terms can follow participation.

On June 28, the [Palestinian Center for Development & Media Freedoms](#) (MADA) said Palestinian journalists face losing media freedoms.

Frank La Rue serves as UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. His recent report highlights the problem.

“States continue to utilize criminal laws on defamation, national security and counterterrorism to suppress dissent and criticism, including on Government policies, human rights violations and allegations of corruption,” he said.

MADA Director General Mousa Rimawi paid tribute to Palestinian journalists who won’t be silent. Despite risking freedom and safety, they keep working.

“(L)ocal journalists in violent or repressed environments deserve special recognition because they can experience the same violations as foreign journalists in conflict zones, but may not receive the same international attention,” he said.

“Sadly many Palestinian journalists are threatened, injured or arrested while simply doing their jobs and many journalists feel pressured to self-censor.”

“(J)ournalists around the world continue to be targeted and repressed, including those using the Internet to publish stories.”

“MADA will continue to support and encourage Palestinian journalists in their work, and to fight for freedom of expression in Palestine.”

Since occupation began in June 1967, Israel pursued a policy of silencing Palestinian dissent. Journalists and media institutions suffer grievously.

In the last decade, Israeli occupation forces murdered 18 Palestinian journalists and two foreign ones.

On Nakba Day 2011, Mohammed Othman was shot. He was photographing Israeli soldiers brutalizing nonviolent Palestinian demonstrators. He worked for Reuters and AFP.

He witnessed dozens of injured Palestinians. "It was bloody and got worse after live ammunition was used," he said.

An Israeli soldier shot him. The bullet entered his chest and "exploded" inside. It destroyed two discs and injured his spinal cord. As a result, he's paralyzed. He always expected something like this to happen, he said. He witnessed other journalists being shot.

His colleagues expressed solidarity. They know they could be next. Othman said he wants to do what he loves best. Nothing ahead will be easy for him.

MADA's Rimawi said Israel targets more than journalists. Palestinian media institutions are threatened. Raids confiscate their equipment. Their property and facilities are destroyed. They incur large financial losses. Some are shut down entirely.

Israel at times bombs Palestinian and international media facilities. Homes of journalists are demolished. During Cast Lead, Gaza's Aqsa TV was totally destroyed. Program director Aqsa Samir Abu Muheisen said:

"The material losses (were) estimated at six million dollars, five million for the price of the equipment and furniture, and one million for the cost of the five-floor headquarter building."

The Alresalah weekly newspaper was targeted. Its headquarters was bombed. It sustained heavy damage. Earlier in January 2002, Israel blew up the headquarters of Palestinian State Radio and Television in Ramalah.

In 2012, occupation forces stormed the headquarters of four West Bank media outlets.

On February 29, Watan TV was targeted. Equipment and valued archives were confiscated. Its director, Muammar Orabi said:

"The material losses, in spite of its large value and its impact on the institution's work, can be compensated, but the archives are priceless."

"In 2002, the occupation forces confiscated all the television station's productions since its beginning in 1996, and now they have again confiscated all our archives from 2002 until the date of intrusion."

On the same day, Quds Educational TV was raided. Its equipment and valued material were taken.

In recent months, other incidents occurred. On April 2, soldiers raided Hona Al-Quds' Jerusalem office. On May 17, they confiscated Jenin-based Al-Aseer channel's main transmitter.

Back-up equipment was used to keep broadcasting. Palestinian media are monitored and targeted for challenging Israeli authority. An Al Quds University community center was raided.

Anyone or activity considered hostile to occupation authority is threatened. Palestinian journalists and media outlets are especially vulnerable. Silencing dissent is official Israeli policy. All ways are used to do it.

MADA said "(b)y confiscating broadcasting equipment, Israeli occupation authorities effectively seize the digital space and frequencies of Palestinian radio and TV stations. In essence, they occupy the airwaves."

In 2000, Radio Bethlehem was targeted. Twice their transmitter was seized. According to Director of Government Media Center's Ghassan Al-Khatib:

"This is part of targeting the Palestinian effort to build a state. The occupation's continuous targeting of media outlets in Palestine has many reasons, chief among them being that Israel is in a permanent media war with the Palestinians."

"Israel seeks to reduce the impact of the Palestinian media on public opinion and the Palestinian voice internationally and instead impose the Israeli narrative over what is happening in Palestine."

"Recently, Israel has been doing this for economic and technical reasons. Some analysts have concluded that Israel wants to retrieve certain frequencies that are economically useful to them. They want to occupy the digital space."

In May 2012, Al-Aseer channel's general director Baha Khairi Mousa was arrested. His home was ransacked and searched. He was taken to an unknown location. Satellite transmitter equipment was confiscated. Broadcasts continued with back-up resources.

During Cast Lead, Al-Jawharah's facilities were bombed. Various channels use them for live TV broadcasts. Media Group chairman Atef Isa said bombardment came during Al-A'lam Iranian TV's live broadcast.

At the time, 20 journalists were on the roof. Israel was told the building is used for live broadcasts. Assurances were given it wouldn't be bombed. Israeli pledges aren't worth the paper they're written on. Verbal ones have no credibility.

Abu Dhabi TV's office was shelled. Heavy damage was sustained. It provides media services for other Arab television channels and outlets.

Nablus' Afaq television was raided and closed. Its equipment and furniture were confiscated. It was targeted earlier.

Palestinian media operations are constantly threatened with shut down. East Jerusalem's Radio FM was closed. Its equipment was seized. Seven of its employees were arrested. Israel falsely claimed it was unlicensed. Its the only Palestinian English radio operation.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

In 1946, General Assembly Resolution 59(I) titled "Calling of an International Conference on the Freedom of Information" designated media freedom as a fundamental human right and cornerstone of all freedoms.

In 1989, UNESCO's Article 1.2(a) reiterated its stipulation "to collaborate in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of people through all means of mass communication (and) to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image."

Many other international laws and conventions protect media and speech freedoms. Israel spurns them.

Speaking, writing, or demonstrating freely subjects Palestinians to repressive crackdowns. Israel tolerates no dissent.

Israeli Arabs also face harsh treatment. Even Jews aren't safe. Challenging Israeli lawlessness endangers them.

Palestinians have no rights whatever. Israeli democracy is more illusion than real. Freedoms are eroding on the way to ending them altogether.

Americans face the same threat. Neither country is fit to live in. Many residents understand and leave.

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