

Israel Slaps Travel Ban on Palestinian Former Mayor

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Global Research, July 10, 2015

[Electronic Intifada](#) 9 July 2015

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

Palestinian citizens of Israel in Umm al-Fahm demonstrate against political detention in June 2014. The former mayor of the city, in present-day Israel, has been hit with a travel ban. Omar Sameer ActiveStills

Israel has renewed a travel ban on a prominent Palestinian political leader from the Triangle region of [present-day Israel](#), according to an [Arabic-language report](#) at the [Arab48](#) website.

Suleiman Eghbaria, former mayor of [Umm al-Fahm](#) and high-ranking official in the northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel, received his first travel ban in July 2014. Citing “national security,” Israel’s interior ministry has since renewed the ban five times.

An estimated 1.7 million Palestinians carry Israeli citizenship and live in cities, towns and villages across present-day Israel. [According](#) to the Haifa-based legal center [Adalah](#), they are subjected to dozens of discriminatory laws that stifle their political expression and limit their access to state funds.

In addition to his activism in the Islamic Movement, Eghbaria works on the boards of several nongovernmental and civic organizations that work with Palestinians in Israel. The travel ban prevents him from traveling abroad for work-related purposes, according to Eghbaria’s lawyer Omar Khamayseh.

Khamayseh, who serves as director of the Foundation for Human Rights in [Nazareth](#), wrote a letter to the interior ministry calling for the cancellation of the travel ban. Alluding to “strange and inaccurate considerations” listed in the ban order, Khamayseh said that the move “is not motivated by state security,” reports [Arab48](#).

The ban is an attack on “the Arab community as a whole,” Khamayseh wrote, stating that it will not prevent Palestinian activists from campaigning for the [al-Aqsa mosque](#) in occupied [East Jerusalem](#) and “will not deter us from communicating with the world and Arab and Islamic charities and associations.”

Crackdown

Israel “exploits” its emergency laws in order “to curb the activities of the Islamic Movement’s leaders,” he wrote, “and these measures are in violation of all international laws.”

Based in Umm al-Fahm and headed by [Sheikh Raed Salah](#), the northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel boycotts Israeli elections and rejects the legitimacy of the Israeli parliament, the [Knesset](#). For years, Israeli authorities have targeted its leaders and members for arrest, detention and interrogation.

While mayor of Umm al-Fahm, Eghbaria himself was arrested by Israeli forces in 2010 along with eight other members of the Islamic Movement. Israeli police had arrested them “on suspicion of money laundering for illegal groups,” *Arab48* [reported](#) at the time.

More recently, Israel has mulled efforts to ban the Islamic Movement altogether. In October 2014, Israeli lawmaker [Alex Miller](#) – a member of the ultra-nationalist [Yisrael Beiteinu](#) party – [proposed a bill](#) to outlaw the Islamic Movement at the behest of [Avigdor Lieberman](#), his party’s leader and then foreign minister.

Back in May 2014, hardline Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) proposed forming a “special interministerial committee for Arab sector affairs” designed to “neutralize the extremist factors” by outlawing the Islamic Movement, the Israeli daily *Haaretz* [reported](#). That committee was not created due to political squabbling within Netanyahu’s cabinet.

Mosque raided

The movement’s leader, Raed Salah, has been arrested by Israeli forces several times. In March 2014, [he was sentenced to eight months](#) in prison for “incitement to violence” over a 2007 speech in which he urged Palestinians to engage in an “Islamic intifada.”

Israel’s crackdown on Palestinian citizens of Israel has not been limited to members of the northern branch of the Islamic Movement, either.

The renewal of Eghbaria’s travel ban comes just two weeks after Palestinian parliamentarian [Basel Ghattas](#) was [arrested for his participation in an activist flotilla](#) that aimed to break Israel’s ongoing blockade on the [Gaza Strip](#).

Back in March, Israel’s Central Election Committee [voted to ban influential Palestinian lawmaker Haneen Zoabi](#) from participating in the elections. Israel’s high court, however, later overturned that decision.

And earlier this week, Israel’s [Border Police](#) were [caught on tape](#) as they raided a mosque in Zalafa, a Palestinian village near Umm al-Fahm. The Border Police claimed they had intelligence that “illegal Palestinian workers” from the West Bank were being sheltered in the mosque, but locals denounced the raid, *Arab48* [reports](#).

[Balad](#) – one of the four parties in the Joint List coalition that represents Palestinians in Israel – blasted the “provocative and cowardly act” in a subsequent statement, *Arab48* adds. The party called on Israeli authorities to “stop the growing and repeated attacks on mosques and Islamic and Christian sites in [Palestinian communities in present-day Israel].”

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