

Israel: Violent Racist Frenzy - Right-Wing Groups Chant “Death to Arabs”; Palestinians Beaten, Arrested for Gaza Support

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Global Research, August 20, 2014
Electronic Intifada

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

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

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Israeli police arrest a protester in Haifa during a protest against the assault on Gaza, 18 July. ([Faiz Abu Rmeleh](#) / [ActiveStills](#))

As a Palestinian political activist living in present-day Israel, Tareq Yassin, 23, has grown accustomed to racist intimidation and threats of violence.

Yassin, secretary of the left-wing [Hadash](#) political party’s student wing at the [University of Haifa](#), has been targeted for his activism time and again. Yet last month was the first time he was subjected to vigilante violence by right-wing Israelis.

He was punched in the head during a protest in solidarity with the Gaza Strip, where Israel’s ongoing military offensive has killed more than 2,000 Palestinians. “I was attacked by a group of Israeli right-wing racists,” Yassin recalled.

Since Israel began its latest war on Gaza in early July, Palestinian activists in Israel have told The Electronic Intifada that the political climate has become even more frightening than usual as the country spirals into a violently [racist](#) frenzy.

“Very disturbing”

Lynch mobs have targeted Palestinians and left-wing Israelis in places like Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and Palestinian citizens of Israel across the country have been beaten during protests, attacked by vigilantes, threatened on social media outlets and arrested by police.

Dozens of Palestinians across Israel have also been fired from their jobs for posting content critical of the war on Gaza on social media outlets such as Facebook.

In most cases, employers fired Palestinian employees who posted political content after being threatened with a boycott by local Jewish Israeli communities, according to a lawyer working with the Nazareth-based Kav LaOved workers’ rights group.

In other cases, “Israeli Jews have read statuses of colleagues and then demanded their termination,” the lawyer, Gadeer Nicola, told the liberal Zionist grantmaking group the New Israel Fund in an [interview](#) published on the organization’s website.

“The overall atmosphere for Palestinians in the ‘48 territories [present-day Israel] is very disturbing,” Yassin told The Electronic Intifada.

An estimated 1.7 million [Palestinians carry Israeli citizenship](#) and live in cities, towns and villages across the country. [According](#) to the [Adalah Legal Center](#), a Haifa-based Palestinian advocacy group, Palestinian citizens of Israel are subjected to more than fifty discriminatory laws that stifle their political expression and limit their access to state resources, including land.

Prevented from leaving

More than a hundred Palestinian demonstrators, accompanied by a handful of Israelis, assembled in [Haifa's](#) German Colony area to protest Israel's assault on Gaza on 18 July.

"We were demonstrating calmly, without causing any problems or breaching any restrictions," Yassin explained. "But [Israeli police](#) arrived to disperse the demonstration immediately and began arresting people."

Yassin said that police forces, including officers on horseback, then divided the protesters into three separate groups and prevented them from leaving.

A group of right-wing Israelis arrived to stage a counter-protest and began chanting anti-Palestinian slogans and holding placards bearing racist slurs. According to Yassin and other witnesses, Israeli police forces permitted the counter protesters to attack Palestinian demonstrators without interference.

"The police were essentially providing them with protection," he said, adding that he didn't file a police report afterwards due to the systemic lack of justice for Palestinians in Israel's legal system.

Yassin says he saw several Palestinians arrested during the protest, but that he wasn't aware of any Israeli counter protester being detained, despite the racist chants and physical violence. Yassin was beaten by counter protesters.

"Death to Arabs!"

"The police [also] attacked us brutally, especially the ones on horses," said Yassin. "Several [protesters] had to be taken to the hospital for treatment."

A [press release](#) issued by Adalah confirms his account: "A crowd of right-wing Israeli Jewish counter-demonstrators attacked the al-Jabha [the political party Hadash] protestors with stones and empty bottles, while police fired tear gas and water cannons to quell the protests; four people were subsequently taken to the hospital," Adalah stated.

Right-wing protesters who chanted "Death to Arabs!" and "Go to Gaza!" were not arrested, the organization added.



Palestinians in Israel and left-wing activists protest the Israeli assault on Gaza in downtown Haifa on 18 July. ([Oren Ziv](#) / [ActiveStills](#))

When hundreds gathered for another protest the following evening, at least 29 Palestinians were arrested, according to media reports and human rights groups. That demonstration, on 19 July, was also attacked by police forces, including undercover officers and others on horseback.

Waad Ghantous, 22, a Haifa-based activist and recent university graduate, was threatened by police officers that evening.

“A female police officer called me and other female demonstrators terrorists,” she told The Electronic Intifada. “Then she put her face close to mine, and another officer from the Yassam [a police unit] said I will be the next one arrested.”

During several protests that weekend approximately forty Palestinians were arrested in Haifa alone, Adalah noted.

Threats

Threats of violence and attacks have not been limited Haifa. Right-wing mobs also [violently assaulted Palestinians and Israeli leftists](#) in an anti-war protest in [Tel Aviv](#), an Israeli city often promoted by Israel advocates as “liberal.”

Others have been [threatened on social media outlets](#). Yara Abu Ahmad, 20, also a student at Haifa University, says she was threatened by Israelis on Facebook shortly before the latest onslaught on Gaza was launched.

After Abu Ahmad shared an article by Israeli journalist Gideon Levy, who reports critically on Israel's occupation, she opened her Facebook to find a full inbox. "One of my Israeli classmates shared a screenshot of my Facebook profile on the [Im Tirtzu](#) page," she told The Electronic Intifada, referring to an extremist right-wing Zionist movement.

"You filthy terrorist, start packing your things," Ofer Yahav, an Israeli Facebook user, told her. "We are going to throw you away to the Arab countries you come from. You will go back there."

Another Israeli Facebook user, Asaf An, wrote to Abu Ahmad: "Allah, the rat, a son of a bitch, eats in his ass with Mohammad (the gay). Your day will come, bitch."

Shani Levi simply wrote: "Die bitch."

Gal H. Arush wrote: "You little bitch [...] you Arab bitch. You'll be kicked out of Israel."

Elinor Patito told Abu Ahmad to "go live in Gaza or the West Bank."

Because she has a photograph of herself at the beach on her Facebook page, Zahi Afumando told her she would "be raped by your uncles and imprisoned" in Iran and Syria if she were there.

The dozens of additional threats, several of which Abu Ahmad showed to The Electronic Intifada, were laden with racism and sexual harassment.

Incitement

[Nadim Nashif](#), director of the Haifa-based Palestinian advocacy group [Baladna](#), said "the fascists are much more organized than in previous years."

"They always know when the Palestinian demonstrations take place and show up," he told The Electronic Intifada.

"This violence comes from the Israeli politicians [who are] calling for violence all the time," he added. "The right-wing fascists translate it into action in the streets, while the police have been given a much freer hand to arrest and beat Palestinian protesters."

Nashif added that Israeli courts are being "much harsher" on Palestinian citizens of Israel arrested in protests. "It seems clear that there was an order from above. The authorities don't want any opposition right now. They are basically trying to silence everything," he said.

Meanwhile, back in his Haifa dorm room, activist Tareq Yassin says he fears the increase in violent anti-Palestinian racism will persist even if Israel's latest military operation against the Gaza Strip ends soon.

"We are being subjected to a wave of racism for no reason other than that we are Palestinian. Many people are scared to speak Arabic in public, fearing that they might have to pay dearly for it" by being attacked or harassed, he said.

Waad Ghantous contributed translation from Hebrew.

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