



National Lawyers Guild

August 22, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

The International Committee of the National Lawyers Guild writes to you out of serious concern for the six prominent Palestinian human rights organizations that were designated “terrorist organizations” by Israel and out of shock and dismay at their being raided and shut down by Israel on August 18, 2022. Israel’s designations were made on the basis of vague and unsubstantiated allegations and target legitimate and essential Palestinian human rights and civil society organizations.¹ The U.S. must act immediately to stop Israel’s rapidly advancing attack on Palestinian civil society.

The six wrongly accused Palestinian human rights and civil society organizations which were designated on October 22, 2021 are Al-Haq, Addameer, Defense for Children International – Palestine, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, the Bisan Center for Research and Development, and the Union of Palestinian Women Committees. These groups work to provide critical services for Palestinian women and girls, children, low-income families, prisoners, and civil society activists. Much of the work of these organizations involves monitoring and documentation of human rights violations. This work is vital given Israel’s policy of prohibiting international investigative bodies from accessing the occupied territory.²

On August 18, 2022, Israeli troops invaded the occupied Palestinian territory and raided the offices of the six organizations, confiscated materials and shut down the entrances. All of the organizations’ offices are located in Area A of the occupied West Bank- which is legally a Palestinian Authority-administered area.

On August 21, 2022, Israeli authorities summoned the General Director of Al-Haq, Mr. Shawan Jabarin for interrogation at the Ofer Military Base, located near Ramallah.³ Mr. Jabarin was told that Al-Haq was shut down and threatened with arrest. On the same day, lawyer and General

¹ Joint Investigation Reveals That Secret Israeli Dossier offers no proof to justify terrorist designations. The Intercept (2021, November 4). <https://theintercept.com/2021/11/04/secret-israel-dossier-palestinian-rights-terrorist/>

² Statement of the UN Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices, 15 July 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/07/end-mission-statement-un-special-committee-investigate-israeli-practices>

³ Urgent Appeal to the United Nations Special Procedures, 21 August 2022, https://www.alhaq.org/cached_uploads/download/2022/08/21/urgent-appeal-to-the-united-nations-special-procedures-director-threats-1661102213.pdf

Director of Defence for Children International, Palestine (DCI-P), Mr. Khaled Quzmar was summoned for interrogation at the Ofer military base by a Shin Beta agent. Mr. Quzmar was not allowed to have legal counsel accompany him.

Members of Congress, the United Nations and human rights organizations globally have condemned and criticized the designations.⁴ The American Bar Association has stated that the designations are a violations of procedural rights guarantees under international law.⁵ EU partners have rejected the Israeli regime's terrorist designations, saying they will continue their cooperation and strong support for the six organizations.⁶ In a joint statement, the foreign ministries of Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden said they had received no "substantial information" from Israel that would justify reviewing their policy. The UN has called on Israel to cease any actions that would prevent the organizations from continuing their critical human rights work.⁷

Israel's blatant attack on human rights work does not reflect our country's stated stance. The National Lawyers Guild echoes the EU's statement that "A free and strong civil society is indispensable for promoting democratic values..." We urge the State Department to follow the EU's lead and utterly and unequivocally condemn Israel's baseless designations as being unsubstantiated and insist that Israel, at a minimum, allow these organizations to re-open and continue their vital work.

We call on Liz Allen, senior public diplomacy and public affairs official, to visit with the representatives of the six designated organizations while in the West Bank this week. Senior Official Allen will be ignoring a glaring obstacle to peace in the region if she disregards the opportunity to hear directly from the organizations who provide vital work in building fairer and more peaceful societies for all.

⁴ Statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on Israel's "terrorism" designation an unjustified attack on Palestinian civil society, 26 October 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/israel-s-terrorism-designation-unjustified-attack-palestinian>; UN Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups Letter to Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles; Letter from Rep. James P. McGovern to Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken Expressing 'Grave Concern', 8 November 2021, https://mcgovern.house.gov/uploadedfiles/israel_2021_-_to_secy_blinken_-_designation_ngos_as_terrorists_8nov21.pdf; Letter from Rep. Ayanna Pressley and 21 others to Secretary of State Anthony J. Blinken Calling for Rejection of the Designations, 18 July 2022, <https://pressley.house.gov/sites/pressley.house.gov/files/2022%2007%2018%20Sec%20Blinken%20Dir%20Haines%20Palestinian%20NGO%20Letter%20Rep%20Pressley%20vF.pdf>; Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International Joint Statement, 22 October 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/22/israel/palestine-designation-palestinian-rights-groups-terrorists>

⁵ Letter Regarding Israel's Designation of Six Palestinian Human Rights and Humanitarian Organizations as Terrorist Entities. American Bar Association (2022, April 22). https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/government_affairs_office/rol-letter-to-israeli-pm-on-designation-of-palestinian-orgs-as-terrorist.pdf

⁶ EU States Reject Israeli 'Terrorist' Designation for Palestinian NGOs, 12 July 2022, <https://www.government.nl/documents/diplomatic-statements/2022/07/12/joint-statement-on-the-israeli-designation-of-palestinian-civil-society-organisations-as-terrorist-organisations>

⁷ Statement by UN Agencies and the Association of International Development Agencies Working in the OPT, 18 August 2022, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/israeli-raid-on-ngo-offices-statement-by-un-agencies-and-the-association-of-international-development-agencies-working-in-the-opt/>

Further, the State Department must comprehensively review the entirety of Israel's human rights records in light of the Foreign Assistance Act, which prohibits providing assistance to a country that engages in a systematic pattern of human rights violations. The State Department must remove Israel from the visa waiver program and rescind the recently signed information-sharing agreement. In sharing information on U.S. nationals to Israel, the U.S. will be contributing to Israel's repressive use of counterterrorism policy to undermine civil society.

Finally, we urge the State Department to immediately call on the Israeli government to reverse course, rescind the terrorism' designations and cease its harassment of all Palestinian, Israeli and international human rights and civil society organisations which promote human rights and accountability in Israel and Palestine. The U.S. must act now before Israel further escalates the attack on these six Palestinian organizations, such as by arresting their committed staff. Expressions of concern have not changed Israeli behavior. The State Department must make clear to Israel that failure to cease these activities will result in consequences.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Adely, NLG President
Suad Abdel Aziz, NLG Palestine Subcommittee