

ACTION ALERT:

MK HANEEN ZOABI (BALAD) FACES DEATH THREATS AS THE ISRAELI KNESSET HOUSE COMMITTEE VOTES TO REVOKE HER PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE GAZA-BOUND HUMANITARIAN AID FLOTILLA AND PROTESTING AGAINST THE BLOCKADE

AN APPEAL TO PARLIAMENTARIANS WORLDWIDE

JUNE 9, 2010

On June 7, 2010, the Knesset House Committee of the Israeli parliament voted by a majority of seven-to-one to recommend that the parliamentary privileges of MK Haneen Zoabi (NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ASSEMBLY—BALAD) be revoked. In accordance with the committee's decision, MK Zoabi will be stripped of three rights usually enjoyed by members of the Israeli parliament. First, her diplomatic passport will be rescinded. Second, her privileges regarding travel abroad will be curtailed. Third, her legal costs incurred while in service will no longer be covered by the Knesset. Before taking effect, the revocation of these privileges must be approved by the Knesset plenum. A vote on these matters may take place as early as next week.

The House Committee decision followed several stormy days in the Knesset, during which MK Zoabi was accused by fellow parliamentarians of being a "terrorist" and a "traitor," and subjected to racist and sexist remarks so offensive and abusive, that some were ordered stricken from the public record. In light of this hateful atmosphere, it is likely that the Knesset plenum will approve the House Committee's recommendations.

BACKGROUND—MK ZOABI AND THE GAZA FREEDOM FLOTILLA

The ongoing military blockade of the Gaza Strip, now in its fourth year, has turned Gaza into the world's largest open-air prison with what Amnesty International has called "a humanitarian crisis" of "catastrophic levels." To date, there has been little to no international pressure on Israel to lift the blockade, not even after Israel's massive three-week assault on Gaza in 2008-2009, during which some 1400 Palestinians were killed. The twofold aim of last week's "Gaza Freedom Flotilla" was to provide much needed aid to some 1.4 million Palestinians while breaking the international community's silence about, and complicity with, the siege, which is precisely why MK Zoabi accepted the invitation to partake in it.

Together with hundreds of activists hailing from some forty countries, MK Zoabi, representing a diverse constituency of Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel who object to the siege and do not want it perpetrated in their names, set sail with a clear humanitarian message: end the siege, end the occupation, end the oppression of the Palestinian people.

Following the Israeli naval attack on the aid flotilla on May 31, 2010, in which nine Turkish activists were killed, MK Zoabi, enjoying parliamentary immunity, was the first to be released from illegal detention and the first eyewitness to describe what had happened when the boats were intercepted in international waters. Thus, offering the first account to contradict the army spokesperson and embedded journalists, MK Zoabi infuriated the Israeli public by countering the official Israeli version of events. In response, Israeli ministers and MKs have called to revoke her parliamentary immunity and Knesset membership, as well as her criminal prosecution. The Israeli Minister of Interior, accusing MK Zoabi of "treason," has requested authorization from the Attorney-General to revoke her citizenship.

Instead of affirming MK Zoabi's basic political, civil and human rights—including freedom of speech—the Knesset has instead joined the choir and come to the army's defense by attempting to silence MK Zoabi by clipping her wings. On June 2, 2010, one of the stormiest days the Knesset has known, MK Zoabi was attacked not only verbally but also physically by Knesset members from the Israeli mainstream and rightwing (see Knesset video footage: www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBUxZnHb2ig and www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7OEzB1GgRs&NR=1).

In their attempt to “shoot the messenger,” these lawmakers have fueled the fire of public campaigns calling to execute MK Zoabi. Since the “Gaza Freedom Flotilla” last week, MK Zoabi has received over 50 death threats. For fear of violence against her (including by other MKs), the Knesset has had to assign her personal security guards. To date, no ruling party elected official (neither Labor, Kadima nor Likkud) has spoken out in support of her right to life and liberty.

CALL FOR ACTION

The persecution of MK Zoabi is but the latest wave in a tide of political repression against the Palestinian citizens of Israel, including various attempts to disqualify BALAD from participating in the general elections, and to delegitimize Arab activists, intellectuals and political leaders who promote the idea of a democratic “State for all its Citizens.”

Already on the political margins, the Palestinian citizens of Israel and their Israeli Jewish political allies are facing a virulent campaign of incitement, criminalization and state-sanctioned hate. In other words, the narrow space of political legitimacy is shrinking fast, and the latest witch-hunt against MK Haneen Zoabi is a case in point. But it is more than that; it is also a test case. Should the world stand by and let the Israeli parliament strip MK Zoabi of her political rights, revoking her civil rights is but the next step. And if they can do this to an elected official, surely they can do it to an average law-abiding dissenting citizen.

Parliamentarians are accorded immunity and privilege not so they can act beyond or above the law, but so they can use them as means to realize conscionable and responsible ends. If partaking in a peaceful international flotilla aimed at aiding a besieged, beleaguered and impoverished civilian population facing a man-made humanitarian crisis perpetrated by one's own government is not an act of conscience, or civic duty, than what is?

We ask you to contact representatives of the Knesset and the government of Israel ([list of contacts below](#)), and urge them to respect MK Haneen Zoabi's right to carry out her parliamentary work on behalf of the Palestinian citizens of Israel and their Jewish political allies free of abuse, threat, intimidation, punishment or censorship. To deny her rights as a lawmaker is to deny her voters' right to be represented; to defend her rights as a lawmaker is to defend her voters' right to be seen, heard and counted.

In the Name of Balad Parliamentarian Group

Mk Jamal Zahalka | office: 02-6408184 | fax: 02-6753182 | jzhalka@knesset.gov.il

Mk Haneen Zoabi | office: 02-6408029 | fax: 02-6496595 | hzoaby@knesset.gov.il

For more details Contact Yasmeen Daher on 054 4884961 | balad.parliamentarian.group@gmail.com

Contact information:

NAME	TITLE	EMAIL	PHONE	FAX
Reuven Rivlin	Knesset Speaker	rrivlin@knesset.gov.il	02-6753444	02-6496193
Benjamin Netanyahu	Prime Minister	pmo.heb@it.pmo.gov.il	02-6705512	02-5664838
Tzipi Livni	Opposition Chairperson	zlivni@knesset.gov.il	02-6408458	02-6496659
Eliyahu Yishai	Minister of Interior	sar@moin.gov.il	02-6701401	02-5666376

PARLIAMENTARY GROUP CHAIR	PARTY	EMAIL	PHONE	FAX
Dalia Itzik	Kadima	dizik@knesset.gov.il	02-6496756	02-6496055
Zeev Elkin	Likkud	zelkin@knesset.gov.il	02-6408145	02-6496438
Daniel Ben Simon	Labor	dbensimon@knesset.gov.il	02-6408850	02-6496415
Chaim Oron	Meretz	horon@knesset.gov.il	02-6408348/4	03-6961728