



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
15 March 2024

English only

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-fifth session

26 February–5 April 2024

Agenda item 7

**Human rights situation in Palestine and other  
occupied Arab territories**

**Joint written statement\* submitted by Union of Arab Jurists,  
Arab Organization for Human Rights, Association Ma'onah  
for Human Rights and Immigration, Forum for Development  
and Human Rights Dialogue, Human Rights Information and  
Training Center, International Organization for the  
Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,  
International-Lawyers.Org, non-governmental organizations  
in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is  
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[12 February 2024]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Accountability and Safety of Journalists and Aid Workers in Gaza**

The humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, notably in Gaza, demands immediate global attention. As representatives of various NGOs, we highlight the dire situation faced by journalists and humanitarian workers who endure grave violations of human rights and international law, perpetrated by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). Leveraging our organisation's insights and collaborative efforts with NGOs, we seek to comprehensively understand the situation. We urge condemnation and accountability for attacks on journalists and aid workers, emphasising the need to ensure access for humanitarian aid and protect their rights and safety. This requires active support for investigations into human rights abuses to hold perpetrators accountable and demonstrate solidarity with the Palestinian people in upholding universal human rights standards.

### **The Human Cost of Conflict**

The conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has inflicted widespread devastation upon the civilian population, with consequences that reverberate across communities. As of 8 February 2024, the data provided by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reveals the astonishing toll exacted on Palestinian of over 27,708 Palestinians killed and more than 67,147 injured, the human cost of the conflict is immeasurable, with countless families shattered and communities torn apart.

In Gaza, over 1.7 million people have been internally displaced, constituting 75% of the strip's population. This significant displacement highlights the extent of the humanitarian crisis, with families forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in overcrowded shelters or makeshift camps. Moreover, the destruction of essential infrastructure, including housing units, educational facilities, bakeries, ambulances, and mosques, has left communities reeling and deprived them of vital services and resources. Attacks on vital infrastructure worsen the humanitarian crisis, causing acute shortages of food, water, and healthcare for Palestinians. Destruction of schools denies children education, while targeting bakeries and ambulances deprives communities of essential services and medical care. With over 60% of housing units in Gaza damaged or destroyed, thousands of families now find themselves homeless and vulnerable, facing uncertain futures amidst the rubble of their former lives.

### **Targeting of Journalists**

One of the most distressing facets of the conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is the deliberate and systematic targeting of journalists by the Israeli military. In a region where the truth is often obscured by propaganda and misinformation, journalists serve as vital conduits of information, shedding light on the realities of the conflict and providing independent reporting to the international community. However, their pursuit of truth and transparency has been met with increasing hostility and violence, as they face harassment, intimidation, and even death while carrying out their duties; 122 journalists and media workers have been killed by the Israeli forces in Gaza alone, underscoring the grave risks faced by those dedicated to shedding light on the realities of the conflict.

The stories of journalists like Hamza Dahdouh and Mustafa Thuraya serve as poignant reminders of the grave dangers faced by media workers in Gaza. Both journalists were killed in targeted attacks by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), their voices silenced by the very forces they sought to document. Their deaths underscore the profound risks inherent in reporting from Gaza and other conflict zones, where journalists navigate a perilous landscape fraught with danger at every turn. These targeted attacks not only rob the Palestinian people of their right to access accurate and impartial information but also represent egregious violations of international humanitarian law. The deliberate targeting of civilians, including journalists, during armed conflict is unequivocally prohibited under international law, yet such violations continue, perpetuating a culture of impunity and injustice.

Despite facing relentless threats and intimidation, journalists in Gaza continue to demonstrate remarkable courage and resilience in their pursuit of truth and justice. Their unwavering commitment to bearing witness to the realities of the conflict stands as a powerful testament to the indomitable spirit of journalism in the face of adversity.

## **Humanitarian Workers Under Fire**

In addition to the peril faced by journalists, humanitarian workers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory have also been thrust into danger, confronting grave risks as they endeavour to deliver lifesaving aid to those in desperate need. The recent incident involving a World Health Organization (WHO)-led mission to Al-Ahli Hospital serves as a reminder of the harrowing challenges faced by health workers in Gaza. Despite their mission to provide urgent medical assistance to critically injured patients, humanitarian workers have encountered relentless obstacles, harassment, detention, and mistreatment at the hands of Israeli authorities. This situation goes beyond isolated events, as demonstrated by the significant loss: 154 UN staff members, including one from WHO, one from UNDP, and 152 from UNRWA, have tragically lost their lives. Moreover, at least 339 health workers and 46 civil defence personnel have been killed while fulfilling their duties. These figures underscore the immense risks encountered by individuals committed to serving their communities amidst the ongoing conflict.

The obstruction of humanitarian missions and the targeted attacks on humanitarian workers constitute flagrant violations of international law and humanitarian principles. The Geneva Conventions unequivocally safeguard humanitarian personnel engaged in medical missions during armed conflict, mandating their protection and ensuring their unimpeded ability to provide vital assistance without fear of reprisal or interference. Yet, the deliberate targeting of humanitarian workers in Gaza not only disregards these fundamental principles but also endangers the lives of both aid recipients and aid providers alike.

Moreover, the challenges which confront humanitarian workers in gaining access to Gaza serve to compound the already distressful humanitarian situation in Gaza. The severe restrictions on movement and access imposed by Israeli authorities severely hamper the delivery of essential aid and services, leaving vulnerable communities bereft of access to lifesaving assistance. The international community bears a solemn responsibility to urgently address these impediments and to staunchly defend the rights and safety of humanitarian workers operating in Gaza.

By upholding the principles enshrined in international law and humanitarian norms, and by steadfastly advocating for the protection of humanitarian workers, the international community can help mitigate the immense suffering endured by the Palestinian people. It is imperative that concerted efforts be undertaken to ensure unfettered access for humanitarian missions, thereby enabling the delivery of critical aid and services to those in urgent need. Only through collective action and unwavering commitment can we hope to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people and advance the cause of peace and justice in the region.

## **Recommendations**

In light of the aforementioned concerns, we urge the Human Rights Council to consider the following recommendations:

Call for Accountability:

Demand accountability for violations of international law and human rights, especially targeting journalists and humanitarian workers. Perpetrators must face justice to prevent future atrocities. This includes holding individuals directly involved in attacks accountable, as well as those commanding and enabling such actions. The international community should pressure all parties to cooperate with investigations and prosecute violators. Additionally, mechanisms for providing reparations to victims and their families should be established to acknowledge the harm inflicted upon them.

**Ensure Protection:**

Advocate for the protection of journalists and humanitarian workers in conflict zones, including the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Upholding their safety is vital for preserving freedom of expression and humanitarian principles. States must fulfil their duty under international law by ensuring proactive measures to prevent attacks and providing adequate support. International organisations should monitor violations and advocate for enhanced safety measures for these individuals.

**Facilitate Access:**

Facilitate unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza to address urgent civilian needs. Restrictions and attacks on humanitarian missions worsen suffering and must cease immediately. Diplomatic pressure should be applied to lift Israeli-imposed movement restrictions, ensuring free flow of aid and personnel. Addressing root causes like the blockade and occupation is crucial to ending the cycle of violence and suffering.

**Conclusion**

The dire situation facing journalists and aid workers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory demands urgent international attention. As representatives of multiple NGOs, we express deep concern over severe human rights violations in Gaza. Targeted attacks on journalists and humanitarian workers obstruct their vital roles, showing blatant disregard for human dignity and rights. We urge the Human Rights Council to unequivocally condemn these assaults and ensure accountability for the perpetrators. Solidarity with Palestinians requires an immediate cessation of hostilities, unhindered humanitarian access, and protection of journalists and aid workers.

Additionally, we urge the Human Rights Council to support the establishment of an independent investigation, within the already existing independent inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, specifically focused on human rights abuses targeting journalists and humanitarian workers in Gaza. This inquiry would shed light on violations and ensure accountability for those responsible. Collective action and unwavering commitment to justice are essential to alleviate Palestinian suffering and promote peace and human rights. As representatives of civil society organisations dedicated to justice and dignity, we stand ready to collaborate with the Human Rights Council toward these goals, striving for universal protection of human rights.

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Society of Jurists International Association of Syrian Jurists in Türkiye American Center for Justice (ACJ) European Palestinian Council for Political Relations- Brussels, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.