

Israel/OPT: Harassment of Palestinian civil society groups must stop immediately



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Last year devices belonging a number of employees had been hacked with Pegasus spyware developed by the Israeli NSO Group

‘These organisations have contributed enormously to human rights in the OPT and across the globe, yet Israeli army boots trample all over their work’ - Amna Guellali

The Israeli authorities must end their campaign of repression against Palestinian civil society and let organisations carry out their work free from harassment, Amnesty International said after Israeli forces today closed the offices of six Palestinian civil society organisations in the West Bank of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).

Before dawn, Israeli armed forces raided the Ramallah offices of Addameer, al-Haq, Defense for Children International – Palestine (DCIP), the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, Bisan Center for Research and Development, and the Union of Palestinian Women Committees, and confiscated files and equipment. They also issued military orders to close them down and welded shut their office doors.

Amna Guellali, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa, said:

“These organisations have contributed enormously to human rights in the OPT and across the globe, yet Israeli army boots trample all over their work. Amnesty stands proudly in solidarity with our Palestinian partners and calls on all

governments to condemn the Israeli army's attack on Palestinian civil society. "The international community needs to work together not only to reopen the offices of these six organisations, but also to honour their calls to support the International Criminal Court's investigation into the Palestine situation and for international condemnation of Israel's apartheid against Palestinians."

Amnesty spoke to partners at three of the six organisations, who conveyed their shock at the raids and closures.

Amnesty's researchers examined the military orders posted on the office doors of three of the organisations. In all cases, the order to close the offices was based on the 1945 Defence (Emergency) Regulations, which were issued by the British to quash resistance to their rule, and never repealed.

Since 1967, the Israeli military authorities have used these regulations extensively to demolish hundreds of Palestinian homes, deport residents and hold tens of thousands of Palestinians from the OPT in administrative detention. Israeli authorities had also used the regulations against Palestinian citizens of Israel until 1966, but not against Jewish citizens.

These practices, which amount to grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention and violate numerous articles of human rights conventions to which Israel is a party, form part of the system of apartheid that oppresses the Palestinians.

On 19 October last year, Israel's Defense Ministry issued a military order declaring these six Palestinian civil society organisations as "terrorist" entities. The designation effectively outlawed them from operating and allowed the Israeli authorities to close their offices, seize their assets and arrest or jail their staff members. It also prohibited publicly expressing support for their activities or funding the organisations. This designation has been widely condemned, including by international NGOs, European and other third-party governmental offices and representatives, and UN experts.

Prior to this the human rights NGO Front Line Defenders (FLD) collected data that confirmed, following a peer review by

Citizen Lab and Amnesty International's Security Lab, that six devices belonging to six Palestinian human rights defenders in these organisations had been hacked with Pegasus, a form of spyware developed by Israeli cyber-surveillance company NSO Group.

On 18 October 2021, the Israeli minister of interior notified French-Palestinian lawyer Salah Hammouri, who works with Palestinian prisoner rights group Addameer, that his Jerusalem residency was being revoked and he would be deported for allegedly "breaching allegiance with the State of Israel". He has been held in administrative detention, without charge or trial, since 7 March this year. Amnesty has called for his release.

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