



EuroMed Rights – Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network  
EuroMed Droits – Réseau euro-méditerranéen des droits humains  
الأورو -متوسطية للحقوق- الشبكة الأوروبية المتوسطية لحقوق الإنسان

**actalliance eu**  
advocacy to the eu

Brussels, 15 January 2016

## **Re: Israel-Palestine –Increasing hostility towards human rights organisations**

Dear Foreign Minister,

Ahead of the 18 January Foreign Affairs Council, EuroMed Rights and Act Alliance EU call on the EU to express grave concern about the increasingly hostile climate towards human rights organisations and continued efforts to infringe on the rights to freedom of association and freedom of expression in Israel/Palestine.

On 27 December 2015, the Cabinet’s Ministerial Committee for Legislative Affairs approved the “NGO Transparency Bill”. This is the latest of a series of bills targeting NGO funding. Singling out NGOs that receive more than 50% of their funding from foreign public sources, the bill would label NGOs as “foreign state entities” requiring them to note their foreign funding on all publications, in meetings and writings with public representatives. Meanwhile, NGOs receiving funding from private foreign sources or those [promoting](#) illegal Israeli settlements remain unhindered by the bill. The bill is intrinsically discriminatory and serves to intimidate and ostracise those organisations who express dissenting opinions on the government’s human rights record towards Palestinians.

The bill comes amidst an intensification of hostile rhetoric aimed at discrediting and undermining the work of specific human rights organisations. Several Palestinian NGOs involved in documenting alleged Israeli crimes have been subjected to defamation campaigns by both public and anonymous sources. On 15 December the right-wing organisation, Im Tirtzu, published a [video](#) inciting against prominent Israeli organisations including EuroMed Rights members B’Tselem and the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel. Depicting a stabbing attack, the video insinuated that these acts are encouraged by Israeli human rights organisations which it referred to as foreign agents of the EU.

While Im Tirtzu is not a state entity, the Israeli government took no steps to condemn its video. Quite the contrary, similarly hostile language is regularly adopted by government officials in Israel. In June 2015, Deputy Foreign Minister Hotovely accused EuroMed Rights members of association with terrorists, while most recently Justice Minister Shaked described Israeli human rights organisations as foreign agents “meddling in Israel’s internal affairs”. Reportedly, Hotovely also [ordered](#) Israeli officials to make it clear in their diplomatic dialogue that support to certain organisations, including those working on the right of return for Palestinian refugees or international criminal prosecutions against Israeli soldiers would be a red line.

Palestinian citizens of Israel also bear the brunt of the recent efforts to limit the freedom of association and political expression. Since October 2015, there have been [cases](#) of excessive police force against demonstrators, including minors, as well as several arrests based on charges of alleged "incitement for politically oriented" Facebook posts. Moreover, on 17 November, the Defence Minister ordered the outlawing of the northern branch of the Islamic Movement, along with 17 charities linked to the movement. The order, which was issued without hearing or presenting substantive evidence, has criminalised participation in these organisations which offer social welfare services to many Palestinian citizens of Israel.

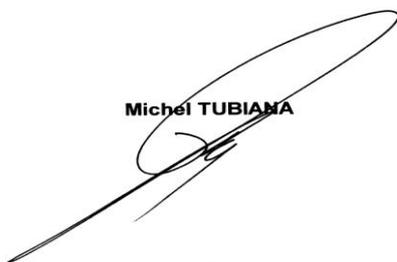
Similarly disquieting trends can be observed in Palestine. Over several years, amendments to laws and presidential decrees have been proposed or enacted allowing the Palestinian Authority (PA) greater power over NGOs. For example, a 2007 Presidential Decree on Civil Associations and Organisations Registration and Licenses gave the Minister of Interior powers to review the licenses of such organisations which subsequently led to the [closure](#) of several NGOs. A 2011 amendment also allowed the State's general treasury to seize the finances of dissolved organisations. Furthermore, between March and November 2015, Al-Haq documented increasing restrictions on freedom of expression by the PA including the summoning and arrests of journalists, social media activists and students, as well as restrictions to media freedoms.

The recent hostility towards human rights organisations is as much an attack against freedom of expression as it is against the "[shared values](#)" on which the EU's bilateral relations with both parties are supposed to be based.

In view of the upcoming Foreign Affairs Council and in line with the EU's previously taken positions at [EU-Israel Association Councils](#) and in the [EU-Palestine Action Plan](#), the EU should:

- Call on Israel to withdraw the "NGO transparency bill" and cease the further introduction and enactment of legislation that aims at limiting the space of civil society;
- Call on Palestine to repeal all presidential decrees, orders and amendments to law which restrict the autonomy of NGOs;
- Express grave concern about the increasing hostility against human rights NGOs in Israel/Palestine;
- Call on all parties to promote a vibrant and independent civil society including by refraining from and appropriately addressing acts of incitement or other efforts which infringe on the rights to freedom of association and expression;
- Stress the vital role civil society plays in promoting open, democratic and pluralistic societies reaffirming that bilateral relations with the EU are conditioned on respect for such values.

Yours sincerely,



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