

*U.S. lawmakers denounce
blacklisting of Palestinian NGOs
by Israel*

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 18, 2022

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

The Honorable Avril Haines
Director of National Intelligence
Office of the Director of National Intelligence
Washington, DC 20511

Dear Secretary Blinken and Director Haines:

We write to you out of serious concern for the six prominent Palestinian human rights organizations that were declared “terrorist organizations” by Israel’s Minister of Defense Benny Gantz over six months ago. A reported lack of evidence to support this decision raises concerns that it may be a deeply repressive measure, designed to criminalize and silence prominent and essential Palestinian human rights organizations.¹

The six Palestinian human rights and civil society organizations are Addameer, Al-Haq, 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.² These groups work directly with Palestinian women and girls, children, low-income families, prisoners, and civil society activists, providing direct services and monitoring human rights abuses by both Israeli and Palestinian authorities.

On October 22, 2021, Israel’s Minister of Defense Benny Gantz, signed an order designating the six Palestinian human rights and civil society organizations as “terrorist organizations,” stating the organizations “were active under the cover of civil society organizations, but in practice belong and constitute an arm of the [PFLP],” a reference to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a group which has long been designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the State Department.³ The move effectively criminalized and banned their activities within Israel. Two weeks later, on November 3, 2021, Israel’s Chief Military Commander in the West Bank declared the organizations to be “unlawful associations” in the occupied West Bank under Israeli military law.⁴

¹ *Secret Israeli document offers no proof to justify Terror label for Palestinian groups*. The Intercept (2021, November 4). <https://theintercept.com/2021/11/04/secret-israel-dossier-palestinian-rights-terrorist/>; *Israel's new secret document still fails to tie Palestinian NGOs to 'terrorism'*. +972 Magazine (2022, January 13). <https://www.972mag.com/israel-document-palestinian-ngos/>

² *Gantz declares six Palestinian rights groups 'terror organizations'*. The Times of Israel (2021, October 22). <https://www.timesofisrael.com/gantz-declares-six-palestinian-human-rights-groups-terrorist-organizations/>

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Two weeks on, Israeli army extends Palestinian NGO terror designation to West Bank*. Haaretz.com (2021, November 7). <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2021-11-07:ty-article/permission/two-weeks-on-israeli-army-extends-palestinian-ngo-terror-designation-to-west-bank-0000017f-060f-d460-a0ff-bef6a14f0000>

Group of Democrats urges Biden administration to reject labelling of six Palestinian rights organisations as ‘terrorist’ groups.

Washington, July 19 (RHC)-- A group of United States legislators has urged the Biden administration to publicly reject Israel's labelling of six Palestinian human rights organisations as "terrorist" groups, in the latest international push against the Israeli decision.

In a letter addressed to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines on Monday, 21 members of Congress – all Democrats – decried the absence of available evidence backing the Israeli allegations against the Palestinian organisations.

"The U.S. must always and consistently speak out against efforts by all countries attempting to undermine civil society and the necessary work of humanitarian organizations. Counter-terrorism legislation must not be applied to legitimate human rights and humanitarian activities," the letter, piloted by progressive Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley, reads.

"Furthermore, repressive tactics such as criminalizing organizations must not be used to suppress or deny the right to freedom of association, or to quash political dissent, or limit the peaceful activities of civil society."

Israel blacklisted the six leading Palestinian human rights and civil society organisations in October 2021 over alleged links to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) political faction.

The order by the Israeli defence ministry practically outlawed Al-Haq, Defence for Children International-Palestine, the Bisan Center for Research and Development, the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees and Addameer.

"These groups work directly with Palestinian women and girls, children, low-income families, prisoners, and civil society activists, providing direct services and monitoring human rights abuses by both Israeli and Palestinian authorities," the U.S. legislators said.

The letter requested a briefing from Biden administration officials with the signatories to discuss the designation and the purported evidence that Israel said it provided to Washington to justify the blacklisting of the groups.

"Evidence justifying this designation has not been provided publicly or to all Members of Congress, despite multiple requests," it said. "We urge you to publicly reject this decision, call on the Israeli government to reverse course, confirm a date for an inter-agency briefing with the below signatories, and provide a report to Congress on your efforts within 30 days."

Over the past months, numerous international bodies and foreign governments have denounced the Israeli move, but Washington has yet to articulate a clear position on whether it believes the blacklisting was justified.

Last month, a State Department spokesperson told Al Jazeera in an email that "the US government has not designated any of the organisations in question, nor have we provided funding to any of these groups."

The spokesperson added that the US made clear to Israel and the Palestinian Authority that "independent civil society organisations in the West Bank and in Israel must be able to continue their important work."

Monday's letter comes shortly after President Joe Biden returned from his first trip to the Middle East, in which he visited Israel and promised to bolster US-Israeli ties.

Since coming into office in January 2021, Biden and his top aides generally have shied away from openly criticising Israel. But Washington's European allies have been more explicit in rejecting the Israeli decision concerning the Palestinian NGOs.

Earlier this month, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden issued a statement rejecting the blacklisting of the groups. It said Israel did not provide “substantial information” to back its allegations, stressing that a “free and strong civil society is indispensable for promoting democratic values and for the two-state solution”.

The European Commission also recently resumed funding for the organisations after a months-long suspension.

The UN Human Rights Council had denounced the Israeli decision, as well, while Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International called the move “appalling and unjust” in a joint statement last year.

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/293912-us-lawmakers-denounce-blacklisting-of-palestinian-ngos-by-israel>



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