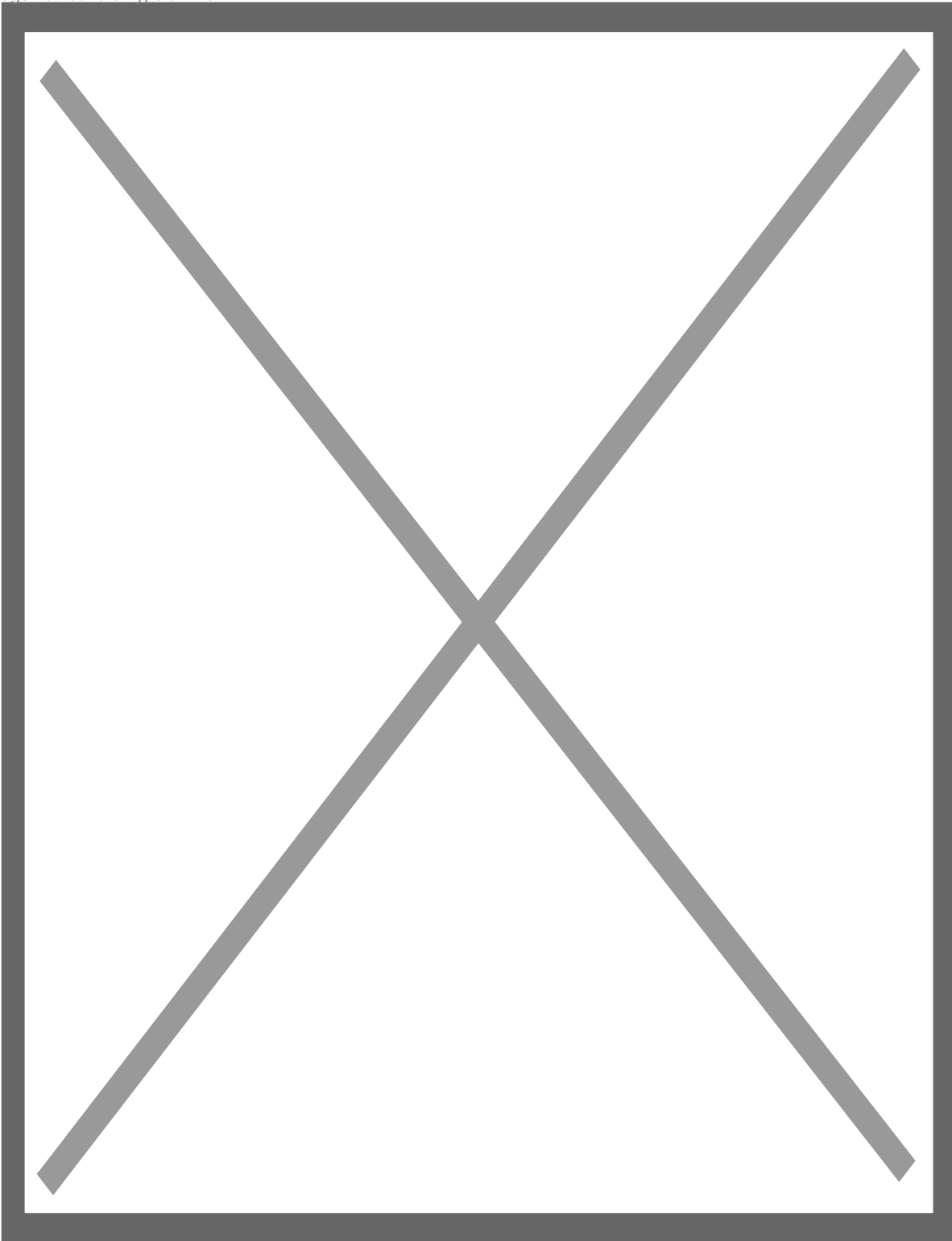


*U.S. lawmakers denounce  
blacklisting of Palestinian NGOs  
by Israel*

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**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.

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