

Al Jazeera condemns Israeli government decision to shut down channel



Police raid the Al Jazeera offices in East Jerusalem, confiscating equipment, cameras, computers (Chaim Goldberg/Flash90)

Doha, May 5 (RHC)-- The Al Jazeera Media Network has condemned the Israeli government's move to close its operations in Israel as a "criminal act" and warned that the country's suppression of the free press "stands in contravention of international and humanitarian law".

"Al Jazeera Media Network strongly condemns and denounces this criminal act that violates human rights and the basic right to access of information. Al Jazeera affirms its right to continue to provide news and information to its global audiences," the network said in a statement on Sunday.

“Israel’s ongoing suppression of the free press, seen as an effort to conceal its actions in the Gaza Strip, stands in contravention of international and humanitarian law. Israel’s direct targeting and killing of journalists, arrests, intimidation and threats will not deter Al Jazeera from its commitment to cover, whilst more than 140 Palestinian journalists have been killed since the beginning of the war on Gaza.

“The Network vehemently rejects the allegations presented by Israeli authorities suggesting professional media standards have been violated. It reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the values embodied by its Code of Ethics,” it said.

The statement comes after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s cabinet voted unanimously to close Al Jazeera’s operations in Israel, weeks after Israel’s parliament passed a law allowing the temporary closure of foreign broadcasters considered to be a threat to national security during the months-long war in Gaza.

Netanyahu announced the decision on X, formerly Twitter. “The government headed by me unanimously decided: the incitement channel Al Jazeera will be closed in Israel,” he posted in Hebrew.

In another X post, Israel’s Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi said he had signed the orders against Al Jazeera, which would be effective immediately. Karhi also ordered the seizure of Al Jazeera’s broadcasting equipment “used to deliver the channel’s content”, including editing and routing equipment, cameras, microphones, servers and laptops, as well as wireless transmission equipment and some mobile phones.

After the Israeli government’s announcement, the country’s police raided Al Jazeera’s operation in the country and satellite and cable providers also took Al Jazeera off air.

Messages have appeared instead of Al Jazeera’s broadcast on a number of satellite providers, including “Yes” and “Hot.” The message displayed by Yes read: “In accordance with the government decision, the Al Jazeera station’s broadcasts have been stopped in Israel.”

Israel’s decision escalates the country’s long-running feud against Al Jazeera. It also threatens to heighten tensions with Qatar, which funds the media network, at a time when Doha is playing a key role in mediation efforts to halt the war in Gaza.

Israel has long had a rocky relationship with Al Jazeera, accusing it of bias against it and collaboration with Hamas. The Qatar-based network has repeatedly rejected the accusations.

Al Jazeera is one of the few international media outlets to remain in Gaza throughout the war, broadcasting bloody scenes of air attacks and overcrowded hospitals, and accusing Israel of massacres.

Last month, Netanyahu had said he would “act immediately to stop” Al Jazeera’s operations in Israel after its parliament approved a law that grants senior ministers powers to shut down foreign news networks deemed a security risk. “Al Jazeera harmed Israel’s security, actively participated in the October 7 massacre, and incited against Israeli soldiers,” Netanyahu had posted on X.

The network accused Netanyahu of “incitement,” holding the Israeli leader “responsible for the safety of its staff and network premises around the world, following his incitement and this false accusation in a disgraceful manner.”

Al Jazeera’s Zein Basravi, reporting from Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, said the Palestine-Israel conflict is “one of the main reasons that our network exists.” “So to have our journalists, our operations, threatened in this way ... Definitely, the worry here in the occupied West Bank is that we will be next,” he said.

Journalists, global media federations and political analysts have also condemned Israel's decision. Nour Odeh, a political analyst in Ramallah told Al Jazeera that Israel is also acting unhinged feeling in a way that it can get away with this ban.

"But people should be concerned," she said. "This is not just about Al Jazeera.... I think this threatens a lot of organisations. Perhaps even a few progressive Israeli news organisations that have been critical of the war..." she said.

Tim Dawson, the deputy general secretary of the International Federation of Journalists told Al Jazeera from London, that it is "utterly a retrograde and ridiculous decision." "Closing down media, closing down television stations is a sort of thing that despots do," he said.

"Israel makes much of being a democracy and the idea that it can simply close down an international broadcaster of considerable reputation and history is atrocious," Dawson added.

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