

Israeli minister orders return of equipment seized from AP news agency



Tel Aviv, May 21 (RHC)-- Israel's communications minister has ordered that a camera and broadcasting equipment seized from The Associated Press (AP) news agency in southern Israel should be returned.

Israeli officials had on Tuesday confiscated the items from the U.S. news organisation and accused it of violating a new media law by providing images to the Qatari-owned media network Al Jazeera.

After Israel seized the equipment, journalism organizations, an Israeli opposition leader and the White House condemned the decision.

"I have now ordered to cancel the action and return the equipment to the AP," Israeli Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi said late on Tuesday on X. Karhi said the Ministry of Defense will undertake a review of news outlets' positioning of live video of Gaza.

Al Jazeera is among thousands of clients that receive live video feeds from the Associated Press and other news organisations.

“While we are pleased with this development, we remain concerned about the Israeli government’s use of the foreign broadcaster law and the ability of independent journalists to operate freely in Israel,” said Lauren Easton, vice president of corporate communications at The AP.

Officials from the Communications Ministry arrived at the AP location in the southern town of Sderot on Tuesday afternoon and seized the equipment. They handed the AP a piece of paper, signed by Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi, alleging it was violating the country’s foreign broadcaster law.

Shortly before the equipment was seized, the AP was broadcasting a general view of famine-struck northern Gaza, where Israeli forces continue to press a ground and aerial assault.

The AP said it complies with Israel’s military censorship rules, which prohibit broadcasts of details like troops movements that could endanger soldiers. The live shot has generally shown smoke rising over the besieged territory.

The seizure followed a verbal order Thursday to cease the live transmission – which the news organization refused to do.

Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid decried the move as “an act of madness.” “This government behaves as if it has decided to make sure at all costs that Israel will be swayed all over the world. They went crazy,” he said.

The White House said it was a “concerning” development. “We stand firm in our belief that journalists have the ability and the right to do their jobs,” the White House said.

The Palestinian group Hamas also denounced the move, saying it was a “recurring, arbitrary and oppressive act” against press freedom. The group said the move intended to “cover up crimes” carried out by Israeli forces against Palestinians.

On May 5th, the Israeli cabinet voted unanimously to shut down Al Jazeera in the country, immediately ordering the closure of its offices and a ban on the company’s broadcasts and websites. Al Jazeera condemned the decision as a “criminal act.”

It came weeks after Israel’s parliament, the Knesset, passed a law on April 1 that allowed Israel to temporarily shut down foreign media outlets — including Al Jazeera — if it deems them a threat to security.

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 news outlets that has remained in Gaza throughout Israel’s continuing assault.

At least 35,647 people, mostly women and children, have been killed in Israel’s assault on Gaza since October, according to Palestinian health officials.

Israel launched the war on October 7 after Hamas led an attack on southern Israel, killing at least 1,139 people, according to an Al Jazeera tally based on Israeli statistics.



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