

Muslim civil society organizations warn that pro-Palestine activism is under attack in Europe

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Students and activists display a Palestinian flag in a rally in support to the Palestinian people at the university campus of Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po Paris) in Paris, on October 8,

2024. (Photo by AFP)

Warsaw, October 10 (RHC)-- Muslim civil society organizations have raised concerns over an increasing wave of government crackdowns on pro-Palestinian activism throughout Europe, citing violations of human rights and freedom of expression.

In a joint statement at this week's Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Warsaw Human Dimension Conference held in Poland, the participants said that protests and public demonstrations supporting Palestine have faced heightened scrutiny and restrictions from local authorities. Groups from the UK, France, Sweden, Austria, and Denmark said there had been an "undeniable increase in the suppression and criminalization of forms of resistance to Israeli atrocities in Gaza", citing the arrests of activists and protesters, restrictions on freedom of speech and the dissolution and banning of organizations.

Activists noted a pattern of increased police presence at events, as well as the imposition of fines and legal actions against organizers, which all disproportionately impact Muslim communities, who are often at the forefront of these movements. They called for greater awareness and support to ensure that their voices are not silenced in the ongoing discourse surrounding the ongoing Israeli war.

In the 10-day conference, activists also warned that such continent-wide crackdown had exposed a "worrying decline in the promotion and protection of human rights." In their statement, the Muslim organizations criticized global institutions and European countries for their inability to hold Israel accountable, urging the OSCE to "enforce mechanisms to compel governments to adhere to international law otherwise it condemns itself as an inept institution."

French activist: Paris 'spearhead of Islamophobia, discrimination' in Europe

Elias d'Imzalene, a prominent French Muslim activist participating in the conference, said France had become "the spearhead of Islamophobia and discrimination in Europe." "This year, to make sure it remains ahead of the game, any activist calling for a ceasefire in Gaza is being severely persecuted. The state seeks to silence their voice by any means necessary," d'Imzalene said, speaking on behalf of Perspectives Musulmanes, a French Muslim advocacy organization. D'Imzalene is set to stand trial later this month after he was taken into custody over a speech in which he called for "intifada in Paris" during a pro-Palestine demonstration in September.

Amanj Aziz, a representative of the Swedish Muslim advocacy group Insan, reflected on the past year marked by what he described as the Western world's overt neglect of fundamental human rights and the violations that have occurred.

"It is absurd to be sitting in this room with delegates who support the ongoing genocide in Palestine, who censor and arrest protesters in their own countries, and to be surrounded by flags of countries who have come to symbolize hypocrisy rather than democracy," Aziz said.

Hezana Hafiz, outreach coordinator for the UK-based campaign group Cage, addressed the conference, saying that the UK government is undermining civil liberties and judicial independence while simultaneously endorsing arms exports to Israel. "To allow Israel to prevail with impunity is one of the darkest stains of our time," said Hafiz.

Representatives from governments, international organizations, and civil society of 57 member states from Europe, Central Asia and North America are gathering at the human dimension conference, which the OSCE characterizes as a vital opportunity to assess the current status of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law across its member states.

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