

Palestinian journalists on the front line get shut down by Israel

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Israeli missiles brought down a tower housing Al Jazeera, AP, and other media offices in Gaza City on May 15 [Ashraf Abu Amrah/Reuters]

Occupied East Jerusalem, June 3 (RHC)-- More than a dozen Palestinian journalists were recently arrested by Israeli authorities after attempting to report the news under often "extremely stressful and dangerous" conditions.

Two Palestinians -- journalist Zeina Halawani and cameraman Wahbe Mikkieh -- were released this week to house arrest after being detained by Israeli security forces over a week ago in occupied East

Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. They were trying to cover protests over the pending expulsion of Palestinians from their homes to make way for Israeli settlers.

After five days in jail, the judge at Jerusalem's Central Court released them on bail of 4,000 shekels (\$1,230) each and ordered them to be under house arrest for a month, forbidding them from communicating with each other for 15 days. "The police accused the two of assault, obstructing police work, and of making threats," their lawyer Jad Qadamani told Al Jazeera.

However, video footage of the day's events and their arrest was shown to the judge that contradicted police evidence. "The police wanted to keep them locked up for further investigation but they lacked sufficient evidence," said Qadamani. "The file on them has not been closed either, but I believe there is no case for the district attorney to press charges."

"The occupation forces claimed that I tried to obstruct the arrest of my colleague Zeina and that I assaulted the occupation army. That did not happen," said Mikkieh, who was hit on the head with the butt of a gun causing him to bleed, describing the five days in prison as the hardest in his life.

Halawani said she was accused of assault, raising the Palestinian flag, and inciting young men to attack police. "None of that is true. I have bruises on my body where I was beaten by two policewomen," she told Al Jazeera as she described the terrible conditions in prison where she could hear children crying through the night.

Despite their ordeal, both journalists remained defiant with Halawani vowing to continue "publishing the truth and facing the occupation." While their experience was traumatic they got out with only minor injuries.

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