

UN experts condemn continuing attacks on journalists in Gaza

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Relatives, colleagues and loved ones of Al-Quds TV journalist Cebr Abu Hedrus, who was killed in an Israeli attack, attend his funeral in Deir el-Balah, Gaza, December 30, 2023 [File: Ashraf Amra/Anadolu Agency]

United Nations, February 1 (RHC)-- United Nations experts have condemned the deadly attacks on journalists and media workers in Gaza, calling on Israel to allow journalists to enter the besieged territory and to ensure their protection.

In a statement released on Thursday, the experts described the war on Gaza as the “most dangerous conflict for journalists in recent history.”

“We have received disturbing reports that, despite being clearly identifiable in jackets and helmets marked ‘press’ or travelling in well-marked press vehicles, journalists have come under attack, which would seem to indicate that the killings, injury, and detention are a deliberate strategy by Israeli forces to obstruct the media and silence critical reporting,” they said.

The experts included Irene Khan, UN rapporteur on free expression; Francesca Albanese, UN rapporteur on Palestine; and Morris Tidball-Binz, UN rapporteur on extrajudicial killings.

Citing UN reports, the statement said more than 122 journalists and media workers have been killed in Gaza since the outbreak of the war. Four Israeli journalists were killed during the October 7 attack, and three Lebanese journalists have been killed in Israeli shelling.

“We pay special tribute to the courage and resilience of journalists and media workers in Gaza who continue to put their own lives on the line every day in the course of duty, while also enduring enormous hardship and tragic loss of colleagues, friends and families in one of the bloodiest, most ruthless conflicts of our times,” the experts said.

The UN officials underscored the case of Al Jazeera’s Gaza bureau chief Wael Dahdouh, whose wife Amna, son Mahmoud, daughter Sham and grandson Adam were killed in an Israeli air raid in October. Dahdouh was later wounded in an Israeli drone attack that killed his colleague, Al Jazeera cameraman Samer Abudaqa. Last month, his eldest son, Hamza – a journalist who worked with Al Jazeera – was killed in an Israeli attack alongside fellow journalist Mustafa Thuraya.

“Journalists are entitled to protection as civilians under international humanitarian law. Targeted attacks and killings of journalists are war crimes,” the UN experts said. They called for impartial investigations into the killing of journalists.

Press freedom groups have warned about the apparent targeting of journalists in Gaza. Beyond the killing of journalists, media workers across the occupied Palestinian territories have been subject to increased attacks and crackdowns by Israel over the past few months.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, a New York-based watchdog, 25 journalists have been arrested in Israel and the Palestinian territories since October 7th. Others suffered “assaults, threats, cyberattacks and censorship”, the group says.

Attacks on journalists in Gaza come amid the broader violence against the Palestinian territory. UN officials and aid groups have said that the conflict has been one of the most destructive in modern times.

“The wholesale destruction of Gaza and the number of civilian casualties in such a short period are totally unprecedented during my mandate,” UN chief Antonio Guterres said last month.

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