

Palestinian journalists covering Gaza war win UNESCO Press Freedom Prize

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Al Jazeera's bureau chief in Gaza, Wael Al-Dahdouh, along with fellow journalists, mourn during the funeral of his son Hamza Wael Dahdouh, a journalist with the Al Jazeera television network

Geneva, May 3 (RHC)-- All Palestinian journalists covering Israel's war on Gaza have been awarded UNESCO's World Press Freedom Prize, the United Nations cultural agency has said.

"In these times of darkness and hopelessness, we wish to share a strong message of solidarity and recognition to those Palestinian journalists who are covering this crisis in such dramatic circumstances," Mauricio Weibel, chair of the international jury of media professionals, said during the announcement on Thursday.

"As humanity, we have a huge debt to their courage and commitment to freedom of expression," Weibel added during a ceremony in Chile's capital, Santiago, on the eve of World Press Freedom Day on Friday.

More than 100 journalists and media workers, the vast majority Palestinian, have been killed in the first seven months of the current conflict in Gaza that started in October, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

Gaza's Government Media Office put that toll at more than 140.

In an interview with Al Jazeera, Weibel said the world has "a huge debt to the Palestinian journalists." "We are facing many risks around the world, and we need to say, 'Stop'," he added.

Audrey Azoulay, director general of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, said the prize pays "tribute to the courage of journalists facing difficult and dangerous circumstances".

Al Jazeera's Lucia Newman, reporting from Santiago, described the event as an "extremely emotional ceremony." "There were many people in the room who were crying. There were a lot of emotions and very strong applause."

Al Jazeera journalists in Gaza were among those who have been targeted by Israeli strikes since October. In December, Al Jazeera's Gaza bureau chief Wael Dahdouh was wounded in an Israeli strike in which his colleague and Al Jazeera Arabic's cameraman Samer Abudaqa was killed, while they were reporting in southern Gaza.

Dahdouh's wife Amna, son Mahmoud, daughter Sham and grandson Adam were killed in an attack in October after an Israeli air raid hit the home they were sheltering in at the Nuseirat refugee camp.

The veteran journalist's eldest son, Hamza Dahdouh, also an Al Jazeera journalist, was killed in January by an Israeli missile attack in Khan Younis, southern Gaza. He was in a vehicle near al-Mawasi, an Israel designated safe area, with journalist Mustafa Thuraya, who was also killed in the attack.

According to reports from Al Jazeera correspondents, their vehicle was targeted as they were trying to interview civilians displaced by previous bombings. In February, Mohamed Yaghi, a freelance photojournalist who worked with multiple media outlets, including Al Jazeera, was also killed in an Israeli air strike in Deir el-Balah, central Gaza.

At least 34,596 Palestinians have been killed and 77,816 wounded in Israeli attacks on Gaza since October 7th. The death toll in Israel from the Hamas-led attacks stands at 1,139 with dozens of people still held captive.

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