

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
King Charles St, Whitehall
London SW1A 2AH

October 30, 2021

Dear Foreign Secretary,

We write to you as a group of British-Palestinian citizens and residents deeply concerned by the State of Israel's recent declaration to criminalise six leading Palestinian human rights organisations.

This move represents a dramatic escalation of a wider campaign, led by the Israeli government, to delegitimise human rights defenders and advocates of Palestinian rights in Palestine, Israel, and beyond, including here in the UK.

This type of tactic, popular with repressive authoritarian regimes around the world, is not new, and it creates significant challenges to the human rights defenders working with these organisations, and the millions of people they serve. That is, indeed, the point; to chill any effective advocacy for Palestinian rights. At the same time, it is yet another reflection of the extent to which Israel has been emboldened by decades of impunity, despite its extensive and well-documented violations of international law.

Al-Haq, Addameer, Bisan Center, Defence for Children International Palestine, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, and the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees are leading Palestinian organisations committed to protecting children, providing legal support, researching and advocating for social justice, and monitoring human rights violations. As the High Commissioner for Human Rights has noted, they are some of the most reputable human rights and humanitarian groups in the occupied Palestinian territory and have worked closely with the UN for decades. They have provided important briefings to many British Government ministers and MPs over the years, in order to shed light on the human rights situation in Palestine. The sheer breadth and depth of statements of support from [Palestinian](#), [Israeli](#), and [international](#) human rights organisations, UN officials, and policymakers around the world is testament to the significance and urgency of this matter.

Israel has revealed no evidence for its criminalisation of the six organisations - rather deeming information 'classified' and referencing vague or irrelevant reasons including entirely legitimate activities such as provision of legal aid. The [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) has confirmed that there has been "no evidence presented to support these accusations" and a [senior EU official](#) stated that similar claims in the past "have never been substantiated". This step has come at a critical moment for accountability, in the context of Israel's overarching regime of control, with the opening of an ICC investigation into the situation in Palestine, and a growing body of evidence reaffirming what Palestinian academics, lawyers, and human rights defenders have been describing for decades as crimes of Apartheid.

The UK has a commitment and duty to ensure that Palestinian human rights defenders - and human rights defenders around the world - are able to operate without fear of intimidation or reprisal. Every such move that the Israeli government makes, and on which the British government remains silent, not only places Palestinians at further risk but also damages the credibility of the UK. We trust you will agree that this type of draconian and anti-democratic step is not acceptable anywhere.

We therefore urge the following actions:

- Urge the State of Israel, through all diplomatic and political means, to immediately rescind this designation
- Meet with the six organisations and take a clear public position on this matter, emphasising the unacceptable nature of Israel's decision
- Publicly commit to supporting human rights and human rights defenders in Palestine and around the world
- Take proactive steps to ensure the UK and its citizens are not complicit in human rights abuses, whether through arms trade, settlement trade, or any other financial links to Israel's settlement enterprise.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Omar Al-Qattan, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, AM Qattan Foundation & Chair of The Palestinian Museum

Sawsan Asfari, Co-Founder & Trustee, The Galilee Foundation

Dr. Tareq Baconi, al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network

Tamara Ben Halim, Director, Makan

Zaher Birawi, Chairman, EuroPal Forum

Selma Dabbagh, Writer

Professor Kamel Hawwash, University of Birmingham

Nadia Hijab, Author and Human Rights Advocate

Dr. Sara Husseini, Director, British Palestinian Council

Ben Jamal, Director, Palestine Solidarity Campaign

Dr Ghada Karmi, former research fellow, Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter

Dr. Ahmad Samih Khalidi, St Antony's College, Oxford

Dr. Mazen Masri, City, University of London

Professor Dina Matar, SOAS

Atallah Said, OBE, Honorary Patron and Founder, British Palestinian Council

Akram Salhab, PhD Student, Queen Mary University of London

Zac Sammour, Barrister

Professor Abdunaser Sayma, Academic based in London

Dr. Aimee Shalan, human rights advocate & Chair, British Palestinian Council

Cc: The Rt Hon James Cleverly

Minister for Middle East and North Africa