



FIGHTING GLOBAL POVERTY



LAWYERS FOR PALESTINIAN
HUMAN RIGHTS



Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP
Minister of State for the Middle East at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

14 May 2018

Dear Minister Burt,

Re: Requesting that the UK urgently intervenes in Israel's appalling decision to deport human rights defender, Omar Shakir

We write as a coalition of human rights and campaigning organisations to request your intervention in the appalling decision of Israeli authorities on 7 May 2018 to deport Omar Shakir, the Human Rights Watch Israel and Palestine director, because of alleged support for boycotts of Israel. He has been ordered to leave within 14 days, subject to an appeal that Human Rights Watch is currently bringing before an Israeli court.

We assert that the decision to deport Omar Shakir represents a direct attack by Israel against the principled work of human rights defenders, and must be reversed. We agree with Human Rights Watch when it says that the decision to deport Omar Shakir: “[I]s not about Shakir, but rather about muzzling Human Rights Watch and shutting down criticism of Israel’s rights record. Compiling dossiers on and deporting human rights defenders is a page out of the Russian or Egyptian security services’ playbook.”

We also share the view of [15 Israeli human rights organisations who stated](#): “Israel’s decision to deport a Human Rights Watch official, and the growing list of people to whom it denies entry for criticizing of the occupation, place Israel squarely on a list of disreputable states... [I]srael is trying to keep both its own citizens and the world from seeing what it is doing.”

In 2011, Israeli authorities passed a law allowing people to file lawsuits and seek damages against anyone who publicly calls for boycotts of Israel, defined to include boycotts of settlements. In March 2017, an amendment to the Law of Entry, empowered authorities to refuse entry into the country to activists who publicly call for or have committed to participate in a boycott against Israel.

Israel's Interior Ministry acknowledged in its May 7 deportation decision letter that “no information has surfaced regarding such (boycott) activities” since Omar Shakir joined Human Rights Watch. Rather, authorities based its decision on a dossier a government ministry compiled on his activities spanning over a decade, almost all of them predating his Human Rights Watch employment.

Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights, Amnesty International UK Section and War on Want are extremely concerned by the decision to deport Omar Shakir on highly spurious grounds.



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We accordingly urge the UK government to act immediately with your European counterparts on this case under the framework of the EU Guidelines for Human Rights Defenders. We suggest this should principally include urgently issuing a UK and/or EU Local Statement that:

- i) Condemns the decision to deport Omar Shakir;
- ii) Calls on its immediate reversal; and
- iii) Re-asserts the need to protect human rights defenders working on critical human rights and rule of law issues.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this urgent matter, and we look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Tareq Shrourou, Director,
Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights

Asad Rehman, Executive Director,
War on Want

Tim Hancock, Director of the Chief Executive's Office,
Amnesty International UK