



Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Foreign Secretary
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

CC: British Consulate-General Jerusalem

10 April 2019

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: UK intervention required under EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders for ongoing judicial harassment of human rights defender Issa Amro

We write to request your intervention under the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defender to protect Palestinian human rights defender Issa Amro from judicial harassment in relation to his peaceful work in defence of human rights within Hebron, in the occupied West Bank.

Issa Amro is the founder and coordinator of Youth Against Settlements, a human rights group in Hebron which seeks to end the building and expanding of illegal Israeli settlements through non-violent popular struggle and civil resistance. Notwithstanding the legitimate nature of his work, Issa Amro is currently subject to a campaign of judicial harassment from both Palestinian and Israeli authorities, which has disrupted both his work and private life.

Judicial harassment by Palestinian authorities

On 28 March 2019, Issa Amro attended the Hebron District Court, following the revision of charges brought against him in 2017 that are linked to his peaceful work in defence of human rights. The court adjourned the hearing to 22 May 2019 to summon witnesses. The 2017 charges relate to a Facebook post published by Issa Amro criticising Palestinian authorities for the arrest of a journalist. At a closed hearing on 7 September 2017, the Hebron District Court charged him with “disruption of public order”, “insulting the authorities” and “inciting strife”. These charges have since been amended to “inciting sectarian strife” and “publishing material that endangers the integrity of the public order of the state.” The offences are considered crimes by the Palestinian 2017 Electronic Crimes Law, that has been criticised by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch as repressively curbing freedom of expression for peaceful critics of the Palestinian Authority. They carry a punishment of a 12-month prison sentence and a considerable financial fine.

The human rights organisation, Front Line Defenders, disturbingly reports that Issa Amro has received death threats through social media, telephone, and his family members. They further report that in February 2019, families and organisations in Hebron received messages whom they believe to be from Fatah, threatening them with adverse consequences if they work with the human rights defender or his organisation. On 28 March 2019, Youth Against Settlements decided to suspend their activities until the harassment against them ceases.



Judicial harassment by Israeli authorities

Issa Amro is simultaneously facing judicial harassment by Israeli authorities for his role in organising protests against Israeli discriminatory policies and settlements in Hebron which violate international law. On 1 April 2019, the Israeli Military Court in Ofer adjourned Issa Amro's court hearing to 7 April 2019 in order to summon a witness. The hearing will consider 18 security-related charges. LPHR shares the position of Front Line Defenders that the charges against Issa Amro are baseless and stem solely from his peaceful activism.

UK intervention under EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders is required

The harassment of Issa Amro is a continuation of a pattern. A statement of UN Special Rapporteurs in August 2013 urged Israel to stop its "ongoing judicial harassment, intimidation and abusive treatment" of Issa Amro. The UN human rights experts reported that Issa Amro was arrested and detained 20 times in 2012, and six times in 2013, without being charged. They highlighted a specific incident on 8 July 2013, when Israeli soldiers allegedly beat Mr. Amro, taking photos of him on a stretcher and threatening to shoot him. He was hospitalised more than five hours later and summoned to the same police station the next day.

We are extremely concerned by the apparent deliberate obstruction of the work of Issa Amro's as a human rights defender through a sustained pattern of acts of judicial harassment, intimidation and retaliation. These acts appear intentionally aimed to stifle the legitimate exercise of freedom of association and expression of Issa Amro and Youth Against Settlements, and to exert a deterrent or chilling effect on other human rights defenders and human rights organisations to exercise their rights and perform their functions.

We therefore urge the UK government to take immediate steps to protect Issa Amro. In particular, we urge the UK to consider working closely with European counterparts to examine this serious matter under the framework of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders. We suggest this includes maintaining suitable contact with Issa Amro, and attending and observing his simultaneous trials. We also suggest this includes preparing a joint public statement that condemns the incidents of sustained harassment against him by Israeli and Palestinian authorities, and calls for an environment in which human rights defenders can undertake their work without restriction, unless where necessary and proportionate under international human rights law, and without fear of retaliatory acts.

We would be grateful for your careful consideration of this matter and for your written reply.

Yours sincerely,

Tareq Shrourou (Director) and Aleisha Esfahani
Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights