



Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
Foreign Secretary
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
London SW1A 2AH

CC: Minister Dr Andrew Murrison MP
British Consulate-General Jerusalem

19 December 2019

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Request to the UK government to urge Israeli authorities to lift a travel ban on human rights defender, Laith Abu Zeyad, that impedes his work and denies him from seeing his unwell mother who is undergoing chemotherapy treatment

We write to request your intervention in the case of an arbitrary travel ban imposed by Israeli authorities on the Palestinian human rights defender, Laith Abu Zeyad, of Amnesty International. The travel ban denies him travel outside of the occupied West Bank which adversely affects his ability to perform his human rights work. Moreover, it has the punitive effect of preventing him from seeing his mother whilst she is undergoing chemotherapy treatment in Jerusalem. We therefore request the UK government to urge the Israeli authorities to immediately lift the travel ban on human rights and/or compassionate grounds.

In September, Laith Abu Zeyad, Amnesty International's Campaigner on Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories, was denied a humanitarian permit to enter Israel from the occupied West Bank to accompany his mother for chemotherapy treatment in Jerusalem. Laith was subsequently stopped at the Allenby/King Hussein crossing between Jordan and the occupied West Bank on 26 October while on his way to attend a relative's funeral. He was kept waiting for four hours before being informed he has been banned from travelling by Israeli intelligence for undisclosed "security reasons".

The permit regime imposed by Israeli authorities requires all Palestinian residents of the occupied Palestinian territory to obtain an entry permit in order to enter Israel, including East Jerusalem, for any reason, including work, medical care and family visits. The arbitrarily imposed travel restrictions in this case fundamentally infringes Laith Abu Zeyad's right to family life under international human rights law. It further prevents him from entering East Jerusalem and Israel or travelling abroad for essential activities, including advocacy at the UN and other international organisations and participation in conferences and other events.

According to international human rights standards, restrictions on the right to freedom of movement may only be imposed exceptionally, and must be necessary for a legitimate purpose, proportionate and based on clear legal grounds. The reasons must be made clear, and the restrictions should be open to legal challenge. The refusal of the Israeli authorities to make public any evidence to substantiate the reasons for this travel ban means Laith Abu Zeyad has been denied a meaningful opportunity to challenge the ban in court.



Background

Laith Abu Zeyad has been granted three permits to enter Israel, each lasting for six months, since he began working with Amnesty International in November 2017. The last of these three permits was valid from 20 November 2018 to 12 May 2019.

On 8 September 2019, Laith Abu Zeyad applied for a humanitarian permit at al-Zaytoona military checkpoint (Hazatem) to accompany his mother for medical treatment in Jerusalem. His application was denied on the same day based on “security reasons” without any further explanation.

On 13 June 2018, Laith Abu Zeyad was among those arbitrarily detained and tortured by Palestinian security forces, during a crackdown on a demonstration organised by Palestinian activists in Ramallah demanding that the Ramallah-based Palestinian authorities lift the sanctions imposed on the Hamas-run Gaza Strip. He had been apprehended and attacked by two security officials in civilian clothes on his way to monitor the demonstration.

As stated by Amnesty International, “*In recent years, Israeli authorities have dramatically intensified their intimidation of civil society organisations and their staff in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. Civil society are facing continuing attacks, through restrictive legislation and governmental policies coupled with smear campaigns aimed at delegitimising human rights work.*” Recent examples include Israeli forces raiding the offices of Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, a Palestinian human rights organisation, in September. And on 5 November, the Israeli Supreme Court denied an appeal against a decision of the government of Israel to revoke the work permit of Human Rights Watch’s Israel and Palestine Director, Omar Shakir, leading to his deportation.

UK intervention to immediately lift travel ban on human rights and/or compassionate grounds

We request the UK government to intervene in this matter by urging Israeli authorities to immediately lift the arbitrary travel ban imposed on the human rights defender, Laith Abu Zeyad, by citing human rights and/or compassionate grounds. We also ask 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 would be grateful for your careful consideration of this matter and for your written reply.

Yours sincerely,

Tareq Shrourou (Director) and Aleisha Ebrahimi-Tsamis
Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights