



Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
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CC: Minister James Cleverly MP

26 May 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

We write to raise urgent concern over reported violations and abuses in the context of mass arrest and detention by Israeli security forces targeting Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We urge the UK government to take immediate action to remind the Israeli authorities of their obligations under international law to respect the fundamental right to assembly, including the right to protest. Furthermore, we urge the UK government to investigate patterns of serious violations and abuse by Israeli authorities, with particular attention to the right to life and the prohibition on torture and ill-treatment under international human rights law.

On the evening of 23 May 2021, Israeli media outlets publicised that Israeli authorities had initiated an operation dubbed as ‘Law and Order’ with the intention to arrest some 500 people within two days in order to ‘even the score’ with Palestinian citizens of Israel.¹ The operation was announced following widespread protests by Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinian residents of occupied East Jerusalem against the imminent forcible displacement of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah, militarised repression at Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, and the 11-day military bombardment of the Gaza Strip. Israeli authorities stated on 23 May that they had already detained over 1,550 Palestinian citizens of Israel since 9 May, including a large number of children.²

Human rights organisations and monitors on the ground in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, including partners and local branches of our organisations, have collected evidence of excessive force used by Israeli police and other armed forces against Palestinians in occupied East Jerusalem, as well as citizens of Israel, in the context of these protests.³ In particular, the following violations have been reported:

- Excessive force used in the repression of protests, including the use of live fire, rubber-coated steel bullets, stun grenades, tear gas, and skunk water;
- Excessive force used in arrests, targeting arrestees and bystanders (including family members in the same house);
- Arbitrary arrest, including of lawyers and individuals documenting incidents;
- Mass arrests and detention, and numerous reports of violations of rights in the process, including of minors;
- Declarations by Israeli officials that appear to condone civilian and police violence against Palestinian citizens of Israel, including a statement by Prime Minister Netanyahu encouraging Israeli authorities to use an “iron fist” in the repression of protests, and assurances that there should be no “apprehension over [future] commissions of inquiry, investigations, inspections”⁴;
- Use of a ‘state of emergency’ to suspend rights, with a disproportionate impact on Palestinian citizens of Israel, who already face systematic discrimination.

The highest representative body of Palestinian citizens of Israel has made an unprecedented call for international protection, saying: “The Palestinian citizens, collectively, are afraid for their lives. This fear is intensified as the bodies that should be affording protection and enforcing the law appear to be shielding the Israeli Jewish vigilante and settler groups.”⁵

In addition, in the occupied West Bank, since 10 May 2021, 27 Palestinians have been killed, including four children, and 6,794 injured by Israeli forces across the West Bank in protests, clashes and attacks. Of all the injuries recorded, about 60 per cent required medical treatment after inhaling tear gas, 25 per cent were hit by rubber bullets, and 11 per cent were shot with live ammunition.⁶

We are especially concerned about this specific violence and these apparent rights violations, but we would be remiss not to mention that this falls within the wider context of systematic discrimination against Palestinians that has by now been well-documented by Palestinian, Israeli, and international human rights experts.

We consider that it is imperative for the UK government to take immediate action and to exercise leadership over these serious human rights issues, including by:

- i) Reminding the Israeli authorities of their obligations to respect the fundamental right to assembly, including the right to protest, and that they must comply with the UN Basic Principle of Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials;
- ii) Undertake its own investigation into the pattern of excessive use of force by Israel's authorities against Palestinian protesters, including use of lethal live ammunition in the occupied West Bank, as well as the institutionalised use of arrest and detention of Palestinians, including children, that is credibly-evidenced to encompass routine ill-treatment that may rise to the level of torture.

We would be grateful for your consideration of this urgent request and for your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Ryvka Barnard
Head of Civic Space
War on Want

Tareq Shrourou
Director
**Lawyers for Palestinian
Human Rights**

Kristyan Benedict
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¹ [“Law and order’: The police will launch an arrest operation across the country today”](#) (in Hebrew), *Ynet*, 23 May 2021.

² As reported in [“A war declaration’: Palestinians in Israel decry mass arrests”](#), *Al Jazeera*, 24 May 2021. Original police statement (in Hebrew) [here](#).

³ [“Israel/ OPT: End brutal repression of Palestinians protesting forced displacement in occupied East Jerusalem”](#), *Amnesty International*, 10 May 2021.

⁴ [“Netanyahu calls for administrative detentions to quell Arab-Jewish violence”](#), *The Times of Israel*, 13 May 2021.

⁵ [“A Call on the International Community to Act: Protect Palestinian Citizens of Israel”](#), *The High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel*, 16 May 2021.

⁶ [“Escalation in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Israel”](#), *UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Occupied Palestinian Territory*, 23 May 2021.