

Detention of Palestinian Human Rights Defender Issa Amro by the Palestinian Preventive Security Forces

On 4 September 2017, Palestinian Preventive Security Forces arrested Issa Amro, EU- and UN-recognized Human Rights Defender (HRD) and coordinator of the nonviolent activist group Youth Against Settlements (YAS) in Hebron. Ever since, he remained in detention. On Thursday, 7 September 2017, his detention was prolonged for another four days.

Mr. Amro's arrest comes after he was summoned for interrogation over a facebook post, in which Amro criticized the arrest of radio journalist Ayman Qawasmeh by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and called for the guarantee of freedom of expression and opinion. In addition to the charge of 'disturbing public order' under the Electronic Crimes Law which the PA recently passed, further charges put forward against Mr. Amro are 'causing strife' and 'insulting the higher authorities' under the 1960 Jordanian Penal code. The later is still enforced in the West Bank today.

Amnesty International and other international human rights organizations harshly criticized Amro's arrest and demand his immediate release. According to Amnesty International, his arrest needs to be seen in the context of "an alarming escalation in the Palestinian authorities' clampdown on freedom of expression in recent months."¹

Since 5 September, in protest to his detention and the conditions of his arrest, Issa Amro is on hunger strike and refuses to take food, water, or medicine until his release. According to Youth Against Settlements, he repeatedly was threatened with physical violence by the Preventive Security Forces.

We call upon you to:

- Take position publicly for freedom of expression in the occupied Palestinian territory, and demand the immediate release of Human Rights Defender Issa Amro.
- Ask the Palestinian representations to take position in the case of Issa Amro's detention and call upon President Mahmoud Abbas to immediately release him.
- Call upon your party as well as the German government to take position in the same spirit.

Before following the summons for interrogation, Mr. Amro issued the following statement to be released in case of his arrest:

"All my writings on social media are part of the freedom of opinion and expression stipulated by the Palestinian Basic Law and are protected by all international laws and conventions. My arrest will not affect my defense of human rights and the rights of journalists to exercise their work freely and without pressure from the government."

¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/09/palestinian-human-rights-activist-charged-under-repressive-new-cybercrimes-law/>

Mr. Amro is also currently facing 18 charges in Israeli military court for his nonviolent work for an end of the Israeli occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory.²

Shortly after his arrest on 4 September 2017, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights published the following statement on facebook:³

OHCHR is concerned at the arrest of human rights defender Mr Issa Amro in Hebron today by the Palestinian Preventive Security. Mr Amro, who has also been the subject of a number of legal proceedings by Israel related to his work as a human rights defender, appears to have been detained after social media posts criticizing the arrest of a journalist by the authorities. The right to freedom of expression is guaranteed by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a binding human rights treaty voluntarily ratified by Palestine in 2014. The UN Human Rights Committee has made it clear that “in circumstances of public debate concerning public figures in the political domain and public institutions, the value placed by the Covenant upon uninhibited expression is particularly high” (General comment No. 34, Article 19: Freedoms of opinion and expression, para 38). OHCHR is monitoring the case, and urges Mr Amro’s release.

In a letter to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on 5 September, former Vice President of the European Parliament and President of AssopacePalestina Mrs. Luisa Morgantini, writes:

I am fully aware of the difficult and contradictory situation in which the PA is forced to live. But this does not justify the arrest of Issa Amro because of his criticism of certain actions of the PA or even of the President. But I must be sincere with you –my concern is not only about Issa Amro, there are actions made by the Preventive Security Forces that are really scary and a danger to democracy.

² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/11/israel-opt-drop-baseless-charges-against-palestinian-human-rights-defender/>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/UNHumanRightsOPT/posts/761442074044120>