

FOSNA Statement on Israel's Labeling of Top Palestinian Human Rights Agencies as "Terrorist Organizations"

By Jonathan Kuttab

FOSNA Executive Director and Al-Haq Cofounder

About 40 years ago, Raja Shehadeh, Charles Shamma, and I created Al-Haq, the first Palestinian human rights organization. After our first publication, "The West Bank and the Rule of Law," an Israeli ambassador contemptuously dismissed us as "a mouthpiece for the PLO" and for "making a mountain out of a molehill." We argued back through the International Commission of Jurists, which was our sponsor, that we are totally independent and meticulous about our facts and documentation. We challenged him to prove his claims or to show that ANY of our publications contained any materially incorrect facts. He never replied.

In fact, we were viewed with some suspicion within the Palestinian community because we were strictly independent and spoke the language of human rights and international law, rather than political polemics. This was new for most Palestinians. We persisted, however, and other organizations followed in our footsteps. We managed to have a positive impact on Palestinian society as a serious human rights organization. Al-Haq is now one of several world-renowned and respected human rights organizations. I am proud to say that over the years Al-Haq has meticulously maintained its high standards and, after the Oslo process, was courageous enough to apply the same standards of objectivity, independence, and defense of human rights not just to the Israeli occupation, but also to the behaviour of the Palestinian Authority, and also of Hamas.

I was therefore shocked, though not surprised, when Israel today declared Al-Haq, together with Addamir, Defence of Children International-Palestine, and three other human rights organizations to be "terrorist organizations." This is a far cry from the polemical, false accusations thrown at us occasionally by Israeli propagandists like the NGO Monitor. It carries practical consequences, such as the seizure of assets, arrest of personnel, and the criminalization of anyone who donates to or cooperates with us in any way.

The fact that Israel is choosing now to attack all six human rights organizations is deeply troubling. It may mean that we are finally becoming effective and successful, that Israel realizes it has lost the public-relations war, and that the world now knows and acknowledges the reality that it is an apartheid state and a systematic violator of human rights and international law. The Defense minister may be afraid that the day is approaching when he and other politicians and army generals may face prosecution before the International Criminal Court for war

crimes and crimes against humanity, and he decided to silence these organizations and cripple their activities.

Another explanation, I am afraid, is that Israel no longer cares about its reputation and no longer fears international public opinion, or any sanctions by the international community. The fact that it has been successful so far in avoiding accountability, and that just a few months ago it ransacked the offices of Defense for Children International in Ramallah with little or no push back emboldened it to do whatever it wants without fear of repercussions. Its assault on civil society can go on unchallenged!!

For this reason alone, it is imperative that we must act now. Our churches, first and foremost, but also our elected representatives must hear from us immediately. Israel must know that its actions are monitored, noted, and will lead to consequences. At the very least, it can no longer claim to be a democracy and be part of the Western world. It can join the likes of Saudi Arabia and North Korea if it chooses, but as long as it pretends to be a democracy and lays claim to billions in economic and military aid from the United States and preferred trade treatment from the US and Europe, it must be made to abide by international standards, and at the very least, stop its attacks on human rights organizations.

So please join with FOSNA and others in this action.

Learn More. Take Action:

- Jewish Voice for Peace has set up an easy mechanism for calling your representatives, which can be [found here at JVP Action](#).
- Also, please check out this informative [Online Action Guide from the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights](#) for more background and other actions to take.
- [Joint Statement](#) by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International
- Al-Jazeera: [Palestinian NGOs designated 'terrorists' call for support](#)
- Journalists can [contact FOSNA](#) to arrange for interviews

Call now and urge your church, as well as your representatives in Washington, to take action and stop this assault on human rights activists and organizations..