

UN Human Rights Office in Occupied Palestinian Territory
Ramallah
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Killings of journalists and their family members in Gaza

The UN Human Rights Office in Occupied Palestinian Territory is alarmed by an unprecedented rate of journalists and media workers who have been killed in Gaza since 7 October.

OHCHR has verified the killing of 50 journalists and media workers, and has received information that 30 more may have died, amounting to approximately 6 per cent of all those registered with the Journalists' Syndicate in Gaza. According to the International Federation of Journalists, 73 per cent of the total number of journalists and media workers killed globally so far in 2023 have been in Gaza.

Gaza has seemingly become the deadliest place for journalists – and their families – in the world.

Journalists and media workers, utilising a variety of tools, including social media, have kept the world informed in real-time of the horrors that civilians in Gaza are enduring. Their dedication deserves tribute. But one by one, these eyes on the ground are going dark.

Mr. Mustafa Ayyash, the founder and Director of the Gaza Now News Agency, was killed along with at least eight members of his family, including children, in an apparent airstrike on his house in Al Nuseirat Camp on 22 November. He had covered escalations of hostilities in Gaza since 2014. Ayyash's last post on his X social media account was just prior to his own death, in which he reported that an Israeli Security Forces' (ISF) strike in Al Nuseirat Camp had claimed the lives of his own father, mother, sister, two brothers and other extended family members.

On 9 December, an apparent airstrike on the home of Ms. Ola Attallah, a prominent journalist, in Al Daraj area in eastern Gaza City, killed her along with nine members of her family. Ms. Attallah had worked for different local and international media outlets, including Al Anadolu news agency. Since 7 October, she had been very active reporting on the desperate plight and suffering of civilians in Gaza and the terrible toll that this conflict has taken on them.

Also, on 9 December, Mr. Mohammad Abu Samra, a photojournalist specialised in covering sporting events, was reportedly killed by a sniper.

On 24 October, Al Jazeera viewers witnessed correspondent Mr. Wael Dahdouh receive news on air of the killing of his wife, son, daughter and grandson. On 8 December, a strike on the home of Mr Abdalhamid Abdelati, a journalist and the Head of Al Sawt Al Sha'b Radio station, reportedly killed seven members of his family, including his mother, sister, and brother. Mr. Abdelati, was not at home at the time of the strike.

International humanitarian law requires that the parties to an armed conflict take all necessary measures to minimise the impact of military operations on civilians, which includes journalists and media workers. In war zones, journalists and media workers perform a particularly vital

function by informing the public about what is happening, and by so doing they highlight the impact of violence on civilians and their humanitarian and other protection needs, promote compliance with the applicable rules of international law, and support accountability by documenting violations.

Every effort must be made to ensure that journalists and media workers are respected and protected.

An alleged Israeli strike destroyed a house in the vicinity of Jabalia Camp on 6 November, killing 22 members of the same extended family of Mr. Momen Al Sharafi, including his parents, siblings and their children. This is one of four incidents since 7 October in which Israeli Forces allegedly struck the locations of reporters working for Al Jazeera and their family members.

Of grave concern are the widely reported claims that journalists and media workers have received intimidatory and threatening phone calls from Israeli security personnel. Threats reportedly preceded the killing of Mr. Rifa'at Al A'reer, a well-known poet, professor and online commentator, who was killed along with six members of his extended family, including his siblings and their children, in an apparent Israeli airstrike in Gaza City on 7 December. Mr. Al A'reer was the founder of the "We Are Not Numbers" project in Gaza, and a prolific writer on the Palestinian cause. The last threat he received shortly before his death prompted him to leave his family at a shelter and relocate to his sister's apartment, where he and his relatives were killed.

These and other similar reports must be fully and transparently investigated, along with the conduct of the military operations that led to the deaths of these journalists, media workers and their family members.

The killing of journalists, their forced displacement from the north, and severe movement restrictions have greatly hindered efforts to monitor, document, and report on the situation in Gaza and on violations and abuses of international law. Information is already scarce due to power and internet connectivity blackouts resulting from ISF strikes on key infrastructures as well as the acute fuel shortage caused by extreme restrictions on fuel imports into Gaza imposed by Israeli authorities.

Israel and Egypt have not permitted journalists to rotate in or out of the Gaza Strip and only a handful of international journalists embedded with the ISF have been able to briefly enter, reporting only what the ISF allows them.

Despite these obstacles, a dwindling number of local reporters and media workers, who themselves must endure personal loss and the lack of basic necessities along with the rest of the civilian population, continue to fulfil their functions to keep the world aware of the widening and deepening horrors taking place in Gaza.

Thanks to their work, the world is watching. They must be protected. There must be accountability.

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