

There can be no talk of a free press in the Occupied Palestinian Territory if journalists are being killed, and threatened for their work

Ramallah – 3 May 2025

The UN Human Rights office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) somberly marks World Press Freedom Day as Palestinian journalists continue to be killed or injured at an alarming rate with impunity, along with widespread attacks on their work and freedom.

“Press vests have transformed from a means of protection to a target for attacks,” one journalist told the UN Human Rights office in the OPT. The Office has independently verified the killing of 211 journalists in Gaza since 7 October 2023, including 28 woman journalists. According to UNESCO, at least 47 journalists were killed while on duty. And as of 29 April 2025, 49 Palestinian journalists are held in Israeli detention based on the information from Palestinian Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military have refused to allow foreign journalists entry to Gaza since 7 October 2023, except for limited army-controlled visits – Palestinian journalists endure the trauma of both living under and reporting on the devastation and death inflicted on Palestinians in Gaza by Israel’s military campaign. They are forced to balance the fear for their lives with their professional commitment to go out and report on daily horrors.

Journalists engaged in professional missions in areas of armed conflict must be respected and protected from attack unless directly participating in hostilities. There are strong indications of incidents in which many Palestinian journalists may have been directly targeted by the Israeli military during their work, which would be a war crime.

Meanwhile in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the resilience of Palestinian journalists also persists despite significant, dangerous and targeted backlash against their work. The UN Human Rights Office has monitored multiple cases of journalists detained, a significant number of whom appear to have been detained arbitrarily. Many are held under administrative detention, while others have been detained under broad allegations of “incitement” for social media posts, in many cases for apparently protected speech, as part of wider ongoing efforts to silence civil society and annihilate any form of opposition to the military occupation. Both men and women journalists detained by Israeli security forces have reported to the UN Human Rights Office that they have been subjected to beatings, humiliation and sexual and gender-based violence during interrogations about their journalistic work.

Detention, threats, ill-treatment and sexual violence against journalists falls into a larger pattern of intimidation and smears against Palestinian press across the OPT, where their legitimate work

is often claimed by Israeli security forces to be associated with “terrorism” including as a justification to shut down media offices.

Palestinian authorities have further contributed to the oppressive environment for journalists, including by banning certain media entities from broadcasting in the West Bank since January 2025, reportedly for publishing “inciting content, misinformation, sedition and interference in Palestinian internal affairs”. They have also threatened Palestinian journalists not to feed information to their media outlets. The shutdown came in the context of often critical coverage of a 6-week operation by Palestinian security forces in Jenin refugee camp, which started in December 2024.

Both Palestinian and Israeli security forces have banned or limited journalists’ entry to the Jenin and other refugee camps in northern West Bank. They injured, detained, threatened and in some cases subjected journalists to ill-treatment.

There have also been reports of journalists harassed by Hamas authorities in Gaza, where they were reportedly pressured to refrain from covering sensitive incidents or information critical of the de facto authorities.

The targeting of journalists is a violation of both international humanitarian law and international human rights law and must cease immediately. Perpetrators of attacks on journalists must be held accountable, including by third party States. The killing of journalists in Gaza and the suppression of media coverage across the OPT has likely contributed to the creation of an enabling environment for ongoing violations of international law that the UN Human Rights Office and other entities have repeatedly raised concerns about. The press is a vital part of ensuring accountability for international law violations, and attempts to suppress media work, including through the killing, detention, ill-treatment, threatening of journalists, or shutting down their offices, are disturbing and entirely unacceptable.

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