

The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA)
Violations of media freedoms in oPt during July 2009
MADA: a marked reduction of media freedoms violations over the last month

There was a marked reduction of media freedoms violations in the occupied Palestinian territories during last July especially by Palestinian security services, compared to the previous month.

Last month, the Israeli occupation authorities arrested the reporter and the cameraman of Al-Jazeera, Othman Al-Batiri and Mansour Al-Abi. It also detained the crew of Watan local TV crew and prevented them from filming near the village of Surda, in addition to detention of cameramen Ashraf Shwaiki, Hamza An-Na'aji, and photographer Ammar Awad.

The Palestinian security forces, on the other hand, detained crew of Watan TV while it was trying to cover a protest near the Palestinian presidential headquarters in Ramallah and arrested freelance journalist Mustafa Sabri. The Palestinian National Authority suspended the work of Al Jazeera Television in the West Bank, filed a lawsuit against it.

The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) condemns all violations against journalists and media outlets in the Palestinian territories, it demands to stop them and to release the journalists held by the Palestinian security forces in the West Bank, Gaza and in the Israeli jails, and to respect the freedom of opinion and expression guaranteed in the Palestinian law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

MADA expresses its concern over the continued Israeli occupation forces of preventing journalists from filming inside the Al-Aqsa yards, and condemns the arrest of photojournalists who filmed or tried to enter there in the last three months.

MADA is welcoming the release of Iqra' Channel reporter, Younis Hasasneh, the journalist writer, Seri Sammour and the independent journalist Mustafa Sabri, it calls for the need to respect the decisions of the Palestinian courts and not to circumvent them.

Details of violations:

(July 1) - Al Jazeera Television reporter Othman Al-Batiri and its cameraman Mansour Al-Abi were arrested in Al-Ramleh prison by the Israeli occupation authorities. Al-Batiri said in an interview with Aljazeera after his released that he and the rest of the passengers have been subjected to ill-treatment during and after their arrest and their camera was confiscated. Al-

Batiri and Al-Abi were accompanying the passengers and the crew of the "Spirit of Humanity" ship, which was raided by the Israeli naval forces July 30 and taken it to Ashdod Port in southern Israel, where it was heading to Gaza to break the siege. Al-Batiri was deported to Jordan on July 6 and Al-Abi on July 7.

(July 14) - Watan TV crew (correspondent Nizar Habash, correspondent Nadia Sarsour, cameraman Khalid Melhem, cameraman Suleiman Abu Srour and crew assistant Ibrahim Badwan), were detained near the village of Surda to the north of Ramallah. Nizar Habash said that they were at Birzeit University when they informed about a flying checkpoint by the Israeli occupation forces near the village of Surda. They headed there at around noon to cover the suffering of the people at the checkpoint. When they arrived, they came down from their car prepared for the filming, however, the Israeli soldiers prevented them from filming, confiscated the battery of their camera, screamed to them, and told them "you are held here". After half an hour, the crew told the soldiers "we will inform the media about our detention", so they released them, returned their battery and told them that they would be arrested if they film at the checkpoint.

(July 15) - Al-Jazeera Channel's work in the West Bank was suspended and a lawsuit was filed against it, by the Palestinian National Authority. The Palestinian Ministry of Information issued a statement accusing Al-Jazeera of allocating a wide range of its broadcast to incite against the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the National Authority and that it is still practice inciting "Although repeatedly invited to be neutral in dealing with the Palestinian issue, ... but it is still continuing to incite against the PLO and the National Authority, the latest of which was what it has done yesterday by incitement, sedition and promotion of false news .. Based on the above and for the protection of the interests of our people, the Palestinian National Authority have decided to go to the judiciary and to suspend the work of Aljazeera Office in Palestine until justice makes a decision in this matter, "Al-Jazeera has broadcasted the previous day a news report about Farouk Kaddoumi, a senior Fatah leader, in which he accused President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Legislative Council member Mohammed Dahlan of conspiring with the Israeli leaders for the killing of the late Palestinian president Yasser Arafat. Dr. Salam Fayyad, the Prime Minister and Minister of Information issued a decision on 18 July to cancel the decision of suspending the work of Aljazeera in the West Bank until the decision of the lawsuit filed against it.

(July 18) – Cameramen of Pal Media, Ashraf Shwaiki and, Hamza An-Na'aji, were detained by the Israeli police in the city of Jerusalem. Al-Shwaiki said that they were trying to enter Al-Aqsa yards to film there at about 11:30 when members of the Israeli police stopped them and confiscated their sound equipment and battery and transferred them to a police station near Magharbeh Gate. After an hour the police transferred them to Al Qishleh Center where they were

questioned about the reasons for trying to enter Al-Aqsa Mosque and what they intended to film there. They were released after three hours and asked to return at six and a half to receive the confiscated material. They went on time and picked them up.

(July 22) - Watan Television (reporter Nizar Habash, cameraman Mohammad Njas and one of the trainees) were detained by the Palestinian security while trying to cover a protest for a group of residents of Yatta near the headquarters of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (Moqata'a) in the city of Ramallah. Habash said that they were preparing a camera to film the protest at about 11:00 am, when a group of security forces attended and confiscated their IDs, mobile phones and camera, and took them to one of the rooms of the presidential guard where they questioned them and told them that filming is prohibited unless there is a coordination with the Information Officer in the Office of the President. They released them after about an hour and a half after signing a pledge not to film at the Moqata'a, without prior permission, and then returned the confiscated properties to them after examining the cassette to make sure that there was no filming of the protest.

(July 29) - Freelance journalist Mustafa Sabri was arrested by the Palestinian military intelligence service from his home in the city of Qalqilya in the northern West Bank. His wife said that a group of the mentioned force came to the house at 1:00 am and took her husband to an unknown destination, and then released in the afternoon of that day. Sabri had been released in the twenty-fifth of July from the Preventive Security prison where he was arrested on 21 April 2009. A decision by the Supreme Court of Justice was issued on 15 June to release him. He was exposed to detention, interrogation and arrest a lot of times over the past three years without charge.

(July 30) - Reuters photographer, Ammar Awad, was arrested by the Israeli police in the city of Jerusalem. Awad stated that he was trying to get his cameras into Al-Aqsa Mosque yard at about 11:00 am when members of the Israeli police surrounded him and told him that he is under arrest and transferred him to the police station in the old city, where they interrogated him for three hours, then they transferred to another police station where he was re-interrogated for other three hours. After that they released him after telling that he is prohibited from entering Al-Aqsa yard for a week. They have returned his cameras, ID card and mobile phone which had been confiscated at the beginning of his arrest. Note that the Israeli police prevent the Palestinian photojournalists from filming or holding cameras into the yards of Al-Aqsa Mosque without any justification. They have previously arrested the photojournalists Diala Jwaihan (on 12 April) and Ahmed Jalajel and his assistant Raed Sarhan (on 29 May) for filming in the yards of Al-Aqsa.

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