**Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA)**

Violations of media freedoms in oPt during February 2011

Various violations against journalists during last month

10 March 2011

The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) monitored numerous violations against journalists in the occupied Palestinian territories during February; including the Israeli occupation forces continued use of attacks, arrests, beatings, use of tear gas and concussion grenades and firing of rubber bullets in targeting journalists covering events in Jerusalem, Ramallah and Hebron. In addition, journalists have faced detention and harassments by security forces in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

February has seen six incidences of journalists being targeted in Jerusalem following the Friday prayers, three assaults during journalists’ coverage of the weekly Beit Omar march in Hebron and one arrest, where the journalists was held for 6 days after covering a march of solidarity with the families of the Hebron martyrs.

In Gaza, there were three summonses for investigation, with two being issued to the same journalist in a month period. In addition, one journalist was ordered to stay at home then he was accused from security services of instigating a news-led campaign of incitement against the government.

In the West Bank, a freelance journalist was attacked by police officers, one journalist was detained and interrogated by the Preventive Security Services in Bethlehem, and one was summoned for investigation in Nablus.

**Details of the violations:**

**Violations of the Israeli occupation forces:**

Israeli occupation forces continue to routinely target Palestinian journalists and operate with impunity while the international community averts its eyes, as such each Palestinian journalist knows the great personal risk they take every time they go to report on events in Jerusalem and the weekly marches in the West Bank.

This February Israeli Occupation Forces threw tear gas canisters and concussion grenades in the direction of journalists, one striking the hand of Japan Agency photographer Mu’amar Awad, causing burns. Other journalists at the scene, Quds Net correspondent Diala Jwehan, Al-Quds newspaper photographer Mahmud A’lian, Silwan Net website photographer Muhammad Abu Snenah, MNB agency photographer Ahmad Jaber, and Freelance photographer Mahfouth Abu Turk suffered asphyxiation from the high concentration of gas.

The Israeli occupation forces also targeted journalists covering the weekly march in the town of Beit Omar, Hebron. Agence France-Presse photographer Hazem Bader was beaten twice by occupation force personnel, first on 5th of February 2011, with a second beating on 25th February. In another incident, Pal Media and German TV cameraman Abdul Ghani Natshe was targeted by occupation soldiers, who first shot his hand with a rubber coated bullet then threw a gas bomb at him, causing him to lose consciousness.

Also In Hebron, Israeli occupation forces arrested Al-Jazeera Talk correspondent Mahmoud Jabari on Friday 25th of February 2011. Jabari was in the process of covering a march of solidarity with the families of the Hebron martyrs when soldiers began verbally abusing, beating and detaining him. Jabari was then apprehended by the Israeli occupation court and held in custody until Thursday 3rd of March 2011 when the court issued a ruling ordering his immediate release.

**Summons and harassment in the West Bank and Gaza**:

The status of media freedoms in the West Bank and Gaza continues to deteriorate, where Palestinian journalists continue to be targets for harassment by the various regional security agencies.

In Gaza the majority of violations against journalists were summonses for investigation. This February, internal security services twice summoned Sawt Alsha’b Radio presenter Sameh Ramadan for investigation, and once summoned journalist and Secretariat at the Syndicate of Journalists’ member Yousif Alostaz. In addition, Palestine radio’s presenter Muammar Tamim has been ordered to remain in his home until further notice following an accusation of instigating a news-led campaign of incitement against the government.

Ramadan reports that he received a call from an Internal Security Agency officer of the Hamas Government in Khan Younis. The caller told Ramadan that his opinions, calls and publications incite the public against the Interior Ministry in Gaza. He was then summoned for investigation and appeared before the security headquarters on 15th February 2011, where he was involved in a verbal altercation with a bodyguard, resulting in the postponement of the interview for two days.

According to Ramadan, he returned to the security headquarters on Thursday 27th of February where all of his personal belongings, including mobile phone, were confiscated. After approximately one hour attending officers charged Ramadan with influencing public opinion and incitement; the accusers did not however present any evidence as justification for this indictment. Ramadan denied all charges, adding: "The investigation lasted for about two and a half an hours, in the end they asked me repeatedly to sign a pledge declaring that I will not participate in inflammatory activities, I refused several times but in the end I signed because of the threats they made against me."

Yousif Alostaz was been summoned by an investigation unit of the Government in Gaza on Thursday 10th of February 2011. Alostaz went to their headquarters as requested and was questioned about his involvement with the Journalists Syndicate; including details of the elections at the journalist’s Syndicate and the reason for his participation despite a Supreme Court decision prohibiting elections in Gaza. Interrogators also inquired about the council of the syndicate, how the elections were conducted and details of all matters relating to the syndicate’s operation. Alostaz added: "I explained to them that the elections took place in the West Bank not in Gaza, and that I was nominated for the elections before the court's decision in Gaza. After the completion of the investigation I was released, but they told me they will call me again later."

Palestine Radio presenter Tamim Muarmmar received an email from the internal security service of Gaza warning him not to leave his home. The email message accused Muammar of leading a disinformation campaign against the government and of conspiracy against specific individuals in the government. He was surprised to find later that his e-mail account was deactivated and canceled as a result of hacking attempts. Several weeks prior to this incident, Muammar had been called by an unknown individual demanding him to "end the conspiracies he is plotting against people". An unidentified person also called some of his close friend, telling them: "Tamim Muammar is plotting against you".

In the **West Bank**, Palestinian policemen attacked independent journalist Mohammed Jaradat while he was covering a march of solidarity with the Egyptian people in Ramallah on 2nd February 2011. Jaradat presented his press card to the policemen, but was attacked and taken to the police station regardless, where he was punched and detained for approximately one hour before release.

In another incident members of the Preventive Security Service prevented Quds TV correspondent Mamdouh Hamamrah from covering a teachers’ sit-in in front of the Education Directorate in Bethlehem and transported him to their headquarters. Hamamrah had gone to the Directorate of Education on Monday 7th Februrary to cover a teachers’ sit-in at 10:45 am, when Preventive Security personnel approached him and his colleague and took them to their headquarters in Bethlehem.

Hamamrah told MADA that his colleague - a cameraman - had been released after the security services had reviewed his photographic material, but that he remained in custody for a further two hours where he was interrogated about his work in Quds TV. The detective stated he considered Hamamrah’s work at Al-Quds illegal and threatened to arrest him if he continued his work with the station, adding: "We will arrest you each time you work for Quds, it encourages sedition." Hamamrah added: "they made me sign a pledge declaring that I will not violate the administrative system, I will respect Palestinian law, and will not work for the illegal formal channel in the West Bank - referring to Quds TV. I then inquired about obtaining an official letter designating Quds TV as illegal, but have not received an answer; they just told me to leave my work and look for another job."

The preventative security service also presented freelance journalist Sami Al-Assi with a summons for investigation in Nablus on 14th February 2011. Al-Assi presented himself to security services the following day and was imprisoned in solitary confinement from 10:00 am – 10:00 pm. His brief interview involved only a few questions concerning his marital status.

**Recommendations:**

The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) condemns all violations against Palestinian journalists, which stand in clear contravention to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 19 of Palestinian Basic Law. MADA calls upon the international community to intervene immediately to protect journalists from the Israeli violators that who pose a serious risk to their lives and wellbeing. MADA also calls upon the international community to apply a real pressure on Israel to comply with international conventions and laws safeguarding freedom of expression. MADA also extends its call to all concerned authorities in the West Bank and Gaza to respect freedom of opinion and expression and adhere to Palestinian basic law, as these continued violations deepen the wounds of journalists and exacerbate their daily suffering.

الاستماع

قراءة صوتية للكلمات

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