

MADA Monitors Decline in Media Freedoms this September

Ramallah – 6 October 2011: The level of media freedoms in the Palestinian territories continued to decline in September with increased numbers of violations perpetrated against journalists, particularly by Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF), with heightened usage of tear gas and rubber bullets during the weekly peaceful protests across the West Bank, in addition to an increase in the number of Israeli police and settler perpetrated abuses. One particularly disturbing development is the emergence of reports of the trial usage of three new weapons against unarmed crowds at close range. Two unusual weapons were used against demonstrators at Qalandia on 21 September, just 2 days before Mahmoud Abbas' official UN bid for state recognition, including an unusually toxic teargas and a sonic weapon dubbed "The Scream" by IOF personnel, which lead to the hospitalization of more than 20 protesters; and the other, a type of explosive grenade, was used against a French journalist in Nabi Salah on 23 September.

Palestinian security services in addition continued to harass Palestinian journalists in the past month, with several journalists summoned for investigation as well as the complete prevention of coverage and broadcast of Abbas' UN address in the Gaza Strip on 23 September. Security services also put a Palestinian journalist on trial for slander based on a critical note he posted on the social networking site Facebook concerning the Ministry of Health.

In the light of this deterioration of media freedoms, MADA center welcomes the court's decision to acquit journalist Alaa Al-Titi on all charges of breaching the peace and inciting sectarian violence through his work at Aqsa TV, Al-Titi was charged in October 2008. MADA commends the Palestinian judiciary, and demands that future cases involving journalists are not stalled and delayed for long periods because of the personal toll and professional disruption this causes, as in the case of Al-Titi who after three years is only now gaining closure on the ordeal.

MADA additionally wishes to highlight the importance of facilitating the work of foreign journalists in the Gaza Strip, and not adding more procedures and restriction to their work. BBC News website said that, BBC reporter John Donison was stopped at the Beit Hanoun crossing and told by officials that he must register his entry to the Ministry of the Interior five days before arrival to the Gaza Strip, Donison had to wait at the crossing but was eventually allowed to enter.

Israeli violations: Targeting journalists covering the weekly marches

The IOF attacked a Palestine Public TV crew: correspondent Haron Amayreh and cameraman Fadi Jayousi, during their coverage of the weekly Bila'in march near Ramallah city on Friday 9 September 2011. An Israeli soldier threw a tear gas canister at European agency photographer Ala' Badarneh while covering a settler attack against the Qasrah area near Nablus on Friday 16 September 2011 causing moderate injuries on his right hand. The IOF also threw grenade canisters beside French journalist Chris Huby (36 years), causing severe contusions on his right leg while he was covering events of the Nabi Saleh march, north-west of Ramallah on Friday 23

September 2011. Freelance photographer Ghassan Bannoura was also shot by a rubber bullet on his left leg while covering clashes at Qalandia checkpoint near Ramallah.

Other IOF and settler violations:

Israeli occupation police in the city of Jerusalem handed freelance cameraman Ahmed Jalajil an official injunction banning him from entering the Al Aqsa Mosque for 15 days on Wednesday 28 September 2011, after covering a policeman attack a Palestinian youth outside Al-Aqsa mosque

. Israeli occupation authorities released Al-Jazeera's Afghanistan Bureau Chief Samer Allawi after 49 days detention after his defence team brockered a deal with the Israeli military prosecution team, where Allawi admitted to the charge of conspiracy to provide a service to an organization hostile to Israel - in reference to Hamas, of which the Israeli military accused him of being a member - in return for his release

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Israeli settlers deliberately hurled a large stone at Wafa agency photographer Ayman Nubani, striking his chest, while covering settler's attacks against residents of A'sera village near the city of Nablus on Tuesday 20 September 2011. Unknown persons also threw a large stone at APA and Chinese agency photographer Muamar Awad, leaving him with severe head injuries, after covering the clashes between IOF personnel and locals of Ras Al-Amoud in Jerusalem on Friday 23 September 2011. Awad believes that the perpetrator is working with Israeli security, because of his coverage of their brutally beating a Palestinian youth on his legs before arresting him.

Palestinian security services: Summons for a number of journalists

Palestinian intelligence services in Bethlehem summoned Aqsa TV cameraman Osaid Amarneh for investigation on Saturday 10 September 2011. In Ramallah, security services also summoned freelance journalist Mouáth Meshaal for investigation and raided his residence in the city of Nablus, confiscating personal items and equipment. The Preventive Security Services in the city of Hebron additionally summoned Palestine Public TV programmes producer Hasasneh Younis on Thursday 21 September 2011. In the city of Qalqilya, the columnist Issam Shawar was summoned on Wednesday 21 September 2011.

Additional Palestinian security service violations:

Members of the Hamas intelligence services in Gaza banned journalists from covering Mahmoud Abbas' UN General Assembly address at the Gallery hall in Gaza city on 23 September. In Ramallah, a security officer at PLO headquarters prevented a Watan TV crew: reporter Aysarr Barghouti and cameraman Ahmed Zaki from filming in the vicinity of the compound on Saturday 17 September, despite having received an invitation to a Fatah press conference by its foreign relations officer Dr Nabil Shaath. Radio Bethlehem 2000 director George Kanawati was put on trial for the alleged slander of Bethlehem's Governor Abdel-Fattah Hamayel on Thursday 8 September 2011, after a complaint was filed against a Facebook note posted by Kanawati criticising Bethlehem's Directorate of Health.

Conclusion and recommendations:

The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) reiterates its condemnation of all attacks against journalists in the Palestinian territories, particularly the frequent IOF attacks that pose a very real threat to their lives, wellbeing and ability to cover events. MADA stresses the need for international intervention to protect journalists in the line of duty and to hold perpetrators accountable for their attacks against media freedoms, which continue unabated and undeterred.

MADA also condemns Palestinian security service violations, and calls upon those concerned to bring an immediate halt to violations and hold all perpetrators accountable. MADA also wishes to emphasise the importance of allowing Palestinian and foreign journalists to operate freely, and remember the seriousness of any attempts to restrict or impinge their work in the Gaza Strip, including the repeated attempts to prevent journalists from covering certain events such as the landmark speech of President Mahmoud Abbas at the United Nations General Assembly.

Details of violations and testimony:

(9 Sep) Israeli occupation forces attacked Palestine Public TV crew – correspondent Haron Amayreh and cameraman Fadi Al-Jayousi – while covering the weekly Bila'in march near Ramallah city. The incident occurred on Friday 9 September 2011. Palestine Public TV correspondent Amayreh said that he went with his colleague Al-Jayousi to cover Bila'in's weekly march against the wall and supporting the upcoming UN bid for Palestinian statehood. At 1:15 pm Israeli occupation forces fired rubber bullets and teargas projectiles at them, causing them both moderate asphyxiation. Amayreh added: "the bullets were flying around us and the situation was very dangerous, but thank God we weren't seriously injured."

(10 Sep) Palestinian intelligence services in Bethlehem city summoned the Aqsa TV cameraman Osaid Amarneh for investigation on Saturday 10 September 2011. Amarneh said that he was summoned to appear at intelligence service headquarters where he was questioned about the reason and context of his arrest by Israeli occupation authorities before being released.

(15 Sep) The Magistrate court of Bethlehem city issued the decision to release Radio Bethlehem 2000's director George Canawati on bail, with the provision that he appear again before then court on 3 October 2011, following charges of libel and slander filed by Bethlehem's Governor Abelfatah Hamayel. Canawati published a note critical of Bethlehem's Health Directorate on his Facebook in addition to criticising the presence of Israeli products on a table in a department meeting of managers on Thursday 8 September 2011. Canawati told MADA that after the publication of the notes the governor summoned him to his office. Canawati obliged and met with the governor and other health department staff, where he was faced with questions as to his reasons for writing the note. The governor then requested Canawati deletes the note from the site, to which he responded that the note was not a personal attack, but was written to highlight the indifference and neglect in the Health Directorate and to encourage department staff to instigate change.

Canawati added: "I removed the article but received an unexpected call from the Bethlehem

court offices on Sunday informing me that the governor had filed a complaint against me and my presence was required at their headquarters. I went and gave my statement and they told me to return to the court the following day, I returned as requested accompanied by my lawyer, Anton Salman. I was questioned further and my lawyer presented my defence, after which the judge decided to grant me bail and told me to reappear before the court on 3 October 2011. Canawati's lawyer Anton Salman said "the plaintiff of the case must demonstrate that the comments had a personal negative affect on their life or livelihood in order to prove libel and slander was committed. In my opinion, the governor has not been affected by the article and therefore the complaint is not valid; I filed my defence yesterday on this basis."

(13 Sep) Israeli authorities extended the detention of Al-Jazeera Afghanistan Bureau Chief Samer Allawi for the fifth time since his arrest, for a further eight days. Allawi's lawyer Salim Wakim said Allawi's detention was extended on the basis that the prosecution had obtained certain data concerning the case, but had yet to complete their preliminary investigation. Wakim asked the prosecution team during the trial: "Why you are extending the detention without providing any formal charges against him? The answer was that they have not yet decided that that is what they will do." Wakim added: "I appealed the arrest extension but it was refused on Sunday 18 September 2011". Allawi was released on 26 September 2011 after 49 days of detention. Al-Jazeera said in a statement that the release came as the result of a deal brokered between Allawi's defence and the Israeli military prosecution team, where Allawi admitted to the charge of conspiracy to provide a service to an organization hostile to Israel - in reference to Hamas, of which the Israeli military accused him of being a member - in return for his release

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Samer Allawi was arrested by Israeli Occupation Forces while crossing the Alkaramah/Allenby border from the West Bank to Jordan on Tuesday 9 August 2011, after spending his annual vacation with family in Sabastya village near Nablus city.

(16 Sep) the Israeli occupation soldiers attacked European Agency photographer Alaa Badarneh while covering a settler's attack in the Qasra area (south-east of Nablus), on Friday 16 September 2011. Badarneh reported that the occupation forces intervened to prevent residents from managing the settler's attacks and began throwing tear gas canisters at them: "the soldiers threw a gas canister at me from a distance of about 100 meters, which struck my right hand and caused moderate injury".

(17 Sep) A security officer working at the headquarters of the PLO in Ramallah prevented Watan TV crew - reporter Aysar Barghouti and cameraman Ahmed Zaki - from filming in the vicinity of PLO headquarters on Saturday 17 September 2011, despite having received an invitation to a Fatah press conference by its foreign relations officer Dr Nabil Shaath. According to Barghouti, he went with his colleague Ahmed Zaki to cover the conference commissioned by the Television administration at the official invitation from the office of Dr. Shaath. After covering the conference inside the hall Barghouti, along with other journalists, decided to conclude their reports outside the building, during which time he was approached by a security officer and told to stop filming, the order was accompanied by threats that if they did not leave immediately the security officer would contact military intelligence services Barghouti added: "We refused to leave, so the officer called the intelligence services who told him that they didn't mind our filming, but the officer insisted on preventing us and confiscated our press cards, after about a quarter of an hour he returned them on the condition we did not continue filming".

(20 Sep), Israeli settlers attacked a Wafa agency photographer Ayman Nubani while covering the settler attacks against residents of A'sera village near Nablus, on Tuesday 20 September 2011. Nubani reported that he was in the village to cover events when a settler deliberately threw a large stone at him, hitting his chest and causing severe pain. Nubani added: "Thank God, my injuries were not life threatening, I went to Rafidia hospital in Nablus and they X-rayed my chest and found there were no fractures".

(21 Sep) Preventive Security Services in Hebron summoned Palestine TV programme producer Younis Hasasneh for investigation on Thursday 21 September 2011. Hasasneh reported that a civilian car came to his house in the town of Halhoul, and handed him a summons to appear before Preventive Security headquarters at 9:00 am on Thursday. Hasasneh added: "I contacted the journalist's syndicate, which called the security services on my behalf, the officer informed them that they only wanted to speak with me for half an hour, but when I went to their headquarter I was left to wait until 3pm and then told to go home and to come back the following day at the same time. The next morning I went to the headquarters and was again left to wait until midday, at which point they returned my identity card and told me I was free to go. I wasn't questioned in the two days, no one even talked to me".

(21 Sep) The Preventive Security Services in the city of Qalqilya summoned columnist Issam Shawar for investigation on Wednesday 21 September 2011. Shawar said that he had received a phone call from the Preventative Security Service at nine o'clock on Wednesday morning, and told to go immediately to their headquarters. Upon arrival Shawar was detained in solitary confinement for two hours and then questioned about the last article he had written; he was released at 1pm the same day.

(23 Sep) Israeli occupation forces attacked French La Desk agency photographer Chris Huby (36 years) while covering the weekly march in Nabi Saleh - northwest of Ramallah - on Friday 23 September 2011. Huby told MADA that he was standing approximately 50-60 meters from occupation forces when a soldier threw a metal grenade (a new type of weapon according to one of the Palestinian activists) to the ground beside him, causing severe contusions on his right leg. Huby received immediate triage treatment at the scene before being transferred to Ramallah hospital by ambulance, where he remained for 3 days before being transferred to

France to complete his treatment.

(23 Sep) An unidentified person assaulted APA and Chinese Agency photographer Muammar Awad after covering clashes between the IOF and locals of the Ras al-Amud area in Jerusalem, on Friday 23 September 2011. Awad said that he went to cover the confrontation, where he witnessed and documented a young Palestinian male being brutally attacked by IOF soldiers, fracturing his legs, before arresting him. Awad added: "The officer saw me filming and did not like that because they had said that the youth had broken his legs jumping a wall. While heading home, a person threw a stone at me from a building, which struck my head broke my camera, I was taken to hospital and received nine stitches." Awad believes that the aggressor was related to Israeli security services and that the assault was intended to break the camera and destroy the incriminating photographic material, luckily this evidence was not destroyed in the attack.

(23 Sep) An Israeli occupation soldier shot rubber bullets at freelance cameraman Ghassan Bannoura while covering clashes between soldiers and Palestinians at Qalandia, in the city of Ramallah, before the scheduled speech of President Mahmoud Abbas at the UN General Assembly, on Friday, 23 September 2011. Bannoura told MADA that he went to cover the clashes that had erupted at Qalandia checkpoint when an Israeli soldier shot him with a rubber coated steel bullet, leaving him with injuries to his left thigh, Bannoura reported that the bullet was fired from a distance and as a result did not cause severe injuries.

(23 Sep) Members of the Hamas intelligence services in Gaza banned journalists from covering Mahmoud Abbas' UN General Assembly address at the Gallery hall in Gaza city on 23 September. Security service personnel broke into the Gallery, arrested its owner, Jamal Abu-Alqumsan, and prevented journalists from filming the broadcast. Security personnel

ordered National Company for Information photographer Guevara Safadi to hand over his video recording in exchange for the release of Abu-Alqumsan, in addition to preventing French journalist Christine Cech and Palestine TV cameraman Abdul Latif Hrafa from photographing the raid.

(24 Sep) Intelligence services in Ramallah summoned freelance journalist Mouath Meshaal for investigation and Preventive Security Services raided his home in the city of Nablus, confiscating personal items and equipment. Meshaal said intelligence members came to his father's business in the town of Silwad near Ramallah on Tuesday 22 September 2011, and handed his brother a summons, they then called him from his brother mobile and asked him to come to their headquarter in Ramallah on Thursday 24 September 2011.

Meshaal added: "The Preventive Security Service raided my home in Nablus at one o'clock in the morning on Wednesday 23 September looking to arrest me. They searched my home for over two hours and confiscated my camera in addition to some papers. I wasn't at the house that evening and was staying in Silwad. After that, on the same evening, the Preventive Security Service raided my home in Silwad, none of my family was present so my uncle Abdul Karim Meshaal went to meet them, they told him that I have to go to their headquarter in Ramallah on Thursday, 29 September." Meshaal also stated that he is not ready to observe the summons because of a previous experience, when on 30 August 2010 Meshaal was arrested and detained for 118 days without charge, following only a 15 minute investigation with security services.

(28 Sep) Israeli occupation police in the city of Jerusalem handed freelance cameraman Ahmed Jalaj

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official injunction
banning him
from entering the
Al Aqsa Mosque
for 15 days
on
Wednesday
28 September 2011
, after covering
a policeman attack
a Palestinian youth outside Al-Aqsa mosque. Jalajil said that he went to Al-Aqsa mosque to
cover clashes between Israeli police and Palestinian worshippers after they prevented them
from entering the mosque that morning. Jalajil added: "I filmed the assault of a Palestinian youth
by an Israeli police officer, when he saw me filming the officer arrested me and the young man
and took us to the nearby Qishla interrogation centre for investigation. After about four hours of
questioning we were both released with the proviso that we not enter the Aqsa compound for
the subsequent 15 days."

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