



**Protecting human rights of journalists involved in the
Israeli-Palestinian conflict**



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Overview

As of 2024, 122 journalists and media workers are estimated to have been killed during the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, a number larger than that of the Vietnam War or World War II (1) (2). Most of the journalists were killed by ruthless missile strikes from both Israel and Hamas, explicitly showing the severe lack of safety for journalists in the conflict (3). The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), an NGO dedicated to journalists' safety, stated that Gaza is especially unsafe to journalists due to constant supply shortages, state of incommunicado, sporadic airstrikes, and power outages. In addition, journalists and their relatives are forced to undergo arbitrary detentions and violations of the freedom of speech. Indeed, the United Nations highlighted the possibility of the intentional killing of journalists after it was reported that media workers with clear signs of the press were being shot in the conflict region (1). To understand the issue in a better light, the complicated history of the conflict needs to be properly addressed.

From the early 20th century, tension between Palestinian Arabs and Jews has been intensifying as the Jewish population mass migrated into the land with the support of Britain (4). In the Balfour Declaration, the British government declared to find a national home for the Jewish population, which gained more support after the notorious anti-Semitic propaganda of Nazi Germany (5). However, this soon boiled down into a violent conflict between Palestinian Arabs and Jews regarding their lands, especially the sacred cities including Jerusalem, as the British government failed to recognize the Arabs who were originally residing in the land. Despite the continuous endeavors of Britain and later the United Nations to alleviate the conflict, Palestinian Arabs and Jews continued to dispute incessantly, accelerating the degree of violence and disagreement. This resulted in a large number of deaths and injuries from both sides with no end goals met, causing the conflict to perpetuate until now (6).

During these conflicts including the Second Intifada and the Gaza War, journalists took a crucial role in covering the issue for the general public, regardless of its accuracy. Concerned about the safety of journalists in the conflicts, the United Nations began to come up with resolutions to address this issue. In 2019, for example, UNESCO implemented an educational curriculum regarding journalists' safety in universities in the region, raising awareness among



the public (7). The Human Rights Council also condemned all acts of violation of the journalists' safety in the resolution adopted on 6 October 2020, urging all member nations to cooperate with journalists and other media workers to cover accurate and transparent reports instead of spreading misinformation (8). Notwithstanding these hopeful attempts, journalists are continuing to be attacked and violated in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with nearly 75% of killed journalists in 2023 originating from Gaza (9).



Definitions of important terms

Arbitrary Detention:

An unlawful detention of an individual by a government or a governing body without a proper legal process and fair trials (10). This goes against the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 9 which states that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrests.

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ):

CPJ is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that calls for freedom of speech in the press around the globe. It is well-known for its endeavors to raise awareness of the human rights abuses against journalists, especially in war zones (11).

Freedom of Speech:

In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19 states that freedom of speech is every individual's right to have opinions and acquire information and ideas through media without any interference (12).

Hamas:

Hamas is an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya, an Islamic Resistance Movement (13) (14). First founded by Sheik Ahmed Yassin, Hamas was created for the establishment of an Islamic society in Palestine and the destruction of Israel. Hamas is also considered one of the two major political parties governing the Gaza Strip. While Hamas is defined as a "terrorist" by multiple organizations and countries including the United States and the European Union, some countries such as Turkey refuse the usage of this definition. Thus, delegates should be aware of the controversy of labeling Hamas as a terrorist group (15).

Intifada:



An organized rebellion or an uprising of Palestinians against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Meaning "shaking off" in a literal translation from Arabic, the intifada is mainly used to describe two rebellions that took place in 1987 and 2000 (16). While pro-Palestinian individuals use the term to describe uprisings against the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands, some pro-Israeli individuals consider intifada as a violent, almost terror-like, offense against the Israeli community (17).

Journalism:

In General Comment No. 34, UNHRC defines journalism as a practice shared by a variety of workers including professional reporters, bloggers, and other journalists who publish independently through different media (18).

Journalist:

According to the UNHRC, journalists are individuals who observe and describe events that may affect society to the general public. This includes all media workers and support staff, such as citizen journalists (19).

PLO:

PLO, an acronym for Palestine Liberation Organization, is an internationally recognized representative of the Palestinians (20). PLO has obtained observer status in the UN and an official representative in UNESCO, maintaining numerous missions with other countries and often participating in diplomacy.

War Correspondent:

War correspondent refers to media representatives present in international armed conflicts who accompany armed forces while not being part of the conflict (21). According to the Geneva Convention III Article 4 (A) (4), are given an identity card which gives them the right to become Prisoners Of War (POW) when captured (22).



Zionism:

First coined in 1897 by Theodor Herzl, Zionism refers to political support for the creation and development of a Jewish homeland in Israel. In Resolution 3379, the General Assembly defined Zionism as a form of racial discrimination due to the belief's consideration of racial supremacy but revoked in Resolution 4686 (23) (24). The definition of Zionism differs from the one of Semitism, and delegates should therefore be cautious when using this term.



Timeline of key events

2 November 1917: Balfour Declaration

On November 2, 1917, the United Kingdom (UK) issued the Balfour Declaration, which would have an everlasting impact on the issue regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The declaration's main objective was to provide a "national home for the Jewish people" (5). This soon popularized the idea of Zionism and was followed by mass immigration of the Jewish population, especially from Eastern Europe, regulated by the British government (4). Despite only consisting of around 10 percent of the whole population prior to the declaration, the Jewish population soon rose to 27 percent between 1922 and 1935, mainly due to the growing anti-semitism in Europe led by Nazi Germany (5). However, this action soon brought an uprising among the Palestinian Arabs who were originally promised to receive independence. To the Arabs, the declaration meant that they were not going to gain independence from foreign control. There was also a controversy on whether a European nation had the right to decide the fate of a non-European land, an idea condemned by the local Arabs through media such as newspapers. As a result of the worsening violence and rebellions, Britain relinquished Palestine and lent the problem to the United Nations in 1947.

29 November 1947: UN Partition Plan

In the UN General Assembly's resolution 181, the UN proposed to divide Palestine into two states, each controlled by Palestinian Arab and Palestinian Jewish populations (5). The Jewish state was slightly larger in mass due to the prediction of more migration in the following years (25). Additionally, the sacred cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem were promised to be internationally shared between the two states. This plan was not accepted with harmony from both sides: the Jewish population wanted more lands, while the Arabs considered the plan to be a form of colonization due to the lack of the Arab population's consent. As a result, the partition



plan was followed by a civil war from November 1948 until May 1948, a war which is now considered the first part of the 1948 Palestine War.

1948-1949: Arab-Israeli Conflict & Armistice Agreement

On 14 May 1948, the British Mandate which controlled Palestine officially ended, causing the World Zionist Organization to establish the Israeli Declaration of Independence (26) (27). The next day, on 15 May 1948, the first Arab-Israeli War began between Israel and neighboring Arab countries, including Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, who disagreed with the partition and the independence of Israel (28). After some time of ambiguity, the Jewish army marched across the demarcation and encroached over the border of the Palestinian Arabs' land (25). As a result of the war, over half of the Palestinian Arab population (approximately 750,000) fled or got expelled from Palestine, an event known as Nakba, meaning "catastrophe" in Arabic (29). Additionally, Israel occupied around 77 percent of the territory while the rest was assigned to Jordan (Transjordan) and Egypt, leaving no state for the Palestinian Arabs as promised before (4). After this event, multiple conflicts and uprisings took place in Palestine and Israel due to the unresolved issue of land.

2000-2005: Second Intifada

Following the first intifada in 1987 to 1993, the second intifada was an uprising among Palestinians against the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands despite the Oslo Accords, a peaceful resolution done between Israel and PLO that ensured the independence of Palestine (30) (31). The intifada is considered to have been mainly triggered by a visit of Israeli politician Ariel Sharon to the Al-Aqsa compound, one of the holiest places in the Islamic world (32). Spanning from 2000 to 2005, the second intifada is infamous for the disastrous casualties with thousands of civilian deaths and fatalities including children and women (33).



2014: Gaza War

On June 11, 2014, three Israeli teenagers went missing in the West Bank (34). Later, they were found dead, triggering the Israeli forces to arbitrarily arrest and violate the human rights of local Palestinians. For around 50 days, both belligerents fired rockets and other firearms until 26 August 2014, when Israel and Hamas agreed to have a ceasefire (35). The violent conflict resulted in thousands of deaths and injuries including children and women. However, the conflict was not properly covered by the media due to extreme biases. For example, Owen Jones, a journalist for the Guardian, openly condemned the BBC for being anti-Palestine by focusing only on Israel's casualties (36). Additionally, countless journalists who sought the truth or endeavored to cover the news with the medium's opposing views faced obstacles, especially death threats from the public.

7 October 2023-present: Israel-Hamas War

First triggered by a surprise missile attack by Hamas on 7 October 2023, the Israel-Hamas War quickly escalated and became one of the deadliest conflicts to the journalists (37). According to OHCHR, 73 percent of killed journalists in 2023 have been in Gaza, summing up to more than 50 media workers (38). Journalists in this conflict are not only faced with possible death but also with censorship, death threats, cyberattacks, arbitrary arrests, and assaults (39). As of February 2024, CPJ states that at least 88 media workers were among the killed population adding up to more than 30,000, and 25 journalists have been verified to have been arbitrarily detained. Also, there is a rising concern that the forces are intentionally assaulting the journalists' family members as reports of dead journalists and their families have been revealed (3). The United Nations expressed great concern for the rising death of journalists, emphasizing the possibility of a war crime. The UN also urged the authorities of the Gaza Strip to allow journalists to access Gaza but has seen no fruitful results, yet (40).



Position of key nations

Egypt:

Egypt has had a rapport with Israel since the 1979 peace treaty but has continuous tension with Hamas due to its religious affiliation. As of the present day, Egypt's diplomacy is still concerned with Hamas's radicalization, promoting peace for both Israel and Palestine (41). Last year, in 2023, Egypt proposed a plan to bring a ceasefire to Palestine and Israel with both belligerents releasing their detainees and Egypt becoming an arbiter for the two authorities (42). This preliminary plan did not have a fruitful outcome, yet Egypt is continuing to pressure the two authorities to have peace. Therefore, Egypt is slightly leaning toward Israel from the neutral perspective due to its concern with Hamas, but overall wishes for peace and is against the current violence against the public including the journalists.

Iraq:

Currently, Iraq does not recognize Israel's Declaration of Independence and does not consider Israel as a legitimate, independent state (43). Since the 1948 war, Iraq continuously participated in wars against Israel and did not have any formal diplomatic relationship with Israel soon afterward. While Iraq is neutral and did not reveal any opinion about Hamas, Iraq has expressed empathy towards the Palestinians, especially innocent children who were killed during the conflict. Therefore, Iraq is for neither Israel nor Hamas but cares for the public who is suffering between two authorities.

Turkey:

Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has openly criticized Israel for its violent response to Hamas's attack since the beginning of the conflict (44). Similar to Egypt, Turkey wishes to mitigate the conflict by acting as a mediating factor that can allow Israel and Palestinian authorities to negotiate a ceasefire and end this war. Also, Turkey has expressed its objection to



the killings of civilians and the usage of mass weaponries including bombardments that have the potential to massacre people. Thus, Turkey is strongly against Israel to the point of calling it an “occupier” and fully supports Palestine, especially Hamas, to gain freedom and quickly end the conflict with the hope of peace.

United States:

Throughout history, the United States has been for Israel and severely condemned Hamas for its terrorist-like actions. According to the White House, the United States supports equal measures of freedom and justice for Israelis and Palestinians but is against Hamas’s violent actions including kidnapping, arbitrary arrests, and assaults. Therefore, the United States is a strong ally of Israel but also supports the Palestinians, expressing objection only to Hamas (45).



Suggested solutions

Diplomatic Pressure and Advocacy

Diplomatic pressure and advocacy against both Israel and Hamas to ensure the protection of journalists could lead to fewer violations of human rights in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Urging each member nation to stringently follow international laws was introduced in the UN Security Council (SC) 2222 of 2015 which focused on protecting journalists specifically (46). The resolution condemns all actions against journalists and affirms nations to follow the resolution. As of 2024, the UN has proposed approximately 1,300 advocacy events since 2012 addressing the safety of journalists (47).

Safety Zones for Journalists

Establishing safety zones for journalists has been done in the past to ensure the protection of journalists. For example, Palestine Hotel located in Baghdad, Iraq, was a hub for journalists who observed and recorded the Iraq war. The hotel was considered a safety zone and ensured the safety of around 100 journalists from violation of human rights in other areas (48). While this may be able to provide a safe area for journalists, it does not solve the issue of nations infringing the human rights of journalists. Also, nations often ignore designated zones as was the case of the Palestine Hotel which was bombed on May 27, 2003, by the U.S bombs. Thus, designating safety zones for journalists can be a double-ended sword as it can be both effectual and detrimental based on the circumstances.

Raising Awareness

Raising awareness regarding the safety of journalists can be accomplished through a variety of methods. First, the issue can be incorporated into the educational curriculum to educate the public of its concept and its severity. For example, in 2019, UNESCO integrated a special course on the safety of journalists into the curricula of six universities in the West Bank and four universities in Gaza (7). Second, awareness-raising campaigns can be held in



cooperation with governments and NGOs. UNESCO, for instance, commemorates journalists' safety on specific days to reinforce commitments and propose new resolutions (49).

Monitoring and Reporting

According to the UN Plan of Actions on the Safety of the Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, the United Nations is currently collaborating with governments, media houses, and NGOs to monitor each area's attacks and threat level and the engagement of the government to mitigate the danger hindering journalists in their land (50). This solution heavily relies on international cooperation, so the diplomatic relationship may become a major hindrance. In the past, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate and UNESCO have cooperated with the patronage of the Prime Minister of Palestine, Dr. Mohammad Shtayyeh, to improve the monitoring framework specifically for the safety of the journalists in the area including the killing of journalists (51). Additionally, NGOs such as CPJ are constantly monitoring and reporting the safety of journalists in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through their own media workers.



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