



annd

Arab NGO Network for Development
شبكة المنظمات العربية غير الحكومية للتنمية



Silenced activists, silenced official delegations: Who will speak for **Palestinians**?

With over a 50 year struggle under Israeli occupation, Palestinians' call for the right to self-determination is not something new. Systematic and gross human rights violations they face neither.

They are daily realities for Palestinians; while their country is now being defined as "least desirable, the least inviting and the least livable place on earth!".

However their struggle for freedom is constant. In each and every occasion they call for an immediate end to occupation and blockade of the Gaza Strip and the ethnic cleansing in Jerusalem and other places in West Bank. They urge Israeli authorities to respect all United Nations resolutions and its obligations under international law recognizing their right to self-determination. Civil society activists and human rights defenders are at the forefront becoming a voice for these calls. They advocate for international solidarity and action as well.

Ahed Tamimi, the young Palestinian is one of these courageous activists, who has served eight months in prison for dissent against Israeli occupation. She turned 17 in custody, and was released on July 29th, 2018. With great media coverage and international solidarity, Ahed's case was followed closely and her release was celebrated widely. But many others remain behind bars. Few days after Ahed's release, Palestinian poet Dareen Tatour was sentenced to 5 months in prison, over poems she published on her personal Facebook page. Two Italian artists who painted a mural of Ahed on the separation barrier in the West Bank city of Bethlehem were arrested and expelled from the country. Media, as a means to outreach and disseminate information on violations occurring, has been under attack as well. The first half of 2018 saw a 21% increase in the number of violations against media freedoms compared with the same period last year 2017 as Mada reports². Two journalists, Yasser Abdel Rahman Mortaja and Ahmad Hassan Abu Hussein covering the Great March of Return were shot dead.

While at home they are arrested, attacked and even shot dead, Palestinians continue to face restrictions at their international advocacy efforts as well. Latest of this occurred during the High Level Political Forum 2018, while the Palestinian delegation's visas were denied to travel to the UN premises at USA. Around 75 national, regional and international organizations showed solidarity with Palestinians and issued a statement criticizing arbitrary and restrictive visa procedures imposed on Palestinian delegation³.

As a result, when silenced at home and abroad, who will speak for Palestinians? Whoever speaks, at first should support and advocate for the full enjoyment of Palestinians right to freely express their opinion? But, as the Palestinian NGO Network in Gaza Representative Amjad Shawa puts forward, "...the silence of the international community is cause for concern". This is particularly important given that Israel just approved its 'apartheid law' defining Israel as a state that belongs exclusively to the "Jewish people."

International actors should play an active role in this regard, with coherent stance and solidarity on supporting Palestinians, calling for the end of Israeli violations and to hold Israel accountable for its systematic human rights violations. Likewise, financial support provided to Palestine is much needed, including from European Union who has provided 24€ million in 2018 to address the needs of around 2,5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in the Gaza Strip, Area C and East Jerusalem, but it is not enough. Sustainable development and leaving no one behind is now a universal commitment including by Palestine and for Palestinian people- achieving development in Palestine must be based on an economic, political and social process of fight against occupation.

1. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/gapal1370.doc.htm>

2. http://www.madacenter.org/report.php?lang=1&id=1808&category_id=5&year=2018

3. <http://www.annd.org/english/itemId.php?itemId=629>