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AOHR UK Webinar: Corruption of the Palestinian Authority Threatens Trade Union Work

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK ([AOHR UK](https://www.aohr.org.uk)) held a webinar entitled “Palestinian Authority Corruption Threatens Trade Union Work”, which discussed possible ways to end violations of civil rights of trade union members.

British journalist Joe Heinz moderated the symposium and the speakers included the American academic and political analyst Norman Finkelstein, the Palestinian legal advisor, Dr. Anis Kassim, a member of the Palestinian Bar Association, Dawoud Darawi, Professor of Anthropology, Professor Ethan Morton, and Ubai Al-Aboudi, Director of the Bisan Center for Research and Development.

In his speech, Professor Ethan Morton talked about his experience with Palestinian workers during the period he spent in the occupied territories to conduct field research for his doctoral dissertation, as he stayed there for three years.

Ethan explained that he had many conversations with the various groups of workers in Palestine, whether they worked in the occupied territories in the West Bank, or in the settlements or within the Green Line area. Although each area was under a different authority, all workers shared one tragedy; they were deprived of their rights, similar to what they lived under the British colonial era.

Ethan pointed out that the Oslo Accords contributed greatly to minimising workers' rights, as it helped the Palestinian Authority tighten its grip on the work of trade unions in order to get international approval and funds.

Ethan referred to the historical roles played by the trade unions during the uprisings, especially the first uprising, which made it necessary to curb the work of unions as it formed a strong resistance to the occupation and the policies of the Palestinian Authority, that had a clear security coordination with the occupation forces.



Ethan pointed out that the labour laws did not enter into force until 2000, and the wage law only enacted in 2012, however, the PA still did not apply the laws in dealing with them.

In his speech, a member of the Palestinian Bar Association, Dawoud Darawi, shed light on the challenges facing trade union work in Palestine, explaining the stages of the development of trade union work in Palestine, which began in the 1920s, followed by an era of undermining Palestinian sovereignty over their lands, the British colonialism, the Israeli occupation, the formation of a Palestinian Authority, and finally the Palestinian division.

Darawi pointed out that during the 1967 war, the work of trade unions was mainly a resistance against the occupation, and leaders of trade unions were subjected to persecution, arrest and harassment by the occupation forces. In 1994, with the formation of the Palestinian Authority, the work of trade unions changed and was focused on demanding work with human and legal rights for workers and all Palestinian citizens.

Darawi explained that in the aftermath of 1967, the occupation prevented public trade union activities, therefore and in the absence of legislation regulating the work of trade unions, they started looking for legislative frameworks to organise their work.

Darawi pointed out to the recent teachers strike and other unions, saying that it was due to the government's disavowal of its agreements signed with those unions.

The main reason for these recent strikes is the occupation's policies of piracy of the money of the Palestinian people, which it deducts from the tax revenues on goods that pass through the crossings, in violation of international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. This occupation privacy caused an internal financial crisis that affected the level of services provided to citizens, and thus salaries and wages.

The second reason was the mismanagement, corruption, the state of democratic retention, the absence of peaceful transfer of power, and the division that made the Palestinian Legislative Council powerless as it was formed to curb the encroachment of the executive authority on the rest of the authorities.

Palestinian Chancellor Anis Kassim spoke about the rampant corruption in the Palestinian Authority and its historical roots, which began to spread in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords in 1994, pointing out that the approval of the Palestinian Authority



led by Yasser Arafat at the time granted them international protection over their corruption that continues until now, and granted them receiving aid and funds without accountability or scrutiny.

Anis pointed out that the Oslo agreement is in fact a "surrender agreement" in which the Palestinian Authority waived the rights of the Palestinians while protecting the rights of the Israelis and the Jewish community in the occupied territories. To guarantee this agreement, the PA suppressed all those against the agreement, including Hamas, and at least 17 Palestinians were killed.

In return, Arafat obtained a guarantee that the outlets for spending the balance sheets and the aid of donor countries would not be investigated, most of which went to the security services, as these agencies receive about 58% of the budget value.

Since then, corruption has become a widespread phenomenon within the PA.

Anis pointed out that in 1998 a report was issued by the Legislative Council that identified the names of personalities and parties involved in many corruption cases but so far no action has been taken against them, while ensuring that these parties are not subject to any international accountability for misuse of funds.

In his speech, the American academic Norman Finkelstein shed light on the general situation in Palestine and the impact of Israeli policies on the daily reality of the Palestinian people.

Norman pointed out that Israel's tendency towards the extreme right-wing more than ever before, whether at the governmental or judicial level, while enabling settlers to attack Palestinian citizens, contributed negatively to the lives of Palestinians, especially with no presence of the left wing.

Norman added that Israel's current agenda is a religious agenda par excellence, which gives no chance for liberalism or secularism, who were slightly better in their dealings with the Palestinian people.

Nevertheless, Norman asserted that the liberals and secularists who were present in the Israeli government like the Barak era were not merciful to the Palestinians, and the Israeli judiciary during the Barak era legitimised the torture and assault of the Palestinians and the violation of their rights. He pointed out that the current situation



is more tragic for the Palestinians in the presence of an extremist right government that support violence.

At the end of the webinar, Palestinian activist Ubai Al-Aboudi, Director of the Bisan Center for Research and Development, spoke about the Palestinian Authority's interference in the work of trade unions, and its attempt to control and direct its work to serve its interests.

Al-Aboudi also spoke about the huge budget that is deducted from the general budget to workers in the PA, especially the security sector, which includes more than 50 thousand people, and 85 thousand workers in the PA itself.

He pointed out that the PA tightens its security grip on Palestinians, therefore spends most of the budget on the security sector.

Al-Aboudi pointed to another way in which the Palestinian Authority exploits the work of trade unions and tries to harass trade unionists, by collecting subscription fees and taxes from the members of these trade unions, yet it still does not allow them to practice their work freely and in a democratic atmosphere.

Al-Aboudi also spoke about the teachers' movement that has been going on for more than 23 years, during which teachers struggled to improve their conditions and ensure the independence of trade union work, but the PA pursued and imprisoned the leaders of these movements.

Al-Aboudi concluded his speech by emphasising that the Palestinian people are fed up with the rampant corruption among politicians who occupy positions of power and practice corruption without accountability, especially with the increase in taxes collected from ordinary citizens, which constitute 80% of the PA's budget, to suppress the Palestinians through their own money.

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