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Between the Hammer and Anvil: Unearthing the Palestinian Authority's Abuses Amidst Israeli Occupation

On Friday, 28th July 2023, Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK ([AOHR UK](https://www.aohr.org.uk)) hosted a critical webinar titled "[Between the Hammer and Anvil: Unearthing the Palestinian Authority's Abuses Amidst Israeli Occupation.](https://www.aohr.org.uk)"

The discussion aimed to delve into the escalating systematic repression instigated by the Palestinian Authority against activists, university students, and former Palestinian prisoners. This pressing issue significantly affects freedom of expression, a fundamental human right that the organisation is firmly committed to safeguarding. The webinar sought to shine a light on this alarming surge in arrests due to the collaborative security measures undertaken by the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli occupation.

The webinar was graced by several esteemed speakers who brought their unique perspectives and insights to the discussion. The panel included Bill Law, the editor of Arab Digest and former Middle East and North Africa analyst for the BBC; Ubai Al-Aboudi, the Executive Director of Bisan Center for Research and Development; Omar Shakir, Israel and Palestine Director at Human Rights Watch; Adam Shapiro, Director of Advocacy for Israel-Palestine at DAWN; Muhannad Karaja, a Palestinian Lawyer and Member of Lawyers for Justice; and Rula Jamal, Former Head of Monitoring and Documentation at Al-Haq. British Journalist Joe Hynes moderated the discussion. Each speaker shared their expertise and knowledge on the disturbing reality in Palestine, offering potential solutions to address the situation, emphasizing the need for international action, and calling for accountability for those perpetrating human rights abuses.



Muhannad Karaja, Director of Lawyers for Justice, addressed the ongoing human rights crisis in the West Bank during the webinar. He cited the report "The Perpetual Crisis: Persistent Suppression of Liberties in the West Bank," which outlines the systematic violation of fundamental rights. Despite its official stance, Karaja emphasized that the State of Palestine fails to meet national and international human rights norms, as evidenced by the assassination of political critic Nizar Banat and others.

Karaja further discussed the State of Palestine's systemic repression through its control over legislative and judicial systems. He pointed out that the executive authority manipulates public prosecution to conceal its arbitrary arrests, thereby establishing absolute control over the judiciary. This has led to a grim picture of severe human rights violations, underscoring the dire state of human rights for Palestinians under the current authority.

Karaja concluded by highlighting the daily political arrests, with Advocates for Justice documenting over 300 instances since the start of the year. He noted that all political factions, except Fatah, have condemned these arrests. He also drew attention to the systematic political arrests of Birzeit University students, leading to a month-long sit-in protest.

Ubai Al-Aboudi, the Executive Director of Bisan Center for Research and Development, provided a comprehensive analysis of the current situation under the Palestinian Authority (PA) during his speech. He emphasized that the issues of torture, abuse of activists, and unlawful arrests are part of a continuous policy that has been present since the inception of the PA.

Al-Aboudi pointed out the brutalities of the Israeli occupation, which range from field killings and arbitrary arrests to slow violence such as restricting water supply to Palestinian communities. He stressed that this repression is being coordinated at the highest levels, with security detachments from several countries fostering security coordination between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli security forces.

In conclusion, **Al-Aboudi** questioned the role of the security apparatus in protecting the Palestinian population. He argued that these mechanisms are not designed to protect Palestinians, as violations and killings against them continue. He urged human rights organizations to hold politicians accountable in Western countries that support



such a repressive security apparatus against Palestinians and to start advocacy campaigns to hold the perpetrators of human rights violations accountable.

Bill Law, editor of Arab Digest and former Middle East and North Africa analyst for the BBC, shared his insights on the situation in Palestine during the webinar. Law described the daily oppression Palestinians face from both Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA), with the latter seen by many as complicit in acts of violence. He referenced a Human Rights Watch report that characterizes the PA's human rights record as one of arbitrary detention, torture, unfair trials, and restrictions on freedom of expression and association.

Law identified six factors enabling these abuses, including the lack of elections since 2006, leading to a lack of accountability and impunity; the Western media's focus on Israeli violations while ignoring those committed by Palestinian Security Forces; and the reluctance of Palestinians in the diaspora and their supporters to call out the PA's abuses for fear of undermining the cause. He also pointed to Mahmoud Abbas's long tenure, Israel's satisfaction with the status quo, and Western governments' tendency to ignore human rights abuses committed by both Israel and the PA.

To address these issues, **Law** proposed six steps, including shedding light on the situation, lobbying Western governments for elections, engaging the Palestinian diaspora to speak out about abuses, connecting with elements of the Israeli protest movement, enabling more engagement with Palestinians in the West Bank, and collaborating with Israeli human rights organizations to address these serious human rights abuses.

In her speech, **Rula Jamal, Former Head of Monitoring and Documentation at Al-Haq**, highlighted the ongoing and systematic human rights abuses perpetrated by the Palestinian Authority (PA). She discussed the PA's tactics of detentions, silencing, and digital surveillance, particularly against journalists, women human rights defenders, and political affiliates.

Jamal also delved into the root causes of this oppression, drawing parallels with historical precedents in Africa and Southeast Asia where colonial powers established native institutions to control densely populated areas. She explained that the PA, supported by foreign aid, serves a similar function in Palestine, mediating between the colonizer and the colonized, and enforcing security and stability.



In terms of solutions, **Jamal** emphasized the importance of recognizing and understanding the root causes of the PA's oppressive actions. She underscored the role of foreign powers, particularly the United States and the European Union, in supporting the PA, and called for them to be held accountable. She advocated for elections for the Palestinian National Council and presidential elections in Palestine as crucial steps towards change and stressed the need for the PA to be held accountable for its human rights violations.

In his contribution, **Omar Shakir, the Israel and Palestine Director at Human Rights Watch**, highlighted the systematic practice of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to arrest and torture critics, dissidents, and opponents arbitrarily. Shakir emphasized that this is not an isolated incident but a pattern that has been documented since the establishment of the PA in the 1990s. He noted that the targets of these arrests have expanded over the years to include journalists, social media critics, and even those attending demonstrations.

Shakir pointed out the paradox of the PA's limited control over the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank, yet its effective police state, particularly in terms of repression. Shakir stressed the systematic nature of the torture used to punish and intimidate those who dare to criticize the PA, and the impunity for these abuses, with very few formal investigations or criminal prosecutions resulting from the numerous complaints lodged by Palestinians.

In his conclusion, **Shakir** situated the actions of the PA within a larger context, noting that many of those detained by the PA are also detained by Israeli forces, often based on the same allegations. He called for clear condemnation of these abuses, accountability through the International Criminal Court, an evaluation of complicity in all its forms, and an end to Western support for abusive PA security services.

During his speech, **Adam Shapiro, Director of Advocacy for Israel-Palestine at DAWN**, shared his thoughts on the complex issue of elections in the region. He argued that elections alone are not the solution to the ongoing conflict and called for additional measures to ensure elections are free, fair but also robust, and well-protected. Shapiro highlighted the case of Jamal Niser, a Palestinian-American citizen held in administrative detention by Israeli authorities, despite his involvement in organizing local candidates for municipal elections.



Shapiro expressed concern over Niser's deteriorating health and his inability to leave the West Bank to return to the United States. He criticized American officials for allowing a U.S. citizen to be detained in such a manner, especially when his actions were seemingly promoting democracy and advocating for elections. Shapiro further discussed the intricate relationship between the PA, Israel, and the United States, arguing that the PA has become an instrument of occupation, apartheid, and repression, with the United States, as a supporter and enabler of the PA, sharing responsibility for the ongoing repression and human rights violations.

In his conclusion, **Shapiro** called for more than just accountability. He urged for a complete revision of the approach to the PA and the larger situation. He criticized the U.S. for its role in the conflict and argued that the apartheid regime, reality, and logic must be completely eradicated before any meaningful progress can be made. He emphasized the need to build something new in its place, a process that he believes requires a clean slate and a fresh approach.

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