



EURO-MEDITERRANEAN HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK
RÉSEAU EURO-MÉDITERRANÉEN DES DROITS DE L'HOMME
الشبكة الأوروبية - المتوسطية لحقوق الإنسان

PRESS RELEASE

EU urged to address deterioration of human rights situation in Israel

Brussels/Copenhagen, 17 February: The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) is calling on the EU to address the deteriorating human rights situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory when meeting Israeli authorities at the EU-Israel Association Council meeting on 21 February.

The last Association Council took place in June 2009, four months after the election of the Netanyahu Government. "Since then the human rights situation in Israel has deteriorated, undermining basic principles of democracy", says Marc Schade-Poulsen, Executive Director of EMHRN.

Schade-Poulsen adds: "A range of discriminatory legislation targeting citizenship and human rights of the Palestinian Arab minority have been tabled in the Knesset". And since the publication of the "Goldstone report" in September 2009, a series of deplorable attempts to silence and severely restrict the activities of human rights organisations in Israel have taken place.

In June 2010 Israel announced measures to 'ease' the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip in face of significant international pressure, including from the EU. Eight months later, there are no real improvements on the ground and civilians continue to be shot and killed in the buffer zone. Marc Schade-Poulsen states that "despite these cosmetic changes the closure continues to be in violation of Israel's obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law."

EMHRN fears that the international community may acquiesce to the current "eased" closure and accept its "institutionalisation" if there is no increased pressure on Israel for a full lifting of the blockade.

More than two years after the end of the Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip (27 December 2008 - 18 January 2009), Israeli and Palestinian human rights organisations declare that both the Israeli government and the Palestinians have failed to conduct investigations that are credible, independent and in conformity with international standards, as requested by the UN General Assembly. In September 2010, the report of the UN Independent Expert Committee mandated by the UN Human Rights Council to assess the Israeli and Palestinian investigations also reported several shortcomings in Israeli investigations.

The EMHRN calls on the EU to urge Israel to:

- Refrain from adopting laws that discriminate towards the Palestinian Arab minority and to amend the existing discriminatory laws.
- Refrain from introducing or supporting any laws, which would curtail the freedom of association and expression of Israeli NGOs and severely limit their legitimate human rights activities.
- Fully comply with its obligations to conduct independent and credible investigations in line with international standards into the alleged violations of international law committed during Operation Cast Lead. The EU should remind Israel that failing to do so would mean facing further actions by the international community, including the recourse to international criminal justice mechanisms.

- Immediately, unconditionally and completely lift the blockade on the Gaza Strip, and allow the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza.

The EU should also use the leverage it has through its bilateral relations with Israel to promote compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law and clearly state to Israel that any improvement or upgrading of EU-Israel relations will remain on hold, pending tangible progress in Israel's respect for international law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and inside Israel.

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