

Israel Cracks Down on Palestinian Human Rights Defenders

"I'm being punished for exercising my right to protest and for defending the rights of the Palestinian people in a nonviolent manner." States Abdallah Abu Rahma, a 44 year old Palestinian human rights defender. On October 21, 2014 Israel's military court declared him guilty of charges that were made against him by Israel's army, four years ago.

On October 11 2010, Abu Rahma was sentenced by Israel to twelve months imprisonment for his prominent role in Bil'in's successful campaign against the construction of the Wall on the village's lands. Abu Rahmah was convicted with two charges, "Incitement" and "organizing illegal demonstrations", but was cleared of all charges connecting him with violence.

According to the indictment, Abu Rahmah collected used tear-gas projectiles and bullet cases shot at demonstrators, with the intention of exhibiting them to show the violence Israel's army uses against them. "Comparing Abu Rahma's actual actions with the charges leveled against him is an example of the absurdity and eagerness of Israel's military court to use legal procedures as a tool to silence and smear unarmed dissent." Says Gaby Laski, Abu Rahma's lawyer.

Under military law, incitement is defined as "The attempt, verbally or otherwise, to influence public opinion in the Area in a way that may disturb the public peace or public order" (section 7(a) of the Order Concerning Prohibition of Activities of Incitement and Hostile Propaganda (no.101), 1967), and carries a 10 years maximal sentence.

As highlighted by the former Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue, following his visit to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory in December 2011, Israeli Military Order 101 is at odds with international law. This order, La Rue determines, is used by the IDF to "restrict Palestinians' rights to freedom of expression and assembly". The order "criminalizes political expression and activities, including organizing and participating in protests; taking part in assemblies or vigils; holding, waving or displaying flags or other political symbols; and printing and distributing any material "having a political significance". La Rue criticized the "vague" "sweeping prohibition of expression deemed to be political" in addition to the "considerable room for discretion" the order leaves to the IDF with regards the degree of force to be used to enforce the order with a "potential for excessive use of force."

Adv. Laski commented that "Israel has tried violent means to hinder and stop the popular unarmed demonstrations in the West Bank. Military courts are an instrument of the occupation and their verdicts are devised to help the occupation continue. This decision makes a mockery of the law and justice itself."

Abu Rahma is scheduled to be sentenced next week on December 1st. He is a known human rights defender. He's the Coordinator of the Bil'in popular committee and member of the board of the Palestinian Popular Struggle Coordination Committee, a nonviolent resistance movement which opposes to the Israeli Military Occupation of the West Bank, the construction of the Wall and the expansion of the settlements, denouncing Human Rights abuses perpetrated by the apartheid system promoted by the Israeli Government in the occupied Palestinian territory.

In 2010 [Catherine Ashton](#) recognized him as a Human Rights Defender and [The Elders](#) called for his immediate release, calling him a prisoner of conscience, as well as Human Rights organizations such as [Amnesty International](#) or [Frontline Defenders](#). Diplomats from Spain, Malta, UK and EU representatives have attended his trials and the Spanish parliament issued a [statement](#) expressing their concern over Abu Rahma's incarceration. The Parliamentary Intergroup for Palestine considers the Bil'in peaceful struggle against the construction of the Separation Wall, which was declared illegal, as a defense of the primacy of law and international law in the face of arbitrary decisions, which ignore not only the reiterated resolutions of the United Nations' political bodies, but also Israel's own legal organization.

In a statement issued on 13 January 2011, France joined the United Kingdom in issuing an official statement against the verdict. "[France] deplores the aggravation of the sentence handed down against Abdallah Abu Rahmah during the appeal judgment delivered by an Israeli military court."