

UN requests international support for Palestinian rights groups falsely labeled 'terrorists' by Israel

Author:

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RAMALLAH: Officials at the United Nations have urged the international community to acknowledge the lack of evidence against the six Palestinian human rights organizations that Israel sanctioned and designated as "terrorist groups" in October 2021, and called on governments worldwide to resume funding those organizations.

The six groups are Al-Haq; Addameer Prisoners' Support and Human Rights Association; Defense for Children International – Palestine; Bisan Center for Research and Development; the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees; and the Union of Agricultural Work Committees.

The officials criticized Israel for failing to provide any credible evidence against the organizations after banning them. They also expressed concern that Israel is abusing anti-terror laws to target and persecute Palestinian human rights and civil society organizations.

Shawan Jabarin, director of Ramallah-based Al-Haq, called the appeal against the ban "an important message from professional bodies that enjoy international respect. Although it is not binding, it reveals the falsehood of the Israeli occupation narrative."

He told Arab News that Israel's decision was political, not legal, and that countries' response to it was determined by their relationship with Israel.

Jabarin believes that Israel is angered by the activities of Palestinian civil rights groups, including Al-Haq, which he said confronts Israel at international forums and exposes the crimes committed by the Israeli military and politicians against the Palestinians, including war crimes punishable under international law.

"It was easier for Israel to make a political decision and consider us a terrorist organization after it tried for 15 years to dry up our financial resources, attack our computers, and put pressure on our funders to stop their support," said Jabarin.

Palestinian human rights institutions, including Al-Haq, played an essential role in preparing cases for the International Criminal Court to prosecute Israeli war crimes.

Al-Haq pursued foreign companies that invested in Israeli settlements and forced them to withdraw those investments, which they were told were in violation of international law.

Ghassan Al-Khatib, a Palestinian political analyst, told Arab News: “Israel has a problem with the work of Palestinian human rights institutions because they have recently succeeded in embarrassing Israel internationally over the issues of arresting children and torture. (It wants to) silence these voices that (turn) international public opinion against it.”

Al-Khatib said the harassment and persecution of these organizations has given their work and activities greater credibility internationally, especially after Israel failed to deliver on its promise to provide evidence linking the organizations to terrorism.

Sahar Francis, director of Addameer Prisoners’ Support and Human Rights Association, which defends jailed Palestinians, told Arab News: “At first, Israel claimed that it had a secret file that proves the six institutions’ relationship with terrorism, but the world told Israel that a secret file cannot be used against human rights institutions and that evidence must be presented.

“We call on countries that have stopped supporting Palestinian institutions due to false Israeli accusations to resume support,” he continued.

Francis claimed that most countries have continued supporting the six institutions, except for those in the European Union.



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US congresswoman slams Israel for labeling human rights groups as terrorists
UN experts denounce Israeli branding of Palestinian rights groups as terrorists

[Iran executions see 'alarming rise' in 2021: report](#)

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PARIS: Executions in Iran rose by 25 percent in 2021, a report by two leading NGOs said Thursday, expressing alarm over a surge in the numbers executed for drug offenses and also the hanging of at least 17 women.

The rate of executions in Iran also accelerated after the June election of hard-line former judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi to the presidency, said the report by Norway-based Iran Human Rights (IHR) and France's Together Against the Death Penalty (ECPM).

The report urged world powers negotiating with Iran on reviving the deal on its nuclear program to put use of capital punishment in the Islamic republic – which executes more people annually than any nation other than China – at the center of the talks.

At least 333 people were executed in 2021, a 25-percent increase compared to 267 in 2020, said the report, based on official media but also sources inside Iran.

Meanwhile, at least 126 executions were for drug-related charges, five times higher than 2020's figure of 25.

This marked a major reversal of a trend of a decline in drug-related executions since Iran in 2017 adopted amendments to its anti-narcotics law in the face of international pressure.

Over 80 percent of executions were not officially announced, including all those for drug-related offenses, it said.

The report "reveals an increase in the number of executions, an alarming rise in the implementation of death sentences for drug offenses and an ongoing lack of transparency," the NGOs said.

IHR director Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam expressed concern that there was "less scrutiny" on Iran's rights record as powers focused on bringing the nuclear negotiations to a positive conclusion.

"There will be no sustainable (deal)... unless the situation of human rights in

general and the death penalty in particular, are central parts of the negotiations," he said.

The report said at least 17 women were executed in 2021, compared to 9 in 2020. Twelve were sentenced for murder and five on drug-related charges. There has been growing concern over the numbers of women executed on charges of murdering a husband or relative who activists believe may have been abusive.

It noted the case of one woman, Zahra Esmaili, who shot her husband dead in 2017. It said she was executed in February 2021 and may have had a heart attack before being hanged after watching others suffer the same fate before her.

In another case, Maryam Karimi was convicted for the murder of her husband and was hanged in March 2021, with her daughter personally carrying out the execution by kicking away the stool as is allowed under Iranian law.

The report also expressed concern that the execution of ethnic minorities also continued to rise in 2021, accounting for a disproportionately large number of those hanged.

Prisoners from the Baluch minority accounted for 21 percent of all executions in 2021, although they only represent 2-6 percent of Iran's population, it said.

Most prisoners executed for security-related charges belonged to the ethnic Arab, Baluch and Kurdish minorities, it added.

"We are alarmed at the disproportionate number of ethnic minority executions as evidenced in this report," said ECPM Director Raphael Chenuil-Hazan.

In one welcome development, the report said that there were no public executions in Iran in 2021 for the first time in a decade but expressed concern they could start again.

"A society routinely exposed to such organized violence has accepted the death penalty as a legal solution, and the death penalty has consequently become a tool of repression in the government's hands," the Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof, whose films on the impact of the death penalty in Iran have won international prizes, wrote in a preface to the report.



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Iranian accused of role in mass executions to face trial in Sweden

[Demand for qidra increases during Ramadan in Palestine](#)

Author:

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HEBRON: A dozen men are standing and waiting at the door of Khalil Al-Rahman bakery, a famous shop that sells qidra in Hebron, to receive their perfectly prepared traditional, delectable dish.

Qidra is the most important meal of the feast served to friends and relatives

at all important occasions; it is present at weddings, Ramadan and other special occasions. It is one of the most important and oldest traditional dishes from Hebron that has been passed down from one generation to another.

Saqr Abu Sunaina, a cook at Khalil Al-Rahman bakery, said: "Friday is the day of qidra. Dozens of families do not cook in their homes but rather bring meat or chicken, and we prepare the qidra for them, so they take it after their Friday prayers to their homes and on their picnics."

The restaurant is responsible for sourcing other ingredients like rice and spices such as salt, turmeric and ghee. The dish is cooked in an oven made of salt, sand and white dirt, which is not easy to make or available in homes.

Abu Sunaina said: "The demand for qidra increases in the month of Ramadan as everyone is exhausted and tired because of fasting so they are looking for ready and delicious food, and qidra is the solution, and all they have to do is bring meat or chicken only."

The cook said that most people only cooked soup in their homes during Ramadan, and for rich food they preferred to have it prepared from outside.

Among those waiting for qidra in front of the bakery was 53-year-old Muhammad Al-Natsheh. "I am here waiting for two qidra dishes, one with meat and one with chicken, for Ramadan dinner as I am inviting about 30 of my brothers, sisters and their children in."

Although qidra is a traditional food from Hebron, people living in other Palestinian areas have different methods of preparing it.

There are many stories surrounding the origin of qidra in Hebron. Some attribute it to the Qasrawi family while others say it came from the Abu Sunaina family, two of the oldest families in Hebron. Some sources also attribute its origins to the Ottomans.



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Demand for tasty, tangy pickles increases during Ramadan in Palestine

[Yemen's govt proposes passport office in Sanaa](#)

Author:

Thu, 2022-04-28 00:15

AL-MUKALLA: The internationally recognized government of Yemen on Wednesday proposed to open official passport offices in Houthi-controlled Sanaa and other areas so that citizens could get access to travel documents, a move it said could end the deadlock over commercial flights from territory controlled by the militant group.

The first commercial flight scheduled to take off from Sanaa airport to Amman on Sunday was indefinitely postponed after the Iran-backed Houthis added dozens of passengers with unauthorized passports.

The government accused the Houthis of attempting to provide fake passports to

military experts and fighters from Lebanon and Iran, so that they could leave the country. The Houthis had refused to allow 104 passengers on the aircraft to leave Sanaa, and insisted on including 60 people with documents issued in their territories.

To end the impasse, Muammar Al-Eryani, Yemen's minister of information, culture and tourism, proposed that his government opens a new passport office at Sanaa airport, in coordination with the office of the UN's Yemen envoy.

If the Houthis agree to this offer, the office could be fully operational in 10 days, the Yemeni minister said. The government would also provide special booths in areas under its control for those from Houthi territory seeking travel documents.

Al-Eryani urged the Houthis to allow passengers with official documents to fly from Sanaa airport to Amman, promising to help those with Houthi-issued passports to get new ones issued by the government.

The Houthis have rejected the offer and accused their opponents of violating Yemeni law and the UN-brokered deal.

Hussein Al-Ezzi, a Houthi official, said that the country's laws allow citizens "the right to obtain a travel document from any province" in Yemen, including areas under their control.

But government officials say that issuing passports is a function of a legitimate administration.

The postponement of the first commercial flight has triggered outrage among thousands of Yemeni people seeking medical help, and prompted the UN's Yemen envoy, Hans Grundberg, to set up a meeting between the parties so that a solution could be found.

Under the two-month-long UN-brokered truce that took effect on April 2, Yemen's national carrier, Yemenia, would fly twice weekly from Sanaa airport to Amman and Cairo; while at least 18 ships carrying fuel would be allowed to enter Hodeidah seaport. The Houthis and the Yemeni army had agreed to stop fighting on all fronts and open roads in provinces, including lifting the Houthi siege of Taiz.

However, the Houthis have repeatedly violated the ceasefire agreement by continuing to mobilize forces and attacking Marib city, while also directing some of its supporters to conduct raids in Taiz.

On Wednesday, a government committee formed by the Presidential Leadership Council to handle the Houthi's seven-year siege of Taiz, called on the UN envoy to order the Houthis to open main roads that link the densely populated city with Sanaa, Hodeidah and Aden, and to hand over maps that show the location of landmines.

"As a committee approved by the legitimate government, we demand that you order the other party (Houthi militia) that besiege Taiz province to quickly open all main roads leading to Taiz city and link it with other provinces,"

the committee said in a letter to the envoy's office.

Separately, local media reports said that at least four people were killed when torrential rain and floods hit parts of Yemen over the past 48 hours. Khaled Al-Shajani, the deputy head of Marib's office assisting internally displaced people, said that at least 20 families were sleeping rough after the floods washed away their tents.

The heavy rain also partially ruined tents and spoiled the food of about 40 other families, the Yemeni official said. Yemen's National Meteorological Center on Wednesday said that more heavy rain and thunderstorms were expected, and warned people from crossing flooded areas and driving in low-visibility conditions.



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Houthis gather more forces outside Yemen's Marib city Houthis gather more forces outside Yemen's Marib city

Jordan's restoration efforts push back on degrading land

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SABHA, Jordan: Efforts to restore damaged but once fertile land in Jordan's desert are sprouting hope for one of the world's most water-scarce nations, as a land assessment report Wednesday warned of the growing scale of global degradation.

Local organizations believe projects that reintroduce native plants and implement smart water harvesting systems will cushion the impacts of climate change and desertification, which are only set to worsen, according to the United Nations report.

The UN desertification agency says 40 percent of land globally is currently degraded, blaming unsustainable land and water management, poor agricultural practices, mining, urbanization and infrastructure development for the land's deterioration.

Mira Haddad, from the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas said several other factors, including "overexploitation of vegetation cover, overgrazing, and...new land practices" as well as climate change are also contributing to land degradation in Jordan.

But environmentalists are already pursuing options to ward off further damage. One of the efforts, run by the Watershed and Development Initiative, is introducing four native plants to 10,000 acres (41 square kilometers) of desert in the Sabha reserve, roughly 56 miles (90 kilometers) east of the Jordanian capital Amman.

"We're working on the water, we're working on the green cover and we're working also with the habitats of the creatures, from insects to animals and all living parts of that ecosystem," Deyala Tarawneh, a WADI founding member, said. "The success rate of these plants is 85 percent, which is considered a very high percentage, and they only need to be watered once, which is also reducing the amount of water needed for the irrigation of the green areas." But despite the success of WADI's planting initiative, land restoration in Jordan is still facing several challenges: the number of land unit areas available for restoration is lacking, and the willingness of local communities to leave the land for at least one or two rainy seasons without grazing is also hindering efforts, said ICARDA's Haddad.

Jordan is one of several countries already grappling with the effects of degradation, with more than 2.3 billion people currently living in water-stressed countries, according to the UN report. It warned that more food supply disruptions, forced migration and greater pressure on species survival are also expected as climate change intensifies and poor land management practices continue. By 2030, it warns that 700 million people could be displaced by drought.

"The situation we have right now is unhealthy and certainly not acceptable,"

Ibrahim Thiaw, the executive secretary of the UN desertification agency, told the Associated Press. "The more you degrade land the more you emit carbon and the more you contribute to climate change."

The report calls for financial support to bolster conservation and restoration in developing countries. It says the expansion of protected areas and conservation hotspots, better water management, smart agriculture, and the rewilding of biodiversity can be boosted by appropriate funding.

If these kinds of measures are implemented on a wider scale, the UN agency's restoration scenario predicts reduced biodiversity loss and improved soil health, with the benefits particularly felt in North and Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

But it also notes that inaction would lead to 16 million square kilometers (6 million square miles) – nearly the size of the entire South American continent – of land degradation by 2050.

The report also recommends scaling up land rights for Indigenous peoples and local communities, urging farmers to draw on ample lessons about land restoration, crop adaptation and livestock from established customs and traditional knowledge.

"We welcome new allies to this battle, including economic actors who are increasingly interested in avoiding climate risk, but we must make clear that we will not be used for greenwashing," José Gregorio Diaz Mirabal, the leader of the Congress of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin, said in a statement. "Partnering with Indigenous peoples requires embracing transformative change."

The UN's Thiaw agreed that support for restoration projects should be ramped up.

"The message from the report is that do not take land degradation as a fatality. It can be addressed, and it is the cheapest solution to the climate crisis and biodiversity loss. It is possible to do it by 2050, which is just one generation," Thiaw said. "It does not require high tech nor a PhD to undertake. Land restoration is accessible and democratic."

Several countries, like Jordan, are already addressing their own land issues, from drought preparedness programs in Mexico, the USA and Brazil, to the 11-country Great Green Wall in Africa aimed at restoring 100 million hectares (390,000 square miles) of degraded landscapes along the Sahel.

"Land restoration is a win for the environment, economy, society, and for biodiversity," said Thiaw. "What we are calling for now is the acceleration of such programs."



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