



Israel Receives Widespread Condemnation for Designating 6 Palestinian Human Rights Groups as Terrorist Organizations

During the past week, Israel sparked global outrage when it designated 6 Palestinian human rights groups as terrorist organizations. The move was widely condemned by prominent rights watchdogs, international institutions such as the United Nations, and foreign governments including the United States, with critics highlighting that the decision was aimed at suppressing documentation and scrutiny against the array of Israeli human rights abuses in illegally-occupied territory. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International labelled the designations as “appalling and unjust” and expressed that they presented a test to the global community’s resolve to protect human rights defenders in the face of systematic assault against them, while the U.S. State Department was irked by the Israeli announcement as well. One of the major aspects that observers lament is the blatant attempt to hinder Palestinian civil society and the important humanitarian work done by not only these groups, but other such organizations too. Rights groups and entities that are not directly impacted by the blacklist designation understand that it is clearly intended to impede advocacy efforts as a whole, and as such it is not surprising that the denouncement of the move has been so swift and overwhelming across the board.

The designations have been adamantly refuted by human rights groups and the United Nations. The U.N. Chief on Human Rights stated that the blacklisting had zero standing and merit, and that it should be reversed immediately. Rights organizations both linked to the U.N. and outside of its apparatus have condemned the move and called for international solidarity against it because they know that it will make their humanitarian work increasingly difficult. The decision undertaken by Israel is aimed at clamping down on criticism of its illegal behavior and activities, which have become more known in recent years as a result of much of the advocacy work done by local and international groups. Additionally, while having no merit, some have also pointed out that the baseless accusations may be retaliation for the International Criminal Court’s (ICC) investigation into Israeli war crimes and human rights violations in illegally-occupied Palestinian territory. Recently, the ICC found that there was substantial basis to examine Israeli activities in Palestinian areas as war crimes.

Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz announced the terrorist designations, which would practically outlaw the human rights organizations’ ability to exist, let alone function. One of the groups – Al-Haq – an organization documenting rights violations since 1979, expressed that “it is no coincidence that Israel’s recent escalation of punitive measures against Al-Haq and fellow civil society organizations has come in the immediate aftermath of the opening of an ICC investigation into Israel’s crimes in the situation in Palestine.” It is obvious that the 6 groups have been targeted because of their involvement in uncovering Israeli abuses, promoting the rights of Palestinians who have been unjustly jailed, advocating for the ICC investigation, and working in partnership with leading rights organizations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. It is also important to point out how preposterous the notion that these Palestinian human rights groups are terrorist fronts is, considering that they receive much of their funding and support from international institutions like the European Union.

At the very least, impartial analysts praise the fact that such a wide variety of actors have rightfully voiced their condemnation of the Israeli terror designations. It is apparent that the decision is an attempt to hinder justifiable concerns with Israel’s unlawful actions and behavior. The move also did not come as a huge shock due to Israel’s history of targeting and trying to suppress human rights activists.