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Queer Palestinian community holds 'historic' protest against LGBT violence

Friday 13 December 2019, by [ZIV Oren](#) (Date first published: 2 August 2019).

Hundreds of demonstrators gathered in Haifa on Thursday to protest against LGBT violence, following the stabbing of a transgender Arab teen. 'The protest represents a voice calling for liberation without restraints - not of the occupiers, and not of the patriarchy.'

The queer Palestinian community organized an unprecedented protest in Haifa on Thursday, as approximately 200 demonstrators arrived at the German Colony, a central area in the city, to protest violence targeting the LGBT community.

The protest was organized in response to the stabbing of a transgender teen from Tamra, a Palestinian city in northern Israel, outside a shelter for LGBT youth in Tel Aviv last week.

The protest was planned by a group of more than 30 organizations, including alQaws, a civil society group advocating for sexual and gender diversity in Palestinian society; Aswat, a feminist queer movement for sexual and gender freedom for Palestinian women; and Adalah, the legal center for the protection of Palestinian rights in Israel. "We reject and condemn the stabbing of the Tamra teen on the basis of his sexual and gender orientation," they wrote in a statement released before the protest.

Demonstrators waved pride flags alongside flags representing the transgender community and Palestinian flags. They held signs saying: "Queers against violence and sexual harassment," and "Silence kills. It's time we raise our voices."

"This is a historic moment," said Widad Assaf, a Palestinian activist at the protest. "Violence against LGBT people occurs all the time, but it took time for people to take to the streets. We hope this won't stop here," she added.

"This is the first-ever protest of the queer Palestinian movement, based on the principles of an intersectional struggle between queer-Palestinian struggles and struggles against the occupation," said Rula Khalaileh, an organizer with the "Women Against Violence" organization. "The protest represents a voice calling for liberation without restraints - not of the occupiers, and not of the patriarchy. It's important to show support for all LGBT Palestinians."

"I am pleased with the turnout," said Jawarah, an activist with the LGBT community. This is the first time that the queer Palestinian community goes out to protest in his 10 years of organizing for LGBT rights, he said. Although Palestinian society can be "close-minded and a bit intolerant of LGBT people," that a teenager was attacked by his own family members for his sexual identity is rare, he added.

Jawarah explained how, as a queer Palestinian, he is doubly discriminated against. "Arab-Palestinians are already on the margins of society due to the state's oppression, so a person who

also carries a different gender identity – both the government and his own society work against him,” he said.

“We are here to protest against all forms of violence and oppression against members of the LGBT community in Arab society,” said Joint List MK Aida Touma-Sliman – the only member of parliament to join the protest. “We are here to emphasize the personal freedom of each and every person to choose their own life path. This is a historic event. This is the first-ever public protest.”

Only a handful of news outlets covered the event, but according to Khalaileh, the attack itself was covered extensively by Arabic media. “This is the first time that all Arabic media outlets were forced to talk about the issue, and published the statement released by the organizations,” she explained.

The call for protest and the statement were drafted only in Arabic, and one of the protest organizers stressed that this discussion is to be had internally, within the Palestinian community.

On Sunday, about 2,000 protestors marched in south Tel Aviv against transphobia and violence against LGBTs, to mark a year since the killing of a transgender teen. During the protest, Yael Sinai, who manages the LGBT shelter house outside which the Arab teen was stabbed, said that the stabbing was an especially violent incident, but that “it is in no way the only experience of violence that these teens encounter.”

“They have to navigate a public environment that labels us as abnormal. The impact of this hatred is immense. We do everything to ensure they are safe [at the shelter], but we cannot cage them inside four walls. The stabbing is only a peak to the political violence that members of the transgender community face from the Knesset, from the religious establishment, and the local authorities,” she continued.

A version of this article was first published in Hebrew on Local Call. Read it [here](#).

Oren Ziv is a photojournalist, a founding member of the Activestills photography collective, and a staff writer for Local Call. Since 2003, he has been documenting a range of social and political issues in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories with an emphasis on activist communities and their struggles. His reportage has focused on the popular protests against the wall and settlements, affordable housing and other socio-economic issues, anti-racism and discrimination struggles, and the struggle to free animals.

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