

# **'This is political persecution': Israel cracks down on internal critics of its Gaza war**

Friday 20 October 2023, by [BISHARAT Odeh](#), [ZIV Oren](#), [ZOUBI Baker](#) (Date first published: 17 October 2023).

**Palestinians, as well as some left-wing Jews, are being suspended from studies, fired from jobs, or arrested at night — all because of social media posts.**

## Contents

- [A growing atmosphere of \(...\)](#)
- ['Aiding the enemy'](#)
- ['May cause riots'](#)

"Hello Dr. X. A complaint was submitted to us regarding the fact that on Oct. 7 you uploaded a profile picture on your Facebook page with the caption 'The Gaza Ghetto will be liberated.' As a senior faculty member at the college, the message spread by you on such a day stings the eye, upsets the heart, and tarnishes the name of the college.

"A reaction to a day like this, in which acts defined by international law as crimes against humanity were carried out by murderers, targeted at civilians, including adults and helpless babies, reminiscent of the Nazis' actions against the Jews, can be interpreted with full plausibility as support for them.

"In addition, in the evening we were exposed to your assertion that the State of Israel is committing 'genocide' against the Palestinians. This type of moral inversion constitutes, seemingly at the very least, behavior that is not appropriate for a faculty member, as required by the regulations.

"In view of the seriousness of your posts, you are suspended pending a disciplinary inquiry that will be held for you in the coming days, and on a date to be determined as soon as possible."

## **A growing atmosphere of repression**

For more than a week, much of the world's attention — as well as that of most Israelis and Palestinians — has been on the Israeli army's [escalating assault](#) on the Gaza Strip, following Hamas' Oct. 7 [massacre](#) and [kidnappings](#) in southern Israel. Less-noticed has been the rising political persecution inside Israel against Palestinians, as well as some Jews, who oppose the destruction and blockade of Gaza.

The letter reproduced above, obtained by +972 Magazine, was sent to a Jewish-Israeli faculty member at an academic college in central Israel (the individual in question requested that their details be kept vague). It is just one example of the growing atmosphere of repression in Israel since the war began, and particularly at universities.

*Police watch on as Palestinian and left-wing Israeli students attend a Nakba Day rally at Tel Aviv University, May 15, 2022. (Tomer Neuberg/Flash90)*

According to the Haifa-based Palestinian human rights organization and legal center Adalah, around 50 Palestinians studying at Jerusalem's Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, the University of Haifa, Western Galilee College, Tel Aviv University, and other academic institutions have been summoned to disciplinary committees in recent days on the basis of social media posts seen as supportive of Hamas — and some of them notified that they have been suspended from their studies.

The Attorney General's Office announced on Monday that it had "instructed some of the heads of higher education institutions, who contacted it following cases of students who published words of praise for terrorism, to forward the details to the Israel Police, so that their case could be dealt with as soon as possible at the criminal level, beyond the disciplinary level handled by the educational institution. At this time we will examine the case of several Israeli students who allegedly published words of praise and support for Hamas."

But the rising persecution in recent days has not been limited to academic institutions. The newly-established Civil Society Coalition for Emergencies in the Arab Community reports that at least 30 Palestinian citizens of Israel have been fired from their jobs — in retail, car companies, and restaurants, as well as the Jerusalem Municipality — since Oct. 7 because of social media posts perceived as supporting the Hamas attack. Meanwhile, the Municipality's inspectors today [prevented Arab construction workers](#) — including senior managers — from entering several sites in central Israel.

Israel Police has stated that at least 170 Palestinians have been arrested or brought in for questioning since the Hamas attack on the basis of online expression. According to Adalah, this number — which includes both citizens of the state and residents of Jerusalem — represents the highest rate of arrests in such a short period of time for 20 years, and comes after State Attorney Amit Aisman authorized such investigations without his office's prior approval.

*Members of the Jerusalem Yamas special forces counter-terrorist unit arrest a Palestinian accused of wounding Israeli Border Police officers and planning a terror attack, Abu Dis, south of Jerusalem, June 7, 2023. (Nati Shohat/Flash90)*

The AG's office said in a statement that it had "zero tolerance" for those expressing "support for the enemy," and for those wishing harm on Israeli soldiers "at a time when [they] ... are fighting the murderous enemy."

Adalah's general director Hassan Jabareen told +972 that Adalah is "receiving reports of illegal arrests, often carried out brutally and late at night without justification, all based on social media posts," reflecting "an alarming trend of deliberate persecution and prohibiting legitimate expression." Nareman Shehadeh-Zoabi, Jabareen's colleague at Adalah, added that they have received reports about people being summoned to police investigations or questioning simply for "liking" posts on social media — including an Arab teacher working in Tiberias who was suspended because she [liked a post](#) shared by the Instagram page Eye on Palestine.

"Any expression of solidarity with the Palestinian civilian victims, opposing the war on Gaza, or calling it a war crime is being perceived as support for terror or a terrorist organization," said Jabareen. "These arrests and measures indicate that all institutions are now implementing the policy of [Israel's National Security Minister Itamar] Ben Gvir, who sees Arab citizens as enemies. I can't make any distinction between Ben Gvir and the police, the attorney general, and the universities."

### **'Aiding the enemy'**

In another bizarre case seen in the past week, a candidate for mayor in the Bedouin city of Rahat

was arrested on suspicion of “aiding the enemy during wartime” on the basis of a brief political analysis that he wrote and shared on Facebook. In the offending post, Amer Al-Huzail, a doctor of political science and a well-known figure in Rahat, offered his interpretation of the possibilities of an Israeli reoccupation of the Gaza Strip.

*A convoy of Israeli tanks at sunset seen near on the Israeli side of the Gaza fence, October 12, 2023. (Chaim Goldberg/Flash90)*

In the post from Oct. 13, which remains [online](#) and did not generate much traction, he assesses four possible scenarios for Israel’s expected ground invasion of the besieged strip. The most likely, he suggests, is “an invasion deep into areas with relatively lower population density, in order to divide the Gaza Strip into areas cut off from each other.” The post also contains an annotated image of a map of Gaza illustrating this scenario.

Al-Huzail was arrested and brought to a hearing at the Be’er Sheva District Court on the same day he made his post. There, the police representative Mohammed Ibrahim stated that Al-Huzail “published several posts, including one that we believe is helping the enemy, Hamas, [in which] he explains how the IDF can invade the Gaza Strip. He wrote the text himself, he did not copy it from somewhere else. In light of the state of emergency in the country and the war, we see this as aiding the enemy during wartime.”

Al-Huzail’s lawyer, Shehada Ibn Beri, said at the hearing that his client “is a respected figure, graduated [from his studies] in Germany with honors, he reads, he understands, he analyzes. I believe that what is being done here crosses boundaries.”

The judge, Amir Doron, said that it is too early to decide whether Al-Huzail’s posts constitute “aiding the enemy,” but seemed to offer more leniency with regard to freedom of expression. Doron noted, however, that one component of the secret material that the police used to build its case against Al-Huzail is considered dangerous, and thus extended the mayoral candidate’s detention until Oct. 16. It was later extended again until Oct. 19 following a second hearing.

*Rockets are fired from Gaza into Israel, southern Gaza Strip, October 7, 2023. (Atia Mohammed/FLASH90)*

Yet Al-Huzail is not the only analyst to have published maps and interpretations about Israel’s expected Gaza invasion over the past few days. The right-wing Israeli journalist Arnon Segal shared a [very similar map](#) on X (formerly Twitter) two days earlier, only this time in Hebrew, not Arabic. And Israeli journalist Ronen Bergman wrote an article in the [New York Times](#), published Oct. 14, fully detailing what is known about Israel’s invasion plans. Neither were arrested or summoned for questioning.

## **‘May cause riots’**

The popular Palestinian singer Dalal Abu Amneh, who has over a million followers on social media, was also arrested on Monday over a social media post in Arabic from Oct. 7 that read: “There is no victor but God.”

Abu Amneh was submitting a complaint at the Nazareth police station against right-wing activists who had sent her multiple threatening messages inciting violence against her and her family, when she received a call from her children: police officers from the Afula department were knocking at the door of their Nazareth home demanding to see her. After she spoke to them on the phone, the officers arrived at the police station in Nazareth and arrested her.

Palestinians stand on top of and beside an Israeli tank inside the border fence with Israel in the city of Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip, October 7, 2023. (Yousef Mohammed/Flash90)

Abeer Baker, Abu Amneh's lawyer, told +972 that the court extended Abu Amneh's detention until Wednesday, and their appeal was rejected. During the first hearing, Baker added, the police claimed that Abu Amneh's post may "cause riots," and that she obstructed the work of the police when she was arrested. "All these allegations are flimsy," said Baker. "This is political persecution."

This crackdown on free speech is also trickling down from the level of the state and academic institutions to wider society. Israel Frey, a prominent left-wing ultra-Orthodox journalist and outspoken critic of Israeli policy — who has previously been [summoned for police interrogation](#) over his tweets — was subjected to an [intimidation campaign](#) at his Bnei Brak home on Sunday night, when far-right protesters shot flares at his apartment and chased after him while he fled.

As he was escorted away from his home by police, Frey reported that the officers spat at and physically assaulted him, accusing him of "supporting Hamas." The police denied the accusations.

Meanwhile, Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi on Monday [brought](#) to the Knesset's security cabinet new legislation that would give him the authority to take broadcasts off air and confiscate broadcasting equipment if a program is seen as damaging national security or public order, or as contributing to "enemy propaganda." The Likud minister had [reportedly](#) already proposed even more draconian legislation — shelved for the relatively more moderate bill tabled Monday — that would have given the police the power to arrest civilians who share information that "undermines the morale of Israel's soldiers and residents in the face of the enemy."

Karhi is also reportedly working to [shut down](#) Al-Jazeera's local bureau on similar grounds.

### **Ghousoon Bisharat, Oren Ziv and Baker Zoubi**

Our team has been devastated by the horrific events of this latest war - the atrocities committed by Hamas in Israel and the massive retaliatory Israeli attacks on Gaza. Our hearts are with all the people and communities facing violence.

We are in an extraordinarily dangerous era in Israel-Palestine. The bloodshed unleashed by these events has reached extreme levels of brutality and threatens to engulf the entire region. Hamas' murderous assault in southern Israel has devastated and shocked the country to its core. Israel's retaliatory bombing of Gaza is wreaking destruction on the already besieged strip and killing a ballooning number of civilians. Emboldened settlers in the West Bank, backed by the army, are seizing the opportunity to escalate their attacks on Palestinians.

This escalation has a very clear context, one that +972 has spent the past 13 years covering: Israeli society's growing racism and militarism, the entrenched occupation, and an increasingly normalized siege on Gaza.

We are well positioned to cover this perilous moment - but we need your help to do it. This terrible period will challenge the humanity of all of those working for a better future in this land. Palestinians and Israelis are already organizing and strategizing to put up the fight of their lives.

Can we count on your [support](#)? +972 Magazine is the leading media voice of this movement, a desperately needed platform where Palestinian and Israeli journalists and activists can report on and analyze what is happening, guided by humanism, equality, and justice. Join us.

[BECOME A MEMBER](#)

---

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and/or French.

---

**P.S.**

- +972. October 17, 2023:  
<https://www.972mag.com/israel-gaza-war-political-persecution/>

*This article contains reporting first published in Hebrew on Local Call. Read it [here](#) and [here](#).*

- Ghousoon Bisharat is the editor-in-chief of +972 Magazine.

Oren Ziv is a photojournalist, reporter for Local Call, and a founding member of the Activestills photography collective.

Baker Zoubi is a journalist from Kufr Misr currently living in Nazareth. Baker has been working in the field of journalism since 2010, initially as a reporter for local Arab media outlets, and later as an editor of the Bokra website. Today, he also works as a researcher and editor for television programs on the Makan and Musawa channels. He writes and posts on his Facebook page various opinion pieces on politics and social issues related to Palestinian society. Recently, he also started writing for Local Call.