

**Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale**

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## Freedom of the Press 2010 - Israeli-Occupied Territories and Palestinian Authority

**Status:** Not Free

**Legal Environment:** 28

**Political Environment:** 34

**Economic Environment:** 22

**Total Score:** 84

Press freedom in the Palestinian territories continued to suffer in 2009. Journalists faced harassment, detentions, and assaults in connection with the partisan power struggle between Fatah, which controls the West Bank, and Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, as well as with the Israeli occupation of parts of the West Bank. At least four journalists were killed covering the Israeli military offensive in Gaza in January, and media access to the territory was restricted throughout the year. According to the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA), there were 173 "violations of media freedoms" in the territories in 2009, 97 of which were committed by the Israeli security forces and settlers, and 76 of which were committed by the Palestinian security forces in the West Bank and Gaza or by Palestinian militant groups.

The Palestinian basic law and the 1995 Press and Publication Law provide for freedom of the press and freedom to establish media outlets, and state that there should be no censorship. However, restrictions are allowed if press activity threatens "national unity" and "Palestinian values." This vague terminology gives authorities ample leeway to impede journalistic activity. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the Hamas government in Gaza in 2008 introduced a new system of accreditation under which all journalists are required to register with the authorities. In the West Bank, the Ministry of Information of the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority (PA) regulates all television and radio station licenses.

Israeli security policies and military activities continued to restrict Palestinian media freedom in 2009. Israeli journalists have been prohibited from entering the Gaza Strip since 2006 under a military decree that cites journalists' personal safety. This ban was extended to all foreign journalists in November 2008, and - though lifted briefly by court order in December 2008 - was maintained until the ceasefire in Gaza in late January 2009, when the restrictions on foreign journalists were removed. However, Israeli journalists are still barred from entering. During the war, Israeli forces bombed Hamas-affiliated media stations and a printing press, and destroyed satellite equipment on the roof of the Al-Johara media building, which houses more than 20 media organizations, including Iran's English-language Press TV and the Arabic-language network Al-Alam. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) also interfered with a Gazan radio and television station, broadcasting calls to abandon Hamas. According to international press freedom

organizations, at least five journalists were killed by Israeli forces during the war in Gaza.

Israeli security services continued to harass reporters during the year. Freedom of movement is restricted by the Israeli checkpoint system, which requires military permission for passage into Israeli territory and often hinders travel within the West Bank. In July, an Al-Watan television crew was detained by the IDF in a village near Ramallah while trying to film at a checkpoint. In August, two photographers for Agence France-Presse and Reuters alleged that soldiers tried to forcibly confiscate their cameras and fired tear gas at their vehicle as they covered a clash between the IDF and Palestinian militants.

Heightened tension between Fatah and Hamas damaged press freedom in both the West Bank and Gaza. Abuses included violence, arrests, threats, and restrictions on distribution and broadcasting, and the cumulative pressure drove many journalists to practice self-censorship. In the West Bank, Palestinian security services allied with Fatah arrested and harassed scores of Hamas-affiliated journalists, particularly those linked to the newspapers *Felesteen* and *Al-Resaleh* and the television station Al-Aqsa. In September, following the release of Ayad Srour of the Yafa Media Center in Hebron, RSF reported that a number of journalists were still being detained by the Palestinian authorities in the West Bank, including *Al-Ayyam* editor Farid Hamad, arrested in July 2008, and Mustapha Sabri of *Felesteen*, arrested in April 2009. By year's end, many employees of Al-Aqsa had been arrested multiple times, including cameraman Oussid Amarena (arrested again in November), director of the West Bank office Mohammed Eshtiwi (arrested again in December), and former correspondents Tarek Abu Zeid and A'laa al-Titi (both arrested in November). In addition, PA officials in July banned Al-Jazeera from operating in the West Bank after a guest, Farouk Kaddoumi, accused PA president Mahmoud Abbas of collaborating with Israel to kill his predecessor, Yasir Arafat; the ban was lifted one week later.

In the Gaza Strip, several journalists with Fatah-affiliated and independent media outlets were detained and assaulted, and Hamas authorities restricted journalists' freedom of movement. In June, the editor of *Al-Sabah* newspaper's website, Sri Mohammed Qudwah, was arrested and his communications equipment confiscated. In August, the Reuters Gaza City bureau was raided after the agency issued a report about fighting in Rafah between Hamas and a Salafist group; meanwhile, the Hamas government banned journalists' access to Rafah and all Gaza hospitals. In November, Hamas security forces raided the office of the Ramattan news agency in Gaza City to prevent a Palestinian National Action Committee press conference. Also that month, Hamas officials blocked an International Federation of Journalists-sponsored meeting that was intended to promote dialogue between journalists in Gaza and those in the West Bank. In December, Ziad Ismail Awad, a Fatah official and producer for a Kuwaiti television channel, was detained by Hamas security forces.

There are three daily West Bank Palestinian newspapers - *Al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, which is completely funded by the Fatah-controlled PA; *Al-Ayyam*, which is partially funded by the PA; and *Al-Quds*, a privately owned paper based in Jerusalem that is subject to Israeli military censorship. Distribution of these papers in Gaza was banned by the Hamas government in July 2008, though the bans on all but *Al-Hayat al-Jadidah* were subsequently lifted. Meanwhile, a June 2007 ban on Hamas-affiliated newspapers *Felesteen* and *Al-Resaleh* in the West Bank remains in place. Travel restrictions imposed by Israeli forces often curtail newspaper distribution. There are approximately 45 privately owned television stations, and the PA funds the official Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC), which is under the direct control of Abbas. The PA has closed down Al-Aqsa in the West Bank towns of Ramallah, Jenin, and Tulkarm. In Gaza, Hamas officials in August 2008 closed down the Voice of the People radio station, which is operated by the left-wing Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, though the station was reopened four days later. PBC transmissions have been blocked in Gaza since the Hamas takeover in 2007. In addition, the Israeli military has utilized coercive tactics to restrict broadcasting by stations deemed to be advocating terrorism. In August 2009, Israeli soldiers confiscated the broadcasting equipment of Radio Bethlehem 2000, based in Beit Jala. About 8.3 percent of the population in the Palestinian territories uses the

internet, and its use is not subject to restriction.

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