

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	893
Land:	Gaza-Vestbredden
Kilde:	Human Rights Watch
Titel:	Escalating Repression Under Israel's Occupation and the Palestinian Authority
Udgivet:	14. april 2025
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	18. august 2025



Document #2124161

HRW – Human Rights Watch (Author)

EU-PA Dialogue Should Focus on Palestinians' Rights

Escalating Repression Under Israel's Occupation and the Palestinian Authority

(Brussels, April 14, 2025) – [European Union](#) High Representative Kaja Kallas and EU foreign ministers should focus on the protection of Palestinians' rights during the high-level dialogue with the [Palestinian Authority](#) (PA) on April 14, 2025, Human Rights Watch said today.

In recent months, the PA has escalated its repression of dissent, arbitrarily arresting and torturing critics and opponents with impunity. Following the [February 24 EU-Israel Association Council](#) meeting, Israeli authorities have [ratcheted up](#) their repression of Palestinians in the West Bank, part of their crimes against humanity of [apartheid and persecution](#), and are continuing to [carry out acts of genocide](#) in Gaza.

"Israeli authorities' atrocities do not give the Palestinian Authority a free pass to arrest and torture critics and opponents," said [Claudio Francavilla](#), associate EU director at Human Rights Watch. "The EU should denounce the Palestinian Authority's abuses, but it won't be taken seriously unless it ends its own double standards and addresses Israel's apartheid and acts of genocide against the Palestinians."

As the main donor to the PA, the EU should press to end arbitrary arrests, mistreatment, and torture. Palestinian security forces arbitrarily arrest critics and opponents and [taunt, mistreat, beat, and torture detainees](#) with impunity, as Human Rights Watch [has extensively documented](#).

Hamza Zbeidat, 40, told Human Rights Watch that PA police forces arrested him from his home in the Dheisheh refugee camp near

Bethlehem on February 20, hours after he called on Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to step down in a Facebook post. He said that PA forces “hit me nonstop across my body, cursed at me and yelled, ‘you dog, you animal, we will educate you.’” They placed him in an overcrowded cell and dumped cold water on him on a frigid day, he said. Interrogators questioned him about the post and prosecutors charged him with insulting “higher authorities,” under their restrictive [cybercrime law](#), as well as with assault of an officer during his arrest, court documents show. The PA [routinely](#) uses the charge of insulting “higher authorities,” as they also [did](#) following a 2021 arrest of Zbeidat for participating in a protest over the killing of a prominent activist by PA forces, and related charges to criminalize [peaceful dissent](#). They released him on February 28, but the charge remains outstanding.

In 2024, the Palestinian statutory watchdog, the Independent Commission for Human Rights, [received](#) 231 complaints for arbitrary arrests, including detention without trial or charge, and 124 complaints of torture and ill-treatment during detention by the PA. In an April 2024 [report](#), the commission said it received 1,148 complaints about torture and ill-treatment against the PA, 766 against the police, between 2018 and 2022 and highlighted widespread impunity for these abuses.

Human Rights Watch [wrote to PA Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa on February 27](#) to request updated information about arrests and treatment of detainees but has not received a substantive response.

Between December 5 and January 21, the PA conducted security operations in the Jenin refugee camp in which at least 11 people [were killed](#) in December alone. Those killed included security officers, but also at least two children, a journalism student, and an unarmed resident riding a motorcycle, the commission reported. Seven camp residents told Human Rights Watch that amid these operations they often could not safely enter and leave the camp, access to food, electricity, and water was limited, and many homes were damaged. The Palestinian legal organization Lawyers for Justice [documented](#) over 200 arrests and abuses, including arbitrary detention, restrictions on access to lawyers, and communication with family, and torture.

On January 21, the Israeli army raided the Jenin refugee camp, which they have [controlled since](#), and displaced [more than 16,000 residents](#), [destroyed](#) critical infrastructure, and killed [25 Palestinians](#).

Amid Al Jazeera’s reporting on the PA operations in Jenin, the Palestinian attorney general on January 1 suspended the international media outlet from broadcasting from the occupied territory, following a ministerial committee’s assessment that it had broadcast “inciting” material and “misinformation, sedition and interference in Palestinian internal affairs.”

On January 5, a Palestinian court restricted local access to several Al Jazeera websites, [claiming](#) that their reporting “threaten[s] national security and incite[s] the commission of crimes.” The Israeli government has also [banned Al Jazeera and closed its Ramallah office](#). The bans on Al Jazeera are an alarming escalation by Israeli and Palestinian authorities to restrict media freedom and further limit the spread of information about serious abuses in Israel and Palestine, Human Rights Watch said.

In January, the Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council [wrote](#) to President Abbas about the “numerous violations” they had documented by Palestinian security forces, including “torture, ill-treatment, violations of freedom of opinion and expression, arbitrary arrests and detentions as punitive measures, collective punishments, including holding citizens as hostages, the closure of newspapers, media outlets, and websites ... issuance of administrative decisions aimed at intimidating citizens, and failure to respect and implement judicial decisions.”

In March, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [documented](#) a “pattern of arbitrary detention and torture and ill-treatment of detainees, including perceived opponents in the West Bank ... journalists, human rights defenders and other individuals deemed to be critical” by the PA.” It highlighted accounts by men and boys of “severe beatings” and “prolonged placement in stress positions, threats, and solitary confinement.”

[During the EU-Israel Association Council](#) meeting with Israel’s Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar on February 24, EU foreign ministers [raised concerns](#) about Israeli abuses against Palestinians, but their calls went unanswered. Israeli authorities again [blocked all aid](#) from entering Gaza, in flagrant violation of international law and a [genocidal act](#), and launched renewed airstrikes that have killed hundreds of civilians, including women and [children](#), [journalists](#), and [paramedics](#). In the northern West Bank, Israel is increasingly using [abusive tactics](#) from Gaza in an escalating campaign.

In July 2024, a groundbreaking [ruling](#) by the International Court of Justice found that Israel’s occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory is unlawful and that Israel is [responsible](#) for racial segregation and apartheid – adding to the [consensus](#) within the human rights movement. The court stated that Israeli settlements should be dismantled and that no other country – including the EU and its member states – should recognize or support Israel’s occupation, including trading with or investing in the settlements.

In February, 163 organizations and trade unions, including Human Rights Watch, [urged the EU to ban trade and business with the settlements](#). They

have yet to receive a reply, and requests for meetings with EU leaders to discuss the matter have been dismissed.

Given Israel's atrocities in Gaza, the governments of [Spain and Ireland](#), [numerous](#) organizations, including [Human Rights Watch](#), and [Members of the European Parliament](#) have urged the EU to review, with a view to suspend, the EU-Israel Association Agreement. Other calls supported by Human Rights Watch and other groups include suspending arms transfers to Israel, given the [high risk of complicity](#) in serious crimes, and [support for the International Criminal Court](#) and execution of all its arrest warrants. EU member states, though, are sharply divided and the EU Commission is reluctant to hold Israeli authorities to account.

"Palestinians find themselves between a rock and a hard place, and the EU is supporting both repressive authorities," Francavilla said. "If the EU really cares about the human rights of Palestinians, it should take long overdue action to hold Israeli authorities to account and stop financing the PA's machinery of repression."

ecoi.net description:

Palestinian Authority (PA) increases its repression against critics and opponents with impunity

Country:

State of Palestine

Source:

[HRW – Human Rights Watch](#) (Author)

Published:

14 April 2025

Original link:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/04/14/eu-pa-dialogue-should-focus-palestinians-rights>

Document type:

Appeal or News Release

Language:

English

Available on ecoi.net since:

28 April 2025

Document ID:

2124161

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(ACCORD)		

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