

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT



Index: MDE 21/003/2014

25 May 2014

Palestinian Authority: Drop criminal charges against peaceful activists, investigate police violence

Amnesty International is urging the Palestinian Authority (PA) to drop the criminal charges against four activists from the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and to ensure an independent and impartial investigation into their alleged ill-treatment.

PA police officers and men in civilian clothes attacked and arrested the four BDS activists during a peaceful protest in Al-Qasaba Theatre in Ramallah on 12 April 2014. The four men, Zaid Shu'aibi, Fajer Harb, Fadi Quran and Abed al-Fatah Hamayel, were detained in the police station in downtown Ramallah where they were allegedly subjected to ill-treatment.

Zaid Shu'aibi told Amnesty International that he and his fellow activists entered the theatre to hold a peaceful protest against a show by a dance group which had performed in Israel the previous day. They said that, before the show began, Zaid Shu'aibi stood up and expressed his opinion, and that of his fellow activists from the BDS movement, by explaining why they were against the show. Zaid Shu'aibi told Amnesty International that he did not call for any action to be taken against the show nor did he insult anyone, but simply expressed his opinion that the performance violated the cultural boycott of Israel.

Minutes after Zaid Shu'aibi spoke, he was approached by a few men in civilian clothes, one of whom, according to Zaid Shu'aibi and another witness standing very close by, ordered Zaid Shu'aibi and his fellow activists to keep quiet and leave the theatre, threatening to beat him up if they did not do so. The men in civilian clothes did not identify themselves or present Zaid Shu'aibi with any indication that they were law enforcement officers. Not knowing who they were, Zaid Shu'aibi did not obey the order. Subsequently, when a uniformed policeman asked him to leave the theatre, he did so without resistance. Despite this, the policeman grabbed Zaid Shu'aibi by his neck in a violent manner and one of the men in the civilian clothes punched him on the back of the head.

Zaid Shu'aibi told Amnesty International that, as soon as he was out of sight of the crowd and cameras in the theatre, the men in civilian clothes, as well as police officers, began to beat him up and continued to do so until he was put into a police car outside the theatre. Fajer Harb, Fadi Quran and Abed al-Fatah Hamayel were arrested for protesting against the beating of Zaid Shu'aibi and were put in the same police vehicle as him.

All four men were taken to the police station in downtown Ramallah and were denied access to lawyers. During their detention there, they said that they witnessed the police beating other detainees and were pressured to sign a statement in order to be released, conditions which they described as threatening. When the men refused to sign the statement they were kept in detention and presented the next day to a judge, who read their charges to them in court. This was the first time the men were allowed access to their lawyers. The four were charged with criminal offences set out in Jordanian Penal Code No. 16 for 1960, including "disturbing the peace" and "disturbing public order", but were released, pending a court hearing scheduled for 28 May 2014.

Amnesty International emphasizes that peaceful expression and protest must never be punished as criminal offences and that imprisonment is always a disproportionate restriction on freedom of expression. Furthermore, the reported treatment of the four men once in custody has undermined their right to a fair trial and raises concerns that they are being punished for their political protest. We urge the PA to drop the criminal charges against them and to ensure an independent and impartial investigation into their allegations of ill-treatment.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK
www.amnesty.org