

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# ISRAEL: END THE ARBITRARY TRAVEL BAN ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER OMAR BARGHOUTI

Israeli authorities must immediately end their arbitrary restrictions on prominent Palestinian human rights defender Omar Barghouti's rights to freedom of movement and guarantee his right to residency, liberty, security of person, and freedom of expression. Israel's Ministry of Interior must renew Omar Barghouti's travel document and ensure he can leave and return to the country freely. Amnesty International remains concerned for the safety and liberty of Omar Barghouti following statements made by Israeli officials, including threats of physical harm and deprivation of basic rights.

Omar Barghouti is a co-founder of the BDS movement. He campaigns to hold Israel accountable for human rights and other international law violations and advocates for the use of non-violent means in doing so. The de facto travel ban is part of long-standing attacks by the Israeli authorities on Omar Barghouti that aim at preventing him from carrying out campaigning work. During an anti-BDS conference in Jerusalem on 28 March 2016, Omar Barghouti was verbally attacked by several Israeli officials, including Minister of Interior Aryeh Deri, who said he was considering revoking Omar Barghouti's permanent residency in Israel and depriving him of the right to travel freely. An especially alarming statement came from Israeli Minister of Transport, Intelligence and Atomic Energy Yisrael Katz who called on Israel to engage in "targeted civil eliminations" of BDS leaders with the help of Israeli intelligence. The term alludes to "targeted assassinations" which is used to describe Israel's policy of targeting members of Palestinian armed groups. Other ministers including Gilad Erdan the Minister of Public Security, Strategic Affairs and Minister of Information described BDS activists and leaders as threats and called for them to "pay the price" for their work following this with a clarification that he does not mean "physical harm."

As a permanent resident of Israel, Omar Barghouti holds an Israeli travel document, which is the only paperwork that allows him to leave and return to the country. The Israeli authorities started proceedings in 2014 to revoke his permanent residency starting with an investigation into his place of residence and, as a result, the Ministry of Interior repeatedly rejected or unduly delayed Omar Barghouti's applications to renew his travel document, preventing him from travel, including on 10 May 2016, when his application was rejected. On 19 July 2016, a Haifa District Court decision stated that there is no reason for the Ministry of Interior to refuse renewing Omar Barghouti's travel document. In January 2018, and despite an urgent request by Omar Barghouti through his lawyer to renew his travel document so that he can travel to Jordan and support his mother during critical cancer surgery there, the Ministry of Interior delayed the renewal of his travel document until after the surgery was over. The latest travel document renewal he was granted was on 16 September 2018, and that expired on 15 December 2018. He has since been under a de facto travel ban despite submitting new applications and having written, through his lawyer, three times to the Ministry of Interior, most recently on 21 January 2019, requesting an explanation for the delay and urging action; he has so far received no substantive answer.

Omar Barghouti has expressed great concern regarding the threats and actions by Israeli authorities and officials. He told Amnesty International: "Israel's far-right government is increasingly revealing the scope of its widely condemned 2016 threat to carry out a 'targeted civil elimination' against me over my involvement in the Nobel Peace Prize-nominated BDS movement for Palestinian rights. Through ongoing, desperate attempts to tarnish my reputation as a human rights defender, to impose de facto travel bans on me, and to implicitly incite violence against me, Israel hopes to disrupt my life and silence me through intimidation. I am clearly concerned, but I am not and shall not be deterred."

Omar Barghouti is invited to speak at a conference on solidarity in London from 22 to 26 February 2019. He told Amnesty International: "This latest de facto travel ban may be an attempt to prevent me from speaking at the prestigious Axis of Solidarity conference, organized by the Tate Modern museum in London and Cornell University." He said that he is gravely concerned about his safety and that of his family: "Israel's multi-faceted persecution against me for the last five years is taking its toll on my family, no doubt. We cannot plan simple family gatherings, and my older daughter is worried I shall not be able to travel to her wedding."

The Israeli authorities use a range of measures, including detentions, movement restrictions, judicial harassment and incitement campaigns, both in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), to target activists, including human rights defenders, who criticize Israel's continuing military occupation. In 2017 they amended the Entry into Israel Law,

which bans entry into Israel or the OPT of anyone supporting or working for an organization that promotes a boycott of Israel or Israeli entities, including settlements. In implementing the provision, they have denied entry to human rights defenders, lawyers, students and doctors.

Israeli authorities have an obligation to respect human rights, including freedom of opinion and expression, without discrimination. They must end their persecution of Omar Barghouti, uphold his freedom of movement and stop any actions aimed at revoking his permanent residency in Israel.