

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT



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## **State of Palestine: Stop excessive use of force, arbitrary detention and torture against peaceful demonstrators**

The Palestinian authorities in the West Bank and the Hamas de facto administration in the Gaza Strip have launched brutal crackdowns on peaceful demonstrators over the last two weeks. Amnesty International strongly condemns the violent actions of the security forces and calls on both authorities to take immediate and effective steps to rein in the security forces, uphold the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, and bring to justice those responsible for arbitrary or abusive force.

On 13 June West Bank-based security forces quashed a demonstration by activists in Ramallah demanding that the Palestinian government lift the sanctions imposed on the Hamas-run Gaza Strip. On Tuesday 12 June, the advisor on Governorate Affairs to President Mahmoud Abbas, had declared that all protests would be banned until the end of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr and that no protests would be allowed. However, the organizers confirmed that they would continue with their protest and made it clear that they did not seek confrontation with the Palestinian authorities.

Amnesty International monitored the demonstration and conducted 26 interviews with victims, witnesses, journalists, and a medical professional working at a nearby hospital. It found that Palestinian security forces, many in civilian clothes, brutally attacked scores of non-violent demonstrators and bystanders, using sound grenades, tear gas, and physical assault to disperse them. At least 52 demonstrators and bystanders were arbitrarily arrested and beaten during detention. Amnesty International staff member Laith Abu Zeyad, was among those arbitrarily detained and tortured. He was attacked by two security officials in civilian clothes while on his way to monitor the demonstration. He was handed to police in uniform who beat him while in detention.

On Monday 18 June, a demonstration in the Gaza Strip organized by the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees was violently suppressed by men in civilian clothes who are likely to have been members of the Hamas security services. The demonstration was calling for an end to salary sanctions on employees of the Palestinian authorities in the Gaza Strip and for an end to Palestinian political division,

The trend of escalating repression of dissent and opposition in the ongoing political conflict between the administrations of the West Bank and Gaza is deeply troubling.

### **Attack on demonstrators and bystanders in Ramallah on 13 June**

On 13 June, at 9.30pm, in downtown Ramallah, Palestinian riot police dressed in uniform and balaclavas attacked a gathering of peaceful demonstrators calling for the end to sanctions by the Palestinian authorities in the West Bank on Gaza. The crowd of demonstrators were holding signs in solidarity with Gaza. Shortly after they started their demonstration, [police officers fired tear gas and stun](#) grenades directly at the demonstrators, some of which also affected bystanders.

Immediately after the initial dispersal, groups of men dressed in civilian clothes [began attacking](#) demonstrators and bystanders in the area where the demonstration was taking place. Some of these men were members of the security forces in civilian clothes, something that was evident from the nature of their interactions with uniformed security force officers. Others were [civilians](#) wearing white or yellow hats with Fatah party insignia who had emerged on the main street in Ramallah and were chanting in support of President Abbas. The attacks took place right in front of Palestinian police and National Security Forces, who did not interfere even when people asked them to.

Amnesty International witnessed dozens of attacks in which men in civilian clothes attacked individuals by beating them with punches, kicks, and slaps and then violently arrested them, most often by forcing them into a chokehold, before taking them to a parking lot that uniformed Palestinian security forces, including Palestinian police and National Security Forces, were using as a makeshift detention facility. Inside the facility, Amnesty International witnessed uniformed police officers abusing detainees held inside marked police minibuses by kicking them, punching them and beating them with batons.

Amnesty International spoke with 26 demonstrators and bystanders about what they experienced and witnessed. One man told Amnesty International that he was injured in the head and right knee after he was hit directly by stun grenades and described how he was worried that if he sought treatment in hospital he would be arrested there. One woman described how she saw men in civilian clothes attack and beat a demonstrator before they proceeded to carry him towards the security forces' makeshift detention facility. She said that she saw these men use an electroshock weapon on the man while he was carried away. Amnesty International spoke to a woman who was hit directly by a stun grenade, which burned her arm and face. She also mentioned that, while trying to document the beating of protesters, she was surrounded by a group of men who forced her to the ground and attempted to steal her phone.

In total, according to Amnesty International's information, at least 52 demonstrators and bystanders were arbitrarily arrested and detained and dozens of others were attacked and beaten. Everyone who was detained was released the following day early in the morning.

#### **Gender-based violence and harassment**

Two women who were present at the demonstration in Ramallah told Amnesty International about experiences of gender-based violence or harassment. One woman said that she was kicked by men in civilian clothes and witnessed other women being grabbed by their breasts and others kicked in the crotch by such individuals. Another said that on more than one occasion she was surrounded and chased by men wearing Fatah hats who were verbally harassing groups of women.

Palestinian human rights organizations and activists have also reported a number of incidents of sexual violence and harassment by Palestinian security forces against female demonstrators and bystanders.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Attacks on media and journalists**

Amnesty International witnessed Palestinian security forces confiscate cameras from journalists and prevent bystanders from taking photographs or videos of the incidents. Amnesty International staff members were threatened and surrounded by Palestinian security forces on more than one occasion while trying to document the beatings of demonstrators. Amnesty International spoke to a cameraman working for Palestine TV who said that security forces tried to confiscate his camera but when he refused they just took the memory card; he described how this also happened to a number of other journalists. According to the Palestinian Center for Development & Media Freedoms (MADA), there were at least 17 attacks on journalists and other media workers.<sup>2</sup> Some of these attacks included beatings, use of tear gas and pepper spray, and the confiscation of equipment, all in order to prevent them from covering the demonstrations.

#### **Denial of medical care**

Many demonstrators and bystanders were injured and dozens were hospitalized as a result of the Palestinian security forces' use of excessive force in Ramallah on 13 June. Amnesty International spoke to a doctor who works at the Palestinian Medical Complex in Ramallah, a public hospital near

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<sup>1</sup> See, Al Haq, "Palestinian Security Forces and Agents Forcefully Disperse Peaceful Demonstrators in Ramallah", 15 Jun 2018, [www.alhaq.org/advocacy/topics/palestinian-violations/1273-palestinian-security-forces-and-agents-forcefully-disperse-peaceful-demonstrators-in-ramallah](http://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/topics/palestinian-violations/1273-palestinian-security-forces-and-agents-forcefully-disperse-peaceful-demonstrators-in-ramallah)

<sup>2</sup> See MADA Center, "Palestinian security forces violently suppressed journalists during peaceful protest in Ramallah", 14 June 2018, [www.madacenter.org/report.php?lang=1&id=1793&category\\_id=6&year=2018](http://www.madacenter.org/report.php?lang=1&id=1793&category_id=6&year=2018)

the site of the demonstration. He mentioned that on the night of the demonstration there were at least 20-30 individuals treated at the hospital due to injuries they sustained from the demonstration. He noted that most of these injuries consisted of multiple trauma wounds, concussions, abrasions, and internal and external bleeding.

Amnesty International also spoke to a demonstrator who was injured and bleeding from his face as a result of severe beating by a baton used by Palestinian security forces. He said that, when he arrived at the hospital, he was detained by Palestinian police in civilian clothes in front of the emergency room, that they denied him access to medical treatment and that he was beaten again by four men in civilian clothes who took him to a police station in a private car. He was released after a few hours and then was transferred back to the hospital to receive medical treatment.

Amnesty International heard at least two accounts of medical negligence in which Palestinian security forces ignored an urgent need for medical treatment while demonstrators and bystanders were detained. One man complained that he had heart problems and was having difficulty breathing; he asked for medical assistance and to go to hospital because he had recently had a catheterization operation. He insisted that he needed to leave to the hospital, saying, "I either die inside the bus or I go to hospital", and reported that a police officer responded by saying, "Die inside the bus!"

Another case Amnesty International witnessed was of a man inside a police minibus who had a head injury and severe bleeding. He asked the security forces for medical treatment to stop the bleeding but was denied treatment for at least 30 minutes, after which he was finally given a bandage to cover his injury.

#### **Arbitrary detention of Amnesty International staff member**

Amnesty International staff member Laith Abu Zeyad was arbitrarily detained and beaten while attempting to monitor the demonstration in Ramallah. He was tortured by Palestinian police while in custody.

Amnesty International was present during the demonstration in order to monitor the events. While approaching the vicinity of the demonstration, Amnesty International staff saw Palestinian security forces in plain clothes detaining a demonstrator and beating him on the way. In an attempt to document this, Laith took out his phone to record the incident. He was immediately attacked by a man in plain clothes who grabbed him by the neck and pushed him against a metal gate. The man was yelling at Laith asking him why he was filming. The man did not identify himself, or give Laith a chance to say anything; Laith was immediately placed into a chokehold. Another Amnesty International staff member told the men detaining and beating Laith that they worked with Amnesty International but he was ignored and told to leave. Laith was punched and slapped by security forces on the way to the bus.

Laith was taken to the parking lot near the demonstrations which security forces were using as a makeshift detention facility, where he was beaten against the front of a marked police minibus. At least three members of the security forces, two in uniform and one in civilian clothes, punched and slapped Laith on the face and upper-body. Laith attempted to explain that he worked for Amnesty International but was ignored. One member of the security forces then forcefully took Laith's phone from his side pocket. Laith was put into a marked police minibus with 18 other demonstrators and bystanders. Inside the minibus Laith was subjected to severe beatings. These beatings included punches to the face and upper body, kicks and strikes with a wooden baton. All of the 19 demonstrators and bystanders were subjected to inhuman treatment as they were squeezed into a small vehicle with closed windows and exposed to verbal harassment.

The beatings and verbal harassment continued on and off for an hour, until Laith was transferred to the National Security Forces' compound in Ramallah, where he was detained. He then was taken to a Palestinian police station, from where he was subsequently released. Laith spent a total of six hours in detention.

### **Suppression of peaceful demonstration in Gaza on 18 June**

On Monday 18 June, men in civilian clothes affiliated with the Hamas de facto administration suppressed a sit-in demonstration organized by the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees and the families of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. The demonstration, held in al-Saraya Square in Gaza City, was calling for an end to the sanctions on Gaza and also for Palestinian unity between the Fatah-run government in the West Bank and the de facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip.

Amnesty International spoke to two people who attended the demonstration. Both men described how, once the demonstration started, men in civilian clothes, allegedly linked to Hamas, began to chant slogans against Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in an attempt to provoke demonstrators, some of whom included family members of Fatah members detained in Israeli prisons. This caused altercations to break out, which included beatings by plain-clothed men against the demonstrators and journalists. According to the Palestinian Center for Development & Media Freedoms (MADA), at least eight journalists and cameramen were attacked and beaten and had their cameras destroyed while covering the demonstration.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear that Hamas security forces and police who were present at the scene failed to protect the protesters. Hamas issued a statement in which it claimed it had no responsibility for the demonstration's suppression.<sup>4</sup> It said that a preliminary investigation by Hamas had concluded that the altercations arose from political tension amongst the demonstrators and were not an orchestrated event.

According to the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, security agents in civilian clothes assaulted the protesters, including by beating them with batons, forced protesters and journalists to delete photos and videos of the demonstration and began to destroy the demonstration's podium.<sup>5</sup> The organizers then called off the event. According to Amnesty International's research, none of the demonstrators were arrested or detained and no one sustained any serious injuries.

### **Recommendations**

Amnesty International calls on the State of Palestine to do the following:

- Promptly launch an independent, thorough, and transparent investigation into the use of excessive force, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other ill-treatment by Palestinian security forces. Where there is sufficient admissible evidence, suspected perpetrators should be prosecuted in fair trials.
- Respect its obligations under international law to uphold human rights, including the rights to security of person, to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and its duty to investigate and remedy violations.
- Provide all victims of human rights violations with full reparation, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition.
- Ensure that police and security forces policing demonstrations or performing other law enforcement duties do not use excessive force and comply fully with the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, including by being uniformed and individually identifiable at all times.

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<sup>3</sup> See MADA Center, "MADA condemns attacks against journalists in Gaza Strip", 19 June 2018, available at: [www.madacenter.org/report.php?lang=1&id=1795&category\\_id=6&year=2018](http://www.madacenter.org/report.php?lang=1&id=1795&category_id=6&year=2018)

<sup>4</sup> See Hamas, "بيان توضيحي حول ما حدث في ساحة السرايا بمدينة غزة", 18 June 2018, [hamas.ps/ar/post/9275](http://hamas.ps/ar/post/9275)

<sup>5</sup> See Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, "Press Release: Al Mezan Condemns Assault on Protesting Ex-Detainees and Ex-Prisoners, Calls for the Respect of Civil Liberties in Gaza", 21 June 2018, available at: [www.mezan.org/en/post/22926/Al+Mezan+Condemns+Assault+on+Protesting+Ex-Detainees+and+Ex-Prisoners%2C+Calls+for+the+Respect+of+Civil+Liberties+in+Gaza](http://www.mezan.org/en/post/22926/Al+Mezan+Condemns+Assault+on+Protesting+Ex-Detainees+and+Ex-Prisoners%2C+Calls+for+the+Respect+of+Civil+Liberties+in+Gaza)

Amnesty International calls on the international community, particularly European Union member states, to:

- Review assistance delivered to the Palestinian police and security forces to ensure that it is not facilitating human rights violations and is meeting its stated goals of strengthening the rule of law and adherence to international standards and promoting accountability within the police and security forces.
  
- Put respect for human rights at the core of the agenda in discussions with all Palestinian parties and hold them all accountable to the same human rights standards.