

AI Index: PRE 01/562/2013
24 October 2013

Israel must drop charges against Palestinian human rights lawyer released on bail

The Israeli authorities must drop all charges against a Palestinian human rights lawyer released on bail last night, Amnesty International said.

A military judge at Ofer Military Court ordered the release of Anas Bargouthi on bail because confessions from other detainees submitted as evidence failed to prove he is a security threat – particularly since the accusations against him relate to alleged activities from over a year ago.

“The release of Anas Bargouthi is positive news but he should have never been detained and charged in the first place,” said Philip Luther, Middle East and North Africa Programme Director at Amnesty International.

“It is unacceptable for Israeli authorities to continue to prosecute activists because of their peaceful work in defence of human rights. This release should be a first step towards the authorities ending their harassment of Palestinian human rights defenders.”

Anas Barghouti, a lawyer with the Addameer Association for Prisoner Support and Human Rights, was arrested by the Israeli army on 15 September 2013 at a checkpoint north of Bethlehem in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Nine days later, he was charged with “membership in the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine”, an organization which Israel has banned, and “leadership of a committee to organize demonstrations”. He denies both charges. If convicted on these charges, Anas Barghouti faces up to 18 months in prison. Amnesty International would again consider him to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for his work on behalf of prisoners and the peaceful expression of his political views.

The Addameer Association for Prisoner Support and Human Rights provides legal support to Palestinians held by the Palestinian Authority’s security forces and campaigns for the rights of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

His arrest is part of a pattern of harassment by the Israeli authorities of Palestinian human rights organizations and activists in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, which includes arbitrary detentions, restrictions on movement, and raids of homes and offices.

On 11 December 2012, Israeli security forces raided the offices of Addameer and two other Palestinian NGOs in Ramallah, seizing computers, work files and equipment and ransacking the premises.

Addameer’s chair, Abdullatif Ghaith, a resident of East Jerusalem, has been banned by Israel’s military from entering other parts of the occupied West Bank or travelling abroad since 2011.

On 23 September 2013, one week after the arrest of Anas Bargouthi, Israeli forces arrested Samer Arbid, Addameer's accountant. He was placed in custody for questioning until 21 October, when he was given a four-month administrative detention order.

Administrative detention is detention by military order without charge or trial which can be extended indefinitely.

Another activist from Addameer, Ayman Nasser, was arrested on 15 October 2012 and charged with offences including membership of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and carrying out activities in support of Palestinian prisoners. He was convicted of these charges a month later and spent a year in prison after a trial by military court. He was released on 21 October 2013.

When in detention Ayman Nasser told his lawyer that he had been tortured during interrogation following his arrest. He said that he was interrogated for up to 20 hours every day and that during the interrogation he was kept in a stress position on a chair with his hands tied behind his back.