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Israel must stop attacks on Palestinian NGOs and human rights defenders

Early on Tuesday 11 December 2012, members of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) raided three Palestinian NGOs in Ramallah, seizing computers, work files and equipment and ransacking their offices in what Amnesty International says is part of a "pattern of harassment" against campaigners in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

"This Israeli raid against the Addameer Prisoners Support and Human Rights Association, the Palestinian NGO Network, and the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees is part of a wider onslaught against Palestinian human rights and civil society organizations and their staff," said Ann Harrison, Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Deputy Programme Director.

"It's a pattern of harassment which seems designed to curtail their vital work."

The Israeli authorities frequently restrict the movement of human rights defenders and other activists in the West Bank based on secret information, and prevent travel between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. NGOs in Gaza were also directly affected by the recent Israeli military operation there.

Amnesty International has asked the IDF for information regarding the reasons for the raid but has not yet received a response.

Amnesty International has been particularly concerned by the Israeli harassment of Palestinian human rights NGO Addameer over many months, including the military orders that ban its chair, Abdullatif Ghaith, from entering the West Bank or travelling abroad.

The Israeli authorities frequently prevent Addameer lawyers from visiting the prisoners and detainees they represent. Most disturbingly, according to his lawyer, Addameer researcher and human rights defender Ayman Nasser was tortured during the lengthy interrogation following his arrest by Israeli forces on 15 October.

"Arbitrary restrictions on movement, attacks on human rights and civil society organizations, and torture of human rights defenders can never be justified. They must end now, and those responsible must be held accountable," said Ann Harrison.