

Joint letter on several European governments' decisions to suspend or review their funding to Palestinian and Israeli civil society organizations

We the undersigned are writing to you to raise concern regarding the decision by several European governments to suspend or review their funding to several Palestinian and Israeli civil society organizations. We are deeply concerned by these developments and call on your government to reverse any decision to halt such crucial funding. A reduction in funds to these groups and organizations erodes human rights protections across Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and call into question your ability to credibly promote and protect universal human rights values across the Middle East and North Africa.

Several European states, namely [Austria](#), [Denmark](#), [Finland](#), [Germany](#), [Sweden](#) and [Switzerland](#), as well as the [European Commission](#) have taken measures to suspend or review their funding to Palestinian and Israeli civil society organizations due to unfounded allegations of diversion of funding to terrorist organizations. These measures have intensified following the attacks by Hamas and other armed groups on 7 October 2023, where members of Hamas and other armed groups committed summary killings, hostage-taking of civilians, and launching indiscriminate rocket attacks into Israel.

While we fully agree that accountability and transparency must be at the heart of international development aid and that donors have a responsibility to review funding regularly, we are concerned about the timing, rationale and impact of the recent announced reviews. To our knowledge, the reasons for halting or reviewing funding include unsubstantiated concerns that monies could be [indirectly](#) diverted to armed groups such as Hamas and unsubstantiated claims that legitimate work by civil society organizations documenting and denouncing human rights violations by the Israeli government amounts to [antisemitism](#) and/or [incites](#) violence against the state of Israel.

There is no credible evidence to date that any EU or European state funding has been channelled to Palestinian armed groups. Palestinian civil society organisations have for years been accused of links to terrorism in an effort to undermine their work and their legitimacy. They have been subjected to high degree of scrutiny by international donors, and aid provided has been rigorously reviewed by donors on a regular basis. The recent announcements by several European donors and the EU itself, implicitly endorse Israel's unfounded allegations of Palestinian NGOs as having terrorist links, and have been enabled by years of misuse and abuse of global counter-terror regulations, including the Financial Action Task Force recommendation no.8.

We are deeply concerned that these decisions amount to undue interference in the work of civil society organizations that promote and protect human rights for all in Israel and the OPT. Requiring organizations to adhere to certain political lines that represent the political positions of donor states infringes upon and restricts their freedom of expression. In suspending all funding development funding to Palestine pending a review, [Sweden](#) has outlined also that it will not provide future development funding to actors who do not condemn Hamas. The absence of such condemnation of criminal acts committed by Hamas and Palestinian armed groups against Israeli civilians does not, however, amount to inciting violence or complicity in violence. Penalizing an individual's or a group's silence on an issue directly flies in the face of their right to freedom of expression and freedom of conscience and belief. Only speech that violates the rights of others, or advocates hatred and incites discrimination or violence should be prohibited.

These decisions also seriously undermine states' commitments to human rights defenders under the EU HRDs guidelines, the Swiss HRDs guidelines and overall commitment to human rights and freedom of association. Freedom of association guarantees that every person can organize and form and participate in groups, either formally or informally. It encompasses the right of a group to take collective action to pursue the interests of its members. The ability to seek, receive, and use funding, including external funding, is foundational to the right to freedom of association. No restrictions should be placed on the exercise of the right to freedom of association unless they are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (*ordre public*), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. Unsubstantiated and discriminatory accusations associating civil society organizations operating in OPT with armed groups or criminal activities do not meet the test for legitimate limitations on freedom of association. It is a violation of international law for counter-terrorism or "anti-extremism" measures to be used as a pretext to constrain the work of independent civil society.

The decision to suspend and review funding, particularly at this time, will only contribute further to an already dire human rights situation in Israel and the OPT. Human rights defenders and organizations in Israel and the OPT are key actors in documenting human rights violations across the region, advocating for accountability for those violations, and seeking effective remedy for victims and survivors. These organizations make invaluable contributions to the work of international human rights organizations, international organizations and governments in other regions with influence over the human rights situation in Israel and the OPT. For these reasons, Israeli authorities have been restricting their ability to receive funding, thereby making them reliant on external funding.

Finally, the credibility of European governments' approaches to the current crisis in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel has already been damaged by their restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and assembly for people and groups [protesting](#) the Israeli authorities' violations of International Humanitarian law and potential war crimes against Palestinians in Gaza. Many European states are not only failing to call out Israeli Grave Breaches of International Humanitarian Law or to hold all parties who are in violation to account, but are also taking actions that result in curbing freedom of expression and assembly in Europe, and undermining civic space and protections of human rights in Israel and the OPT through suspension of support for local human rights actors.

Threats to defund or the actual halt to funding for groups and organizations that champion human rights in Israel and the OPT would align European states with repressive governments across MENA that employ similar tactics to close civic space and silence vital voices doing vital work. We know that human rights for all can only be achieved with the meaningful involvement of civil society based on principles of equality, security, justice, and human dignity. To prevent them continue their work would only undermine hopes for a future where everyone in Israel and the OPT can enjoy equal rights.

Sincerely,

1. ActionAid International
2. Alianza por la Solidaridad – ActionAid Spain
3. Amnesty International
4. Annulliamo La Distanza
5. Associazione delle Organizzazioni Italiane di Cooperazione e Solidarietà Internazionale (AOI)
6. Associazione di Cooperazione e Solidarietà (ACS)
7. Armadilla Scs
8. Asamblea de Cooperación por la Paz
9. Bloody Sunday Trust
10. Broederlijk Delen
11. Central Union for Child Welfare (Lastensuojelun Keskusliitto)
12. Centre Delàs d'Estudis per la Pau
13. Centre for Global Education
14. Christian Aid Ireland
15. CIDSE
16. CISS
17. CIVICUS
18. CNCD-11.11.11
19. Comhlámh Justice for Palestine
20. Comité catholique contre la faim et pour le développement
21. Coopération Nord-Sud
22. COSPE
23. Derechos Digitales · América Latina
24. Diakonia Sweden
25. Digital Action
26. Een Andere Joodse Stem / Another Jewish Voice (Belgium)
27. EuroMed Rights
28. European Jews for a Just Peace
29. Finnish Refugee Advice Centre
30. Fondazione La Locomotiva
31. Forum for Development and the Environment
32. Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst (forumZFD)

33. Free Press Unlimited
34. Frieda - the Feminist Peace Organisation
35. Front Line Defenders
36. Gerechtigkeit und Frieden in Palästina (GFP)
37. Glas Ijudstva (Voice of the people)
38. Global Justice Center
39. Het Actiefonds
40. Hivos
41. Housing and Land Rights Network - Habitat International Coalition
42. Human Rights House Foundation
43. Humanitas - Centre for Global Learning and Cooperation
44. humanrights.ch
45. IM Swedish Development Partner
46. Ina outra senda - Swiss Friends of Combatants for Peace
47. Institut PROJA
48. International Media Support
49. International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR)
50. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
51. Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign
52. Irish Anti-Apartheid Campaign for Palestine (IAACP)
53. Irish Council for Civil Liberties
54. Jewish Voice for Democracy and Justice in Israel/Palestine (Switzerland)
55. Jews for Justice for Palestinians
56. KFUK-KFUM Global
57. La Coordinadora de Organizaciones para el Desarrollo (Spain)
58. Lebanese Center for Human Rights
59. MADRE
60. Majal.org
61. Médecins du Monde Switzerland
62. Medico International
63. Medico International Schweiz
64. Movement for Peace (MPDL)
65. Mundubat Foundation
66. Nobel Women's Initiative
67. Norwegian Helsinki Committee
68. Norwegian Human Rights Fund
69. Norwegian Peoples Aid
70. Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund (SAIH)
71. Novact
72. ONG Rescate Internacional
73. Open Briefing
74. Outright International
75. Oxfam International
76. Palästina-Solidarität Region Basel
77. Pax Christi – Deutsche Sektion
78. Piattaforma delle OSC Italiane in Medio Oriente e Mediterraneo
79. PIC - Legal Center for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment
80. Platform of French NGOs for Palestine
81. Première Urgence Internationale
82. Rafto Foundation
83. Sadaka – The Ireland Palestine Alliance
84. Saferworld
85. Slovene Philanthropy
86. SOLIDAR
87. Suomen Setlementtiliitto
88. Terre des Hommes International Federation
89. The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation
90. Trans ry

91. Trasek ry
92. Trócaire
93. Un Ponte Per
94. War Child UK
95. Weltfriedensdienst e.V.
96. zusa – art of collaboration