

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. Asociación Española de Investigación para la Paz (AIPAZ)
6. Association for Progressive Communications - APC
7. Associazione delle Organizzazioni Italiane di Cooperazione e Solidarietà Internazionale (AOI)
8. Associazione di Cooperazione e Solidarietà (ACS)
9. Armadilla Scs
10. Asamblea de Cooperación por la Paz
11. Bloody Sunday Trust
12. Broederlijk Delen
13. Central Union for Child Welfare (Lastensuojelun Keskusliitto)
14. Centre Delàs d'Estudis per la Pau
15. Centre for Global Education
16. Child Rights International Network (CRIN)
17. Christian Aid Ireland
18. CIDSE
19. CISS
20. CIVICUS
21. CNCD-11.11.11
22. Comhlámh
23. Comhlámh Justice for Palestine Group
24. Comité catholique contre la faim et pour le développement
25. Coopération Nord-Sud
26. Coordinadora Valenciana de ONGD
27. COSPE
28. Derechos Digitales · América Latina
29. Diakonia Sweden
30. Digital Action
31. Een Andere Joodse Stem / Another Jewish Voice (Belgium)
32. EuroMed Rights

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

91. Saferworld
92. Slovene Philanthropy
93. SOLIDAR
94. Suomen Setlementtiliitto
95. Terre des Hommes International Federation
96. The Fund for Global Human Rights
97. The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation
98. Trans ry
99. Trasek ry
100. Trócaire
101. Un Ponte Per
102. War Child UK
103. Weltfriedensdienst e.V.
104. zusa – art of collaboration