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PNGO and PHROC Call on the Dutch Government to Protect UAWC from Harm and to Shield Palestinian Civil Society

The Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network (PNGO) and the Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council (PHROC) condemn the toxic incitement and defunding campaign against the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), a long-standing member organization of PNGO.

This campaign has escalated after the Dutch government recently announced that it will launch a review into UAWC and suspended its funding to UAWC, pending this review. PNGO and PHROC regret these steps by the Dutch government, which have not been taken by UAWC's other donors, including the EU and other European countries.

The decision of the Dutch government was preceded and triggered by a coordinated pressure campaign of organizations closely affiliated with the Israeli government, mainly NGO Monitor, UK Lawyers for Israel (UKLFI) and the International Legal Forum (ILF). NGO Monitor has been inciting against human rights defenders and organizations active in Israel and Palestine for many years. UKLFI and ILF are aggressive lawfare organizations established to undermine international support for Palestinian rights.

NGO Monitor, UKLFI, ILF and other proxy organizations of the Israeli government have been waging systematic smear campaigns against UAWC, long before the Israeli occupying authorities arrested two of UAWC's former employees last year. These employees – Abed al-Razeq Farraj (57) and Samer Al-Arbid (45) – were arrested for alleged involvement in a bomb explosion near an Israeli settlement. Both men have suffered physical and psychological torture during interrogation and are currently standing trial before an Israeli military court.

PNGO and PHROC condemn the torture and degrading treatment Abed al-Razeq and Samer have endured during detention and demand that their fundamental right to a fair trial be respected, in accordance with international standards. With regret, PNGO and PHROC note that the Dutch government has so far paid minimal attention to these concerns and failed to adhere to its legal obligation, as a third state, to prevent the crime of torture, which is systematically and widely used by Israel, the Occupying Power.

PNGO and PHROC are gravely concerned that the Dutch review will have a catalysing effect on shrinking civic space, by adding fuel to the Israeli campaign to disrupt and damage UAWC and to discredit Palestinian civil society more broadly. PNGO and PHROC call on the Dutch government to protect UAWC from harm and to proactively counter all attempts to defame, delegitimize, defund and de-platform Palestinian civil society organizations.

Moreover, PNGO and PHROC express their concern about the domestic implications of the Dutch review, against the backdrop of severe polarization within Palestinian civil society about EU funding conditions. It is of critical importance that the Dutch government ensures that its review cannot and will not be manipulated by the Israeli government and its proxy organizations. PNGO and PHROC call on the Dutch government to take adequate precautions to prevent such manipulation.

In this context, PNGO and PHROC deplore the cordial tone and reassuring message in a recent [letter](#) of the Dutch government to UKLFI, in which it thanked UKLFI “for [its] ongoing engagement and detailed information in relation to the Dutch support to Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC)” and committed to address this information in its upcoming review. PNGO and PHROC consider this tone and message vis-à-vis an organization attacking Palestinian civil society inappropriate and unworthy for a country profiling itself as a leading supporter of civic space and human rights defenders.

Israel and its proxy organizations systematically attack Palestinian civil society organizations that defend Palestinian rights, that challenge Israel’s unlawful occupation, settlement policy and apartheid regime, that promote justice and accountability and that stand in the way of Israel’s preparations to formally annex large parts of Palestine. With its vital work in Area C of the West Bank, UAWC falls in the latter category. UAWC is preserving the Palestinian presence on land Israel wants to annex. This is why UAWC has been under attack for years.

The Dutch government and other countries should investigate the Israeli preparations for annexation and hold anyone accountable aiding and abetting this grave violation of international law, including Dutch companies maintaining commercial relations with and profiting from illegal Israeli settlements. Instead, a Palestinian NGO supporting farmers and vulnerable communities across Palestine, finds itself under review.

Earlier reviews of UAWC have dismissed the toxic allegations by the Israeli government and its proxy organizations as unfounded, as also noted in UAWC’s [statement](#) on 22 July 2020. PNGO and PHROC expect the Dutch review to arrive at the same conclusion.

Before this review has even begun, several Dutch parties have acted as extensions of NGO Monitor, UKLFI and ILF, harming UAWC’s standing through suggestive parliamentary questions and statements on social media before any organizational wrongdoing has been detected. PNGO and PHROC deplore this behaviour and call on these parties to be guided by international law and basic principles of fairness and due process – not by Israel’s destructive agenda.

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