

**Press conference “International Organizations in Solidarity with Palestinian Civil Society”
– intervention Sari Bashi, Program Director, Human Rights Watch**

28 September 2022 | For more see: <https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/20641.html>

Sari Bashi (approximate text, check [video recording](#) for verbatim version):

“I am honored and proud today to join Palestinian human rights defenders, social workers, researchers, lawyers and others in celebrating Palestinian civil society and opposing attempts by the Israeli government to silence independent voices. At Human Rights Watch, we are privileged to follow the lead of Palestinian rights defenders, most recently in sharing their long-standing determination that the Israeli authorities are committing the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution. It’s not a coincidence that, as more and more people around the world confirm the analysis of Palestinian human rights defenders, the Israeli government is escalating its crackdown against them.

I want to join my colleagues in addressing European responsibility. The EU and nine individual European countries recently announced they would continue to fund these organizations, despite the Israeli government’s false designation of the groups as terrorist. European countries found no evidence that these Palestinian civil society groups are using the funds for anything other than what they said they were using it for: defending children tried in Israeli military courts, providing loans to businesswomen and female farmers, creating seed banks to preserve traditional agriculture, conducting critical research on social and economic issues and documenting human rights abuses by Israeli as well as Palestinian authorities. Yet, the EU continues to grant the Israeli government cultural, diplomatic and economic privileges, based on so-called shared values of democracy, human rights and freedom of expression.

My colleagues mentioned the EU-Israel Association Council meeting, aimed at strengthening diplomatic ties. It’s concerning the Association Council meeting is taking place at a time of arguably peak repression of civil society by the Israeli authorities. It’s taking place as international consensus grows, that the Israeli authorities’ oppression and discrimination against Palestinians rise to the level of apartheid. The EU did not even secure basic benchmarks as a condition to hold the Association meeting. They could have asked for the so-called “terrorist” designations to be revoked. Many of those NGOs are funded by the EU, so the Israeli government is essentially saying the EU is funding terrorism, with no repercussions for bilateral relations.

When EU officials shake hands with Israeli government officials at that Association meeting, they should know that they are shaking the hands of people representing a government that is committing the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution. A government that is trying to silence Palestinian human rights defenders who speak out against those crimes. A government that is enjoying the benefits of a close relationship with the EU, even as it sends armed troops to raid the offices of peaceful advocacy organizations, take files and printers and shutter their doors.

Civil society activists like Salah Hammouri have already been arrested, and others in this room are at risk of arrest. What the EU does matters. Prior to meeting with Israeli officials in a diplomatic embrace, the EU should call for the Israeli government to cancel the terrorist designations and end its crackdown on peaceful civil society activists. It should undertake a comprehensive review of EU-Israel bilateral relations to ensure consistency with the EU’s commitments and obligations under international law. The EU should condition further support to the Israeli government on its compliance with its international human rights obligations.”

Video recording available at: <https://www.facebook.com/alhaqorganization/videos/1350140985518820>