

I am very honoured to represent Amnesty International today and to have the chance to express its support for the 6 Palestinian civil society organisations which are suffering unprecedented repression.

It is indeed the place of a human rights organisation like Amnesty to be here today, alongside the human rights defenders, activists and powerful voices of Palestinian civil society who are gathered in this room.

The violent repression against them has dramatically worsened in recent months: raids on premises, interrogations of leaders, threats on funding, interdiction to work, etc. This repression is a flagrant violation of international law protecting the rights to freedom of association and freedom of expression. As in many other countries where respect for HR is under constant threat, civil society organisations are being targeted and then, civic space is being progressively reduced. Once again, the fight against terrorism is diverted from its objective in order to silence critical voices. The aim here is undoubtedly to prevent the work of associations.

But these associations do not do just “any work”. These 6 associations are the frontliners. They are the frontline of the fight for rights, those who document, testify, analyse, fight, support, assist despite harassment and repression.

Palestinian human rights organisations were the first to describe and qualify as apartheid the systematic and widespread repression imposed by the Israeli authorities on the Palestinian population. Now, our international organisations have joined this analysis, which is supported by a growing number of organisations including the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories. Apartheid is a crime against humanity in international law, which falls under the jurisdiction of the ICC.

The current repression against associations is a facet of this cruel system of domination.

The dangerous escalation of this repression should alert us all. We cannot be mere spectators of these violations of human rights, we must not get used to them.

One man symbolises several very explicit aspects of the HR violations suffered by Palestinians: Salah Hamouri. He is a lawyer and HR defender who has spent 9 years of his life in prison, a Palestinian born in Jerusalem, a resident of this city, and also French citizen. This man has been separated from his family for 16 months and has been in administrative detention for almost 7 months now.

Salah works for Addameer, one of the 6 associations for which we are present today. He has always lived in Jerusalem, despite the years of detention and the difficulties he faces to live normally. His life is crossed by two opposing winds: the harassment he has been subjected to by the Israeli authorities, but also his determination to live in his country, to carry out his activity and to defend human rights there, despite this harassment.

He is a symbol of the repression against members of civil society and the apartheid system :

1. Because he is threatened with deportation from his native land and is subject to the full force of the administrative and judicial machinery aimed at making him an exile. His right to residence in Jerusalem was withdrawn last October, a decision that would deprive him of his nationality and would make impossible his life in his own country.
2. Because he has been in administrative detention since 7 March, without being informed why. No evidence, no material element has been brought to his knowledge, despite the requests of his lawyers. His detention was constantly renewed, and the next hearing is scheduled for early December.

The administrative detention is a practice that has become commonplace for the Israeli authorities. Many Palestinians have experienced it. But let there be no mistake: it is a practice that violates all the rules of international law on the subject.

Administrative detention is based on secret security reasons, which are not communicated to the defendant or his lawyer. It is used to bypass the legal protection and due process guarantees provided under international law for anyone deprived of their liberty. The international law allows the use of administrative detention only in exceptional circumstances, and with strict safeguards. This frame is clearly not respected by the Israeli government: its systematic use of administrative detention against the Palestinians – for decades – indicates that the state uses it to persecute them and not as an extraordinary and selective preventive measure.

3. Because he is a HR defender, and his work is made impossible by these repressive practices. In October last year, it was revealed that Salah's phone, as well as those of other HRDs in Palestine, had been infected by the spyware Pegasus, produced by the Israeli company NSO. All over the world, members of civil society have been spied on through this software that intrudes into the personal and intimate data of lawyers, journalists, activists, political leaders, etc. Salah Hamouri has lodged a complaint in France against NSO, with the support of the FIDH. These practices are unacceptable and illegal under international law.

In Amnesty International report on Israeli apartheid published last February, we mentioned the case of Salah as one of the emblematic cases of the Israeli authorities' policy of repression and domination of Palestinians. Today his situation, like that of associations, members of civil society and HRDs, is worsening. Last Sunday, 30 administrative detainees, including Salah, started a hunger strike. This is the weapon of despair. This information should sound like an alert for a general mobilisation.

Our visit today, in solidarity with Palestinian civil society, aims to alert the international community. We cannot accept that the countries called "friends of Israel" resign themselves to these repressive and illegal practices.

How can we imagine that these repeated and serious attacks against Palestinian civil society are taking place in the silence of the international community?

Who will speak about human rights when all HRDs have been put in prison or forced into exile? Who will speak out when Palestinian civil society has been silenced?

In France, more than 10,000 people have already written to the President Macron to demand action for Salah's immediate release. AI France and its 120,000 members and activists are campaigning for his release alongside Salah's wife, Elsa Lefort, who lives in France.

We now demand the Israeli authorities to put an end to this illegal and inhumane detention.

Salah Hamouri should be immediately released, unless charged with an internationally recognized crime, and the threat of his deportation from Jerusalem should be removed.

The 6 Palestinian associations, as well as all those unjustly repressed, must be allowed to do their work without hindrance, their rights and those of their staff respected and protected.

Let us be witnesses, relays and allies of these struggles for justice and accountability.