

**Weekly Focus:**  
 **Hamas Travel Restrictions on Politicians and Activists**  
**21 July – 28 July**

28 July 2011  
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The trend

In the last week, on two separate occasions the security forces of Hamas prevented activists and politicians from traveling outside Gaza Strip to attend meetings and conferences.

Al-Haq collected the testimony of several individuals, including a member of a delegation to the conference organised by the Crisis Management Initiative Foundation (CMIF) on the mechanisms of Palestinian reconciliation in Turkey, who have been victims of such politically motivated interference with their freedom of movement.

The incident

Doctor Usama 'Abd-al-Sitar al-Farra, 50 years old, is the Governor of Khan Younes Governorate in Gaza Strip and a member of the Revolutionary Council of Fateh Movement.

At around noon on 16 July, Usama left his home as part of a delegation of 12 other activists and members of Palestinian factions for the CMIF. The group reached Rafah border crossing in southern Gaza in order to travel to Istanbul, where the conference was set to begin on 19 July.

Upon arrival at the Palestinian side of Rafah border crossing, a group of border employees met them in a large waiting room and took half an hour to process their passports. Usama and two other members of the delegation, 'Ayyad al-Krunz, a community activist, and Samah al-Rawagh, a journalist and community activist, were then informed by members of the internal security forces of Hamas government that they would not be allowed to travel to Egypt. The security personnel gave no immediate reason for the decision.

Doctor Ghazi Hamad and Doctor Ahmad Yousef, who work in Hamas government and were also part of the delegation directed to Istanbul, tried to refute the travel restriction to no avail. Ghazi and Ahmad reported that Usama and the two others had been prevented from traveling for political reasons. Usama had participated in two former conferences on the same issue, one in Finland in April 2011 and another in Ankara in May 2011 before being prevented from traveling (Al-Haq Affidavit No. 2011/6482).

Another case

On 26 July at approximately 11:20 am, Hamas security personnel prevented Amal Tawfiq Hamad from crossing Erez crossing out of Gaza for political reasons. Police stopped Amal at the Palestinian customs checkpoint near Beit Hanoun while she was on her way to the West Bank, to participate in a meeting of Fateh Central Committee on the question of the Palestinian initiative at the United Nations in September. Amal is the

Deputy Secretary General of the Revolutionary Council of Fateh Movement and a member of Fateh Central Committee.

Upon her arrival at the customs checkpoint, the police took Amal's ID card, which was returned only at 1:30 pm, when she was informed that, for political reasons, she was not allowed to travel to the West Bank.

The security forces in Gaza Strip have prevented Amal from exercising her right to freedom of movement through Rafah and Erez crossings for political reasons approximately six times since the last Palestinian elections in 2006 (Al-Haq Affidavit No. 2011/6484).

### The larger context

These politically motivated travel restrictions are part of the climate of fear and control which Hamas exercises against individuals affiliated with other political parties or ideologies by employing a variety of intimidation tactics. This policy is not limited to travel restrictions but extends to other rights, including the right to freedom of assembly and frequently escalates in arbitrary arrest, torture and ill-treatment, and physical assault

### **Freedom of Assembly**

On March 16 2011, members of Hamas security apparatus raided al-Quds Open University, Gaza City branch, and physically assaulted some of the students with guns, batons, iron rods, and electric detonators and wires. A large number of students had gathered to non-violently protest an attack by Hamas security apparatus that took place several hours earlier on al-'Azhar University students (Al-Haq Documentation).

### **Beatings**

On 1 January 2011, a Fateh supporter was arbitrarily arrested and beaten by Gaza Strip police personnel for setting off fireworks at his BeitLahyia home in celebration of the 47<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the launch of Fateh movement. His neighbor was also taken by police while he was watching the arrest from outside his home and was beaten until he lost consciousness. He awoke in the hospital and was subsequently jailed by the police before being released for further medical treatment later that day (Al-Haq Affidavit 6000/2011).

### **Censorship**

On 23 January 2011, Hamas security forces imposed a censorship order on a bookstore in Gaza City. Three men from the General Investigation Unit entered the store and asked the owner where the two novels "Chicago" and "The Seaweed Feast" were located. The men threatened the owner with arrest and confiscated the novels on the grounds that they were contrary to Islamic teachings (Al-Haq Affidavit No. 6040/2011).