

Urgent Call

On the Administrative Detention of Palestinian Human Rights Defender Khitam Al-Saafin

On 2nd November 2020, Israeli forces raided Ms. [Khitam Al-Saafin](#)'s home in Ramallah, arrested her and placed her under six months of administrative detention. Khitam, 59, is the Head of the [Union of Palestinian Women's Committees](#) – UPWC, secretariat member of the General Union of Palestinian Women and a prominent Human Rights Defender and activist in Palestine. Her work is well renowned at the regional and international level and is [recognised](#) for “empowering Palestinian women and advocating against human rights violations resulting from the Israeli occupation”. She is active at the World Social Forum and a member of the Regional Coalition for Women Human Rights Defenders in Middle East and North Africa – and framed within the definition of the *European Union in its Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders*.

Following her arrest, on 9 November, the Israeli military commander announced that Khitam would be incarcerated for 6 months under an administrative detention (AD) order and sent her to Ofer Prison. After an appeal from her lawyers, Khitam will be held for at least 4 months under AD without charges, trial or conviction nor a definite date of release, as AD orders remain subject to renewal. It is only on the last day of her current AD order – which will be 1 March 2021 - that she will be informed if she will be released or held for an extended period of 4-6 months, **a practice that amounts to a form of psychological torture, along with [other ill-treatment practices suffered systematically by Palestinian women](#) during arrests and illegal detentions, under interrogation and in Israeli jails**, specially Hasharon and Al-Damun Prisons, where Khitam was and will be held.

The **attacks and harassment of human rights activists in Palestine is a continuation of Israel's policy of silencing those who defend and express their opposition to the policies of the Israeli occupation**, including human rights defenders, leaders of civil society, as well as members of the Legislative Parliament. In the case of Ms. Al-Saafin, she is [targeted](#) by the Israeli authorities “solely as a result of her peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights”.

The arbitrary use of administrative detention is a [serious violation](#) of international humanitarian and human rights law, particularly articles 66, 72 and 78 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which provide protected persons with the right to fair trial unless “imperative security reasons” exist. Recognising its “promiscuous use” by the Israeli authorities, UN Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk recently issued a [statement](#) calling upon Israel to “abolish its practice of administrative detention, release those detainees it presently holds, and strictly follow international law in the application of its security operations”.

Israel systemically and extensively holds Palestinian political prisoners and detainees without trial or charge and without disclosing evidence; i.e., administrative detention. As of November 2020, [4,500 Palestinians](#) were held in Israeli prisons, 370 of them in administrative detention.

The undersigned condemn the detention of Ms. Al-Saafin, which adds to hundreds of arbitrary arrests that Israel has committed against Palestinian rights. **We also condemn** the growing environment of prosecution and harassment of human rights defenders, women human rights defenders and human rights organizations.

We call on the European Union - in line with the EU's already-established positions on Israel's practice of administrative detention, and the protection of human rights defenders and civil society - to take all the actions at their disposal to:

- Ensure Israel's immediate release of Palestinian human rights defender Khitam Al-Saafin;
- Ensure that Israel puts an end to the practice of administrative detention and releases all human rights defenders currently detained;
- Call on Israel to respect International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law and Human Rights of all Palestinian prisoners and detainees held in its custody;
- Recognise and support the work of UPWC and Human Rights Organizations, in compliance with the European Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders.

We call on MEP Member of DROI/Delegations for relations with Palestine, to immediately raise the case of Ms. Khitam Al-Saafin in the European Parliament and relevant European Union institutions, such as the European Commission and EEAS, reiterating the EU's longstanding and [repeated "concern"](#) against Israel's use of administrative detention without formal charges, and calling on Israel to respect international humanitarian law towards all Palestinian prisoners and detainees, and put an end to Israel's practice of administrative detention. More specifically, we call on you to:

- Write a letter to the High Representative/Vice President Joseph Borrell to highlight the case of Khitam Al-Saafin as an example of Israel's systemic practice of administrative detention against Palestinian human rights defenders and activists. Request that he communicate with the State of Israel urging it to **release all those held under administrative detention without trial or charge, including Khitam Al-Saafin**. In addition, to remind Israel of its obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law towards Palestinian prisoners and detainees.
- Issue a public statement condemning Israel's practice of administrative detention against Palestinian human rights defenders and activists such as Khitam Al-Saafin.
- Write a letter to the EU Special Representative for the MEPP Susanna Terstal to raise the issue of administrative detention, particularly the most recent arrest of Khitam Al-Saafin, with the Israeli authorities and calling for its end and thus the release of all prisoners.

Signatories

1. Association Belgo-Palestinienne WB
2. Association France Palestine Solidarité (AFPS)
3. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
4. CIG - Confederación Intersindical Galega
5. CIVICUS
6. CNCN-11.11.11
7. Euromed Rights
8. European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine (ECCP)
9. European Trade Union Network for Justice in Palestine
10. FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
11. Finnish Peace Committee
12. Fundación Mundubat
13. Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights (LPHR)
14. Norwegian People's Aid
15. Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees (Fagforbundet)
16. NOVACT - International Institute for Nonviolent Action
17. OMCT (World Organisation Against Torture), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
18. Paz con Dignidad
19. Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign
20. SOS Racismo Portugal
21. SUDS – Internacionalisme Solidaritat Feminismes
22. The Norwegian Palestine Committee
23. The Palestinian Human Rights Organisations Council (PHROC)
and its members:
24. Al Haq Organization - Law in the Service of Mankind
25. Al Mezan Center for Human Rights
26. ADDAMEER Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association
27. Palestinian Centre for Human Rights
28. DCI - Defense for Children International - Palestine
29. Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center
30. Aldameer Association for Human Rights
31. Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies
32. Hurriyat - Center for Defense of Liberties and Civil Rights
33. The Independent Commission for Human Rights (Ombudsman Office)
- Observer Member
34. Muwatin Institute for Democracy and Human Rights - Observer Member
35. Union of Palestinian Women Committees (UPWC)
36. Unite the Union - Ireland
37. Un Ponte Per (UPP)
38. Intal Globalize Solidarity
39. Viva Salud