

URGENT ACTION

DROP CHARGES AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Palestinian human rights defenders Farid al-Atrash and Issa Amro are facing their next two court hearings on 29 October and 5 November before an Israeli military court. Both men face charges relating to the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. The charges against them must be dropped.

Palestinian human rights defenders **Farid al-Atrash** and **Issa Amro** will face their next two court hearings before the Ofer Israeli military court on 29 October and 5 November, during which the court will hear seven witnesses called by the prosecution. The two men were charged following their participation in a peaceful protest march on 26 February 2016 organized by Palestinian residents and activists in the Old City of Hebron, in the occupied West Bank. The march was held to mark 22 years since the Israeli authorities first closed al-Shuhada Street in Hebron and to call for the removal of Israeli discriminatory restrictions on movement placed on Palestinians in the city. The charges against both men are baseless, and are related solely to their work as human rights defenders.

Both human rights defenders were released from detention on 1 March 2016, and are currently on trial.

Farid al-Atrash, a Palestinian lawyer, was arrested during this peaceful march and is facing five charges, including participating in an illegal demonstration and attacking soldiers. Video footage of the arrest corroborates Farid al-Atrash's account that he was peacefully protesting when he was pushed and dragged by soldiers and violently arrested.

Issa Amro, coordinator of the Youth Against Settlements group, was arrested on 29 February 2016 by Israeli police from the centre he runs in Hebron. Initially arrested for his role in the 26 February protest, Issa Amro was presented with 18 charges, ranging from "insulting a soldier" to "assault". Some of the charges date back to 2010. Issa Amro denies all the charges, and alleges that he was beaten by the Israeli police while in custody on two occasions. No investigation has been launched into these allegations.

Please write immediately in Hebrew, English or your own language:

- Calling on the Israeli authorities to immediately drop all the charges against Issa Amro and Farid al-Atrash;
- Calling on them to put an immediate end to the harassment of Issa Amro, Farid al-Atrash and other human rights defenders in the Occupied Palestinian Territories;
- Calling on them to order a prompt, impartial, independent and effective investigation into Issa Amro's allegations of torture or other ill-treatment, and prosecute those suspected of responsibility in fair trials.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 4 DECEMBER 2017 TO:

Prime Minister
Benjamin Netanyahu
Office of the Prime Minister
3 Kaplan St, PO Box 187
Kiryat Ben-Gurion
Jerusalem 91950, Israel
Email: pm_eng@pmo.gov.il
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Military Judge Advocate General
Brigadier General Sharon Afek
6 David Elazar Street
Hakiryia
Tel Aviv, Israel
Fax: +972 3 569 4526
Email: Mag@idf.gov.il
Salutation: Dear Brigadier General

And copies to:
Minister of Defence
Avigdor Liberman
Ministry of Defence 37 Kaplan Street
Hakiryia Tel Aviv 61909, Israel
Fax: +972 73 323 3300
Email: minister@mod.gov.il

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR MARK REGEV, Embassy of Israel, 2 Palace Green Kensington W8 4QB, 020 7957 9500

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 278/16. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE15/5294/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 9 July, an Israeli military judge heard the testimony of two Israeli soldiers testifying against Farid al-Atrash and Issa Amro. One of the soldiers claimed that Farid al-Atrash pushed him during the protest in Hebron that took place on 26 February 2016. However, video evidence showed Farid al-Atrash standing and holding a poster peacefully in front of Israeli soldiers when he was pushed and dragged and then violently arrested by a number of Israeli soldiers. Issa Amro said that he was very nervous and that “the soldier’s testimony is baseless”. He told Amnesty International: “You can see that in the video, but we do not expect justice from this mock trial. The military courts convict Palestinians in 99% of cases.”

Issa Amro runs the Youth Against Settlements group in Hebron, which is committed to non-violent activism against the illegal settlements in Hebron and the discriminatory restrictions placed on Palestinians by the Israeli authorities. Issa Amro documents human rights violations, organizes peaceful protests and distributes information about the settlements and the Israeli military occupation to visitors, journalists and diplomats.

Farid al-Atrash is a lawyer and the head of the southern districts office of the Independent Commission for Human Rights. The video footage of his arrest during the protest on 26 February 2016 is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCeeS2C6kWY>. Farid al-Atrash said that he is innocent and that the Israeli authorities are putting him on trial “to silence me and deter other human rights activists from conducting our work.”

Hebron is the only Palestinian city in the West Bank, apart from East Jerusalem, where Israeli settlers live inside the city centre. About 800 settlers live in four settlement enclaves inside and adjacent to Hebron’s Old City. In addition, more than 7,000 settlers live in two settlements on the edge of Hebron, and regularly enter the city. On 25 February 1994, an Israeli settler shot dead 29 Palestinians praying at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Cave of the Patriarchs, a holy site for Muslims and Jews, and wounded scores of others. Following the killings, the Israeli authorities imposed a series of severe and discriminatory restrictions on movement on the city’s Palestinian residents, closing many parts of al-Shuhada Street – formerly the city’s commercial centre – completely to Palestinians while allowing Israeli settlers and those visiting them free access.

Restrictions on movement have remained in place over the years, with the Israeli army periodically imposing additional curfews or closures, sometimes for long periods of time, including when Palestinians have attacked Israeli soldiers or civilians. Palestinians are forbidden even to walk on some streets of the Old City, including al-Shuhada Street. None of the restrictions are applied to the Israeli settlers or those visiting them. Since October 2015, as violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel has surged, the Israeli authorities have drastically increased the arbitrary and discriminatory restrictions on movement imposed on Palestinians in and around Hebron’s Old City, declaring parts of it a “closed military zone”.

Human rights defenders in the city have long faced a campaign of harassment from the Israeli army, police and settlers. Issa Amro has frequently been threatened and sometimes attacked physically by Israeli settlers, often in the presence of Israeli soldiers or police. He alleges that he has been arrested on many occasions by the Israeli army, and detained for a few hours before being released, in an attempt to appease the Israeli settlers in the city.

Some of the charges Issa Amro is facing, such as “participating in a march without a permit”, are not recognizable criminal offences under international standards. One of the charges of assault refers to an incident in a protest on 20 March 2013 that took place after he had already been arrested and was therefore not present. A video from the scene clearly shows another man was responsible for the incident, in which a settler’s camera was broken (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVGaQGnM2Bw>). The protest was peaceful and coincided with US President Barack Obama’s visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Issa Amro has also faced harassment from the Palestinian authorities. He was arrested on 4 September by the Palestinian security forces after he posted comments on his Facebook page criticizing the arrest of a local radio journalist. He was released on bail six days later. He is currently facing trial in a Palestinian court on charges of disturbing “public order” under the newly adopted Electronic Crimes law, as well as “causing strife” and “insulting the higher authorities”.

Further information on UA: 278/16 Index: MDE 15/7305/2017 Israel/OPT Issue Date: 23 October 2017