

URGENT ACTION

PROTECT TWO GAZA WOMEN IN GRAVE DANGER

Two Palestinian women have not been heard from since 6 January after the Palestinian security services in the Gaza Strip forced them back into the custody of their abusive father. Wissam al-Tawil, 24, and her sister Fatimah al-Tawil, 20, have faced multiple forms of violence at the hands of their father, including beatings, death threats and “interrogations” at gunpoint. Amnesty International is asking for proof that Wissam and Fatimah al-Tawil are alive and safe and for the authorities in Gaza to grant them immediate protection from all forms of gender-based violence. The authorities in the Gaza Strip are obligated under Palestinian and international law to act with due diligence to prevent violence by private individuals against women and girls and to protect women and girls from it.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Dr Ghazi Hamad

Ministry for Social Development

Fax: (+970) 82827474

Email: mosdgoyps@gmail.com

Facebook: DrGhaziHamad

Twitter: @MinistryGaza

Dear Minister Hamad,

*I am writing to you in relation to sisters **Wissam and Fatimah al-Tawil**, residents of the Rafah refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. They have not been heard from since 6 January 2023, after the Palestinian security services forced them back into the custody of their abusive father.*

Amnesty International was able to confirm, after reviewing documents, pictures and videos, and after speaking to the two sisters and to different people who know the family, that Wissam and Fatimah al-Tawil were facing different forms of severe violence at their home at the hands of their father for months. The violence included repeated and prolonged captivity, on one occasion for 36 days, in a locked room, interrogation, beatings, death threats, threats of further violence and constant intimidation. In September 2022, the sisters fled their home by jumping from a 6th floor window. Since September 2022, when they fled to the shelter for women and girls facing domestic violence, the two women's father used his Facebook page and his circle of supporters in Rafah refugee camp to threaten the two sisters, to demand that the police return them by force, and to smear and tarnish their reputation. On 30 August 2022, the two sisters filed a complaint with the police detailing the violence that they were enduring, and that was forcing them to seek protection. The authorities, including the director of the government-run women's shelter, prevented them from meeting the prosecutor and proceeding with their complaint.

Your government had previously given assurances that the women would be protected. The Palestinian authorities are obligated to try to prevent acts of gender-based violence, especially when they are aware of specific risks, as in this case.

I call on you to seek proof that Wissam and Fatimah al-Tawil are alive and safe. The Palestinian authorities have the duty to protect the sisters from all forms of violence, guarantee their safety and security, and respect their right to choose their residence. All legal proceedings, protective and support measures and services concerning victims and survivors should respect and strengthen the women's autonomy. Accountability mechanisms should be activated to bring abusers to justice while victims of violence have effective access to comprehensive services. The security forces which detained Wissam and Fatimah al-Tawil and delivered them to their father should be investigated for their failure to protect these women.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Wissam al-Tawil bravely told the story of her ordeal and expressed solidarity with all survivors of gender-based violence, in an article published on 24 December 2022 on news site raseef22.net. Over the last months of 2022, Wissam and Fatimah have shown extraordinary courage by speaking out against the violence they have endured, posting on social media and sharing powerful accounts of their plight in the media. They refused to be silenced even when their father posted threats against them on his Facebook page. The sisters said they were speaking out not only for themselves, but for all women facing gender-based violence.

The two women attempted to leave Gaza through the Rafah crossing on 25 October 2022 but were informed by the authorities that they were not allowed to travel. Since then, the two women repeatedly sought permission to travel but were told on each occasion by the authorities that they would not be allowed to, despite the fact that there is no judicially ordered travel ban against them.

On 12 November 2022, the two women were coerced into leaving the women's shelter after months of pressure from their father, who accused the authorities of destroying "family values" and violating social norms by "refusing" to hand over his two daughters, whom he treats as his own private property. The father published numerous videos on Facebook and WhatsApp reiterating this message.

The two women told Amnesty International that they felt they had been subjected to "psychological warfare", forcing them to leave the shelter and return to Rafah against their will. They said that the director of the shelter had conducted humiliating searches in order to confiscate their mobile phones and that the Gaza women's police officer had ordered them to immediately leave the shelter. After hiding for weeks, the women were detained by the Palestinian security services and brought back to their family on 5 January 2023. The last words that they sent to Amnesty International, around 1 am on 6 January 2023, were "We are doomed."

In 2014, the State of Palestine ratified the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Palestinian authorities are obligated to protect women from violence, provide survivors with remedy, and hold perpetrators accountable.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic

You can also write in English or your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 21 March 2023

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Wissam al-Tawil and Fatimah al-Tawil (she/her)