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Occupied Palestinian Territories / Israel: Artist and human rights defender Hafez Omar remains in detention

On 14 March 2019, Israel’s Ofer Military Court ordered that human rights defender **Hafez Omar** be detained for 12 days. A subsequent appeal, which was made on behalf of the human rights defender, was rejected by the court on 20 March 2019. Hafez Omar remains in detention and is being denied access to his lawyer.

[Hafez Omar](#) is an artist and human rights defender. His award-winning artwork has been widely used on posters and in campaigns defending the rights of Palestinian prisoners and for the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Hafez Omar has been vocal in his opposition of extrajudicial killings and the siege of the Gaza Strip. The human rights defender had been working in his newly-opened graphic studio in the hours preceding his arrest.

At around 4 am on 13 March 2019, Israeli forces stormed the house of Hafez Omar’s younger brother in Ramallah. They broke the windows and broke down the main door of the house and they interrogated the brother. The officer-in-charge identified himself as being from the Israeli Security Agency (Shabak).

Around 4.45 am, the officers took the brother to Hafez Omar’s house, which is in the same neighbourhood. When they arrived at the human rights defender’s house, there was already a large Israeli Army presence. His brother was reportedly beaten and threatened that if he made noise he would also be arrested and “suffer the consequences”. After the officers checked the human rights defender’s identity, he was told that he was being arrested, but not told why or what charges – if any – he was facing. The human rights defender’s phone was confiscated and he was handcuffed and blindfolded.

On the same night, 23 other Palestinians were also arrested in their homes by Israeli security forces, which resulted in clashes that broke out on the streets of Ramallah. When taking Hafez Omar, the officers made him walk in front of them through the clashes effectively using him as a human shield. The human rights defender was understood to have been taken to Israeli Military Interrogation Centre in Ashkelon, but he was neither granted access to his family nor his lawyer while there.

The following day, on 14 March 2019, Ofer Military Court ordered that Hafez Omar be detained for 12 days. An appeal was subsequently drafted and submitted by lawyers from the Palestinian human rights organisation, Addameer. At the appeal hearing, which was held at Ofer Military Court on 20 March 2019, a lawyer working with Addameer expressed his concerns that Hafez Omar might be mistreated or tortured. The Court rejected the appeal. He remains in detention despite not having been charged and has not been granted access to a lawyer.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Israel to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Hafez Omar, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being held solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Allow Hafez Omar's family and lawyer immediate and unfettered access to him;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.