

9 July 2021

OPT/Israel: Ongoing harassments against Health Work Committee

On 8 July 2021, the Ofer Military Court rescheduled the hearing session of woman human rights defender **Shatha Odeh Abu Fannouneh** to 14 July 2021. The woman human rights defender was detained on 7 July 2021 at her house in Ramallah, as part of a wider crackdown against the Health Work Committee. **Juana Ruiz Sánchez**, the project coordinator of the organisation has been detained since 13 April 2021.

Shatha Odeh Abu Fannouneh is a woman human rights defender and the Director of the Health Work Committee, an organisation working to deliver health services to Palestinians in remote areas of the West Bank. The organisation focuses specifically on women's and children's health. Juana Ruiz Sánchez is a Spanish woman human rights defender, she has been working in the Health Work Committee for almost 28 years, she worked as the project coordinator in the organisation.

On 7 July 2021, early in the morning, approximately 15 soldiers raided the house of Shatha Odeh Abu Fannouneh. The soldiers separated the family from the woman human rights defender, and detained her. The family reported that a female soldier was accompanying Shatha Odeh Abu Fannouneh and heard her shouting at the woman human rights defender. The soldiers also confiscated Shatha Odeh Abu Fannouneh's phone and car which belong to the Health Work Committee. The woman human rights defender was taken to Ofer prison, where there is no women's section. On the same day she was transferred to Hasharon prison, located in Israel, which is a breach of International Humanitarian Law, as the IV Geneva Convention prohibits transferring prisoners outside their territories. The woman human rights defender has a medical condition which requires 8 pills daily, and regular medical examinations. She is not allowed to take her medication now, as the Israeli authorities have refused the entry of her medications into the prison. She was not allowed to meet with her lawyer until her hearing session, and she was only allowed to contact one of her family members briefly.

On 8 July 2021, the first hearing session of Shatha Odeh Abu Fannouneh was supposed to be held in front of the Ofer Military Court, however, her hearing was rescheduled to 14 July 2021. No charges have been submitted against the woman human rights defender yet.

The detention of Shatha Odeh Abu Fannouneh is part of a wider crackdown against the Health Work Committee. On 9 June 2021, the Israeli army raided the organisation's headquarter in Ramallah, and ordered the closure of the organisation for six months. During the raid, the soldiers confiscated several items belonging to the organisation, including computers and documents. The raid caused several damages in the organisation's building, including breaking the door to the building.

The crackdown also included the earlier detention of woman human rights defender Juana Ruiz Sánchez. Juana Ruiz Sánchez has been in detention since 13 April 2021 and is facing the charges of "participating in the activities of an illegal organisation", "being part of the board of directors of an illegal organisation", "receiving and introducing money into the Palestinian territories" and of "receiving money for a false purpose", which are based on her work for the Health Work Committee. Juana Ruiz Sánchez has had very limited access to her lawyer and family, and she was kept in solitary confinement for approximately 20 days. The UN Human Rights Committee has in recent years [denounced](#) the use of solitary confinement, noting that "prolonged solitary

confinement of the detained or imprisoned person may amount to acts prohibited by article 7," which is the prohibition of acts of torture. The woman human rights defender is currently detained in Al-Damoun women's prison.

The ongoing judicial harassments have also included the detention of the organisation's accountant, Tayseer abu Sharbak, who was detained on 8 March 2021 and is being held in Ofer prison. He is facing the charges of "participating in the activities of an illegal organisation" as well as charges relating to terrorism, because of his work with the Health Work Committee. He has since had contact with his lawyer, however, his family have not been able to see him due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned regarding the detention and ill-treatment of the women human rights defenders, and the other staff members of the Health Work Committee. Front Line Defenders believes that their detention is solely based on their peaceful and legitimate human rights work.

Front Line Defenders urges the Israeli authorities to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release the two women human rights defenders Shatha Odeh Abu Fannouneh and Juana Ruiz Sánchez, as well as Tayseer abu Sharbak. Front Line Defenders believes that they are being held solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Ensure that the treatment of the two women human rights defenders and Tayseer abu Sharbak, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the *'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment'*, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Allow the above women human rights defenders immediate and unfettered access to their families and lawyers;
4. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in OPT/Israel 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.