

31 July 2020

## **OPT/Israel: Raid at Yabous Cultural Centre and judicial harassment of its director Rania Elias**

On 28 July 2020, Rania Elias, Director of the Yabous Cultural Centre in Jerusalem, was summoned and interrogated by police following her participation in a peaceful demonstration against the raid of the Centre, as well as on the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music, on 22 July .

The [Yabous Cultural Centre](#) is a non-profit cultural centre in Jerusalem. The main objective of the Centre is to maintain and defend the cultural rights of Palestinians in Jerusalem, through organizing different cultural and artistic events and activities.

On 22 July 2020 at approximately 9am, the Israeli Police raided the home of Rania Elias and Suhail Khoury in Jerusalem. Rania Elias is the Director of the Yabous Cultural Centre, her husband Suhail Khoury is the Director of the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music in Jerusalem. The police asked the couple to keep their children in one room whilst they searched the house and confiscated their mobile phones, laptops, and some of their personal papers and documents. Following this, the police brought Rania Elias to the Cultural Centre, where they proceeded to confiscate the laptops there too, as well as other documents from the centre. At the same time, police were also raiding the Edward Said Centre and confiscated same. Rania Elias was then taken to Abu Ghniem police station, where she was interrogated for almost eight hours, with her lawyer only permitted to be present for the first part of the questioning. She was later released on bail. Currently Rania Elias and Suhail Khoury are the facing charges of 'money laundering', 'tax evasion' and 'supporting terrorist activities'. Suhail Khoury was also released on a bail.

On 28 July 2020, Rania Elias participated in a peaceful demonstration in front of Yabous Cultural Centre to protest again the unlawful raid . The Israeli police observed the demonstration, and once it had finished, Rania Elias was summoned to the police station where she was investigated for almost three hours. She was ordered by police not to go to the Yabous Cultural Centre or Ramallah, where another branch of the Centre is located, for 15 days. Rania Elias has also been denied from the right of family reunification, and the right of permanent residency in Jerusalem, for many years. She believes that these efforts to deny her the right to live legally with her husband and children in Jerusalem are in reprisal for her work defending and maintaining Palestinian cultural rights in Jerusalem.

The Yabous Cultural Centre has been subjected to several raids by Israeli police in the past. Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned regarding the raid of the Yabous Cultural Centre and the continual harassment of its director, Rania Elias, and her husband, Suhail Khoury. The personal targeting of the Centre's director can be seen as an attempt to hamper the Centre's work, defending cultural rights. Front Line defender believes that the raid and the continuous harassment are a result of the peaceful work of Yabous Cultural Centre to maintain and protect the cultural existence of Palestinians in occupied Jerusalem.

**Front Line Defenders urges the Israeli authorities to:**

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the raid of Yabous cultural centre, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Return the documents and the devices confiscated during the raid, as they are manifestly not linked to any criminal activity;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders and organisations in Occupied Palestinian Territory and 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.

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