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OPT/Israel: Judicial harassment against Palestinian human rights defenders

On 4 July 2021, human rights defender **Mohannad Karajah** was arbitrarily detained by the Palestinian police on the premises of the Ramallah Courts. The human rights defender was informed by police that he is facing the charges of “denouncing the Palestinian Authority”, “illegal demonstration”, and “inciting hatred within the communities”. The detention of **Mohannad Karajah** is part of a wider crackdown, which Palestinian human rights defenders have been facing since the killing of activist **Nizar Bannat** on 24 June 2021.

[Mohannad Karajah](#) is a Palestinian human rights defender and attorney representing Lawyers for Justice, a Palestinian non-governmental, human rights organisation that works to support Palestinian activists and political prisoners held by the Palestinian Authority through legal aid. Lawyers for justice also works on documenting human rights violations which the Palestinians are subjected to by the Palestinian Authority.

On 4 July 2021, at approximately 9:00 am, **Mohannad Karajah** was arrested while he was at the Court of Ramallah, practising his work as a lawyer. Several Palestinian police officers approached the human rights defender, and arrested him. The human rights defender requested to see the arrest warrant, which the police claimed was issued, but that they didn't have it with them. **Mohannad Karajah** handed over his phone and personal belongings to his colleague, which the police attempted to confiscate, however, the colleague refused to give the phone to them as they did not present an arrest warrant for the human rights defender. Later on the same day, the Public Prosecution denied issuing an arrest warrant against **Mohannad Karajah**. The human rights defender reported to Front Line Defenders that he was taken to the intelligence office for interrogation, but he refused to be interrogated without the presence of a representative from the Palestinian Bar Association, as it is illegal to interrogate a lawyer without the presence of a representative from the Bar Association. His detention lasted for approximately for four hours, during which he was not allowed to contact the Bar Association or his family. Before his release, he was forced to sign a document, where he committed to attend an interrogation in front of the Public Prosecution the next day.

The human rights defender is facing the charges of “denouncing the Palestinian Authority”, “illegal demonstration”, and “inciting hatred within the communities”, under the Cyber Crime Law No (10) of 2018 and Jordanian Penal Code No (16) of 1960. **Mohannad Karajah** did not attend the interrogation scheduled for 5 July 2021, as the Bar Association was not informed of this by the authorities. The human rights defender reported that he could be arrested anytime now.

On 4 July 2021, after **Mohannad Karajah** was detained, several lawyers and activists demonstrated outside the Court of Ramallah against the arbitrary detention of the human rights defender. Human rights defenders [Jihad Abdo](#) and [Ezz El Din Zaaloul](#) were detained during the peaceful demonstration, and are also facing the charges of “denouncing the Palestinian Authority”, “illegal demonstration”, and “inciting hatred within the communities”. On 5 July 2021, woman human rights defender and lawyer [Diala Abu Aiash](#) was arrested during a peaceful demonstration in front of the police station in Al-Bierh. The woman human rights defender reported that she was subjected to sexual harassment and verbal abuse by police officers in the Al-Bierh police station. She was released after a few hours of her arrest.

This is a part of a wider crackdown on Palestinian human rights defenders, who are requesting accountability for the death of activist **Nizar Bannat**, which the official autopsy report showed that

police violence was the main cause of his death. Several demonstrations have taken place, and others are still ongoing in the West bank. Palestinians are protesting against the killing of Nizar Bannat, and the corruption inside the Palestinian Authority institutions. Hundreds of Palestinian peaceful protesters have reportedly been arbitrarily detained, physically abused and subjected to sexual harassment during the peaceful demonstrations.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned regarding the charges against human rights defenders Mohannad Karajah, Jihad Abdo, and Ezz El Din Zaaloul. It is further deeply concerned regarding the arrest and reported sexual harassment and verbal abuse of woman human rights defender Diala Abu Aiash. Front Line Defenders believes that they are solely being targeted and facing charges as a result of their peaceful and legitimate human rights work.

Front Line Defenders calls the Palestinian Authority to:

1. Immediately release human rights defenders Jihad Abdo and Ezz El Din Zaaloul, and drop all charges against them, Mohannad Karajah, as it is believed that these charges are solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the sexual harassment and verbal abuse against woman human rights defender Diala Abu Aiash with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Cease targeting all Palestinian human rights defenders 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.