



## **Israel's arrest of Shatha Odeh is an attack on the right to health of Palestinians**

**Statement by the People's Health Movement  
July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

On Wednesday 7 July 2021, the Israeli army arrested Shatha Odeh, director of the Health Work Committees (HWC), at her home in Ramallah. This organisation is one of the most prominent Palestinian non-profit health care providers. Shatha herself is a well respected civil society leader both locally and internationally. She is the chairperson of the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO), a network of most Palestinian NGOs, and a member of the Global Steering Council of the People's Health Movement.

Shatha is one of those brave women at the forefront of the worldwide struggle for health and social justice. She speaks truth to power and is known as an exemplary leader of great courage but also as a caring friend and comrade with a great sense of humour.

Shatha's arrest comes one month after HWC received an Israeli military order to close its headquarters for six months. This initial attack was widely condemned, including by Amnesty International, which highlighted the "catastrophic consequences for the health needs of Palestinians across the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT)." As they face a fourth wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Israeli attacks on HWC further weaken the Palestinians' ability to cope with the pandemic. And yet, as an occupying power, Israel is responsible for the right to health of Palestinians

These attacks come in a context of increasing criminalisation of Palestinian civil society organisations by the Israeli occupation forces. In January 2019, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights pointed out that Israeli "legislation, both adopted and proposed, singles out human rights organizations for increased restrictions. Administrative constraints are placed on their operations. Sources of funding are undermined through campaigns to delegitimize organizations working for the rights of Palestinians. Human rights defenders are arrested and threatened, and groups including Israeli organisations as well as foreign Jewish organizations are being targeted for standing up for Palestinians' human rights".

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) talk about a three-pronged delegitimation strategy implemented by Israel which aims firstly to defame these organisations claiming they have links with terrorist or anti-



Semitic organisations, secondly to put pressure on any organisation or individual that supports them, and thirdly, to actively advocate for cutting off all their sources of funding. The arrest of Shatha Odeh, a dedicated and persistent defender of health and human rights of the Palestinian people, and the strictures against HWC, are merely further manifestations of Israel's illegitimate and immoral attacks on Palestinian civil society.

The People's Health Movement strongly condemns Shatha's arrest, calls for her immediate release and also safeguard the important work of the Health Work Committees (HWC). We urge international organisations and foreign governments who are genuinely concerned about the fate and health of the Palestinian people to join us in our condemnation of the increasing criminalisation and delegitimation of humanitarian and civil society organisations.

Free Shatha Odeh!

Health for all Palestinians!