



4th September 20221

The UN Special Rapporteur for Health
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Dear Dr Mofokeng

The arbitrary detention and harassment of Shatha Odeh and the closure of the Health Works Committees in the West Bank by Israeli security forces – request for intervention

We write to you as the South African chapter of the People's Health Movement to request that your office intervene in the arbitrary arrest and harassment of Ms Shatha Odeh, who is the Director of a Palestinian Health NGO called the Health Work Committees (HWC), which provides preventive, curative and health promotion services for the population of the West Bank. Ms Odeh also serves as chair of the Palestinian NGOs Network and on the Global Co-ordinating Council for the People's Health Movement.

She was arbitrarily detained in a night-time raid on the 7th July 2021 by Israeli security forces who arrested her without any warrant under circumstances of gross intimidation. She remains in custody without access to her family and without having been charged, more than two months since her arrest.

The Israeli Security forces have also forced the closure of the HWC under the pretext of claiming the organisation and, by implication, Ms Odeh, is linked to terrorist groups. There is no credible evidence for such a claim. The "evidence" for such assertions stems from sources known to be pro-Zionist organisations closely linked to the Israeli security establishment. The use of misinformation to smear legitimate opponents of the Occupation has been escalating over the past months.

Ms Odeh's arrest is part of an ongoing crackdown on civil society in Palestine by Israeli security forces who are increasingly shrinking any space for legitimate and peaceful civil society action in the occupied territories.

We bring this to your attention as the Special Rapporteur for the Right to Health and in light of your particular interest and attention to matters of Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights, since the closure of the HWC and the harassment of Ms Odeh have resulted in the denial of access to health services and in particular, to sexual and reproductive health services.

We believe this action by the Israeli government, which is a state party to both the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Right as well having ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in October 1991, represents a grave failure of the Israeli state to respect a range of human rights – principally, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, amongst numerous other human rights.

It is inconceivable how a purportedly democratic state can interfere with access to health care and violate the rights of Palestinian Women to sexual and reproductive health rights, without any grounds. The Israeli Military occupation of the Palestinian territories allows a perversion of the rule of law which would be expected in any democracy to protect citizen from arbitrary arrest and from state action that violates the population's rights to the highest attainable standard of health.

We believe an investigation by the Office of the Special Rapporteur into the impacts of Israeli Security for action on the right to health in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is much warranted.

We are also appealing to you to intervene to ensure the urgent release of Ms Odeh, committed health worker (she is nurse by training and manager of extensive health services for a highly vulnerable population). She is herself suffering from a number of chronic illnesses and her conditions of incarceration cannot be said to be compatible with the rights of detainees to adequate health care. In any event, she should not be detained in the first place for seek to promote access to health for the Palestinian population.

We attach to this request information that may be helpful to you in considering our request:

1. A PHM statement on Ms Odeh's arrest issued on 9th July
2. A statement issued by the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO) and the Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council (PHROC) on the 12th August
3. A fact sheet on the Health Work Committees
4. An August 11th Statement by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

Given the multiple human rights under threat by her arbitrary detention and the closure of the HWC, we congratulate the UN Special Rapporteurs for their joint statement of 11th August and look forward to further joint action by the offices of the different rapporteurs.

We would be happy to engage further and/or to offer PHM support to any investigative mission to Palestine in the matter, should you wish to take that up.

We look forward to hearing back from your office

Yours sincerely



Melanie Alperstein
Secretary, PHMSA Steering Committee.