

August 26, 2024

Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles
High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
/ Vice-President of the Commission

Mr. Valdis Dombrovskis
European Commission, Executive Vice-President for An Economy that Works for People

In copy: Foreign Ministries of EU Member States

Sent via email

Dear High Representative / Vice-President Borrell and Executive Vice-President Dombrovskis,

Our organizations are writing to request that the European Union take action against the Israeli authorities' unprecedented killing of journalists and other violations of media freedom, in contravention of Israel's human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL) obligations. These are part of widespread and systematic abuses committed by Israeli authorities in Gaza, the West Bank, Israel, and elsewhere, as documented or acknowledged by Israeli, Palestinian and international NGOs, UN experts, the International Court of Justice, and in a request for arrest warrants by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. These violations should trigger the suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement and further EU targeted sanctions against those responsible. Regrettably, the EU 27 governments are yet to unanimously acknowledge, attribute, and condemn the Israeli forces' crimes in Gaza.

Since October 7, 2023, when fighters led by Hamas' armed wing carried out [numerous and coordinated attacks](#) on civilians and hostage-taking in Israel, the Netanyahu administration has taken an unprecedented series of steps to curtail media freedom that has effectively resulted in the establishment of a censorship regime.

The ongoing attacks against journalists and media freedom by Israeli authorities requiring urgent action include:

- **Unprecedented killings of journalists:** Press freedom organizations, including the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) have recorded the [killings of more than 100 Palestinian journalists and media workers](#) in Gaza, as well as two Israeli and three Lebanese journalists, since October 7, making it the deadliest period for journalists in the decades that these organizations have been gathering data. Many of these journalists were wearing press insignia when killed. The decimation and displacement of Gaza's press corps has meant that [fewer local journalists are left](#) to report on the hostilities in Gaza.

- **Targeted killings of journalists:** CPJ found that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) directly targeted and killed at least five journalists,¹ and CPJ is researching at least 10 other deaths that indicate possible IDF targeting.² Other organizations such as RSF believe the [number of targeted killings may be higher](#). Documenting and verifying the details necessary to conclude that targeting has occurred, while access to Gaza is constrained and reporting conditions [remain dire](#), is difficult. The targeted or indiscriminate killing of journalists, if committed deliberately or recklessly, is a war crime. In one of these attacks, an IDF tank strike killed Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah in southern Lebanon on October 13, as documented by extensive independent investigations by human rights and media organizations and supported by extensive [forensic video analysis](#).³ Six other journalists were injured.
- **Ban on independent media access to Gaza:** While some restrictions on reporting are common in war, the effective [total ban on journalists](#) entering Gaza — both foreign nationals and Israeli and Palestinian journalists — is unprecedented in modern times. Journalists have been able to report from the frontlines in almost every major conflict over the past three decades: from Ukraine to Rwanda. By comparison, despite the Israeli government press office issuing media credentials to approximately [2,800 international journalists](#) to enter Israel since the conflict began, only select journalists have been allowed to enter the Gaza Strip — all under Israeli military escort and with [restrictions on reporting](#).⁴ Consequently, more than 70 news outlets and civil society organizations have recently [urged that Israel](#) grant independent access to Gaza.
- **Record-high arbitrary detention:** Since October 7, Israel has arrested [at least 49 journalists and media workers](#) — often without charge — in what they and their attorneys say is retaliation for their journalism and commentary. At least 13 are being held under administrative detention, a policy under which a military commander may detain an individual without charge, typically for six months, on the grounds of preventing them from committing a future offense, and extended an unlimited number of times. The use of the procedure has repeatedly been declared a form of [arbitrary detention by the UN](#).
- **Enforced disappearance:** Palestinian journalists [Nidal Al-Wahidi](#) and [Haitham Abdelwahid](#) have been [detained by Israeli authorities](#) since October 7, while they were reporting on the Hamas-led attack in southern Israel. Since then, the Israeli authorities have refused to disclose information about their whereabouts, the legal grounds for their arrest, or even confirmation that they are still alive.
- **Allegations of torture and mistreatment:** There are a growing number of allegations by journalists of [torture](#) and [mistreatment](#) while arrested or detained by Israeli authorities. While

¹ The five journalists targeted and killed are Reuters journalist and Lebanese national [Issam Abdallah](#) in southern Lebanon and Palestinian journalists [Hamza Al Dahdouh](#), [Mustafa Thuraya](#), [Ismail Al Ghoul](#), and [Rami Al Refee](#) in Gaza. CPJ also found that the IDF deliberately targeted journalists before Oct. 7, as in the case of American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, whose killing is the subject of an ongoing Justice Department investigation. See [CPJ report finds no accountability for journalists killed by the Israeli military over the past two decades](#), Committee to Protect Journalists (May 9, 2023).

² Other organizations such as RSF believe the [number of targeted killings may be higher](#); however, documenting and verifying the details necessary to conclude that targeting has occurred, while access to Gaza is constrained and reporting conditions [remain dire](#), is difficult.

³ See independent investigations by [Reuters](#), [AFP](#), [Amnesty International](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), and [Reporters Without Borders](#).

⁴ A small number of journalists have entered Gaza whilst embedded with the Israeli military on very short visits that offer a limited and curated view of the conflict, and a CNN correspondent briefly reported from inside Gaza after entering with an Emirati aid group. See Patrick Kingsley [A Glimpse Inside A Devastated Gaza](#), New York Times (Jan. 9, 2024). The ban on journalists' access has been [upheld](#) by Israel's Supreme Court. Access from Egypt is also impossible.

lack of access to Gaza has hampered research organizations' ability to independently confirm these accounts, they are consistent with the evidence of systemic ill-treatment of detainees in Israeli custody documented by [civil society organizations](#) and the [United Nations](#).

- **Censorship and egregious limitations of media freedom:** More broadly, legal impediments and [significant impairments](#) to independent reporting within Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory have expanded since October 7. In Israel, [press freedom](#) has been curtailed by an increasing number of [banned](#) articles, government [officials' anti-press rhetoric](#), alleged attempts to seemingly [control](#) news outlets, and [attacks on Israeli reporters](#), among other threats. In April 2024, Israel also passed a law that empowers the government to temporarily [ban the broadcasting of international news outlets](#) in Israel if they are deemed a threat to national security, resulting in the [shuttering of Al Jazeera](#) within Israel. In May 2024, Israel temporarily [confiscated equipment from the Associated Press](#) for providing live video feeds to Al Jazeera. There are also ongoing [internet shutdowns](#) that prevent news and testimonies from Gaza from reaching the outside world, extensive allegations of [harassment and intimidation](#), and reports that more than [50 media offices have been destroyed or damaged](#) in Gaza.
- **Failure to investigate or hold perpetrators to account:** Despite repeated calls by civil society organizations, none of these attacks, killings, or other allegations of abuse against journalists have been transparently or comprehensively investigated by the IDF. The IDF has a [longstanding pattern of impunity](#) that predates the current conflict: in May 2023, CPJ documented at least 20 journalists killed by the IDF over the past 22 years, including American-Palestinian journalist [Shireen Abu Akleh](#), and no one had ever been charged or held accountable for their deaths. The Israeli rights groups B'Tselem and Yesh Din have [independently](#) concluded that when Israeli military [investigations](#) do occur, they serve as a "[whitewash mechanism](#)," findings that are supported by other organizations such as [Human Rights Watch](#).

Journalists play an indispensable role in documenting and reporting on war crimes and other human rights violations. The cumulative effect of these abuses is to create the conditions for an information void, as well as for propaganda and mis- and disinformation. While Israel contends that its actions are to keep its people safe, history shows that censorship and denial of the right to information is a flawed path to peace or security.

We, therefore, write to you today to call for the suspension of the Israel / EU Association Agreement on the basis that it has violated international human rights and criminal law and for the adoption of targeted sanctions against IDF officials and others responsible.

In addition, European leaders should unequivocally and publicly ask that Israel meet the following demands on press freedom:

Provide access and uphold the freedom to report

- Lift its blockade on international, Israeli, and Palestinian journalists from independently accessing Gaza.
- Revoke legislation permitting the government to shut down foreign outlets and refrain from any further legal or regulatory curtailment of media operations.
- Release all Palestinian journalists from administrative detention or who are otherwise held without charge.

Protect the lives of journalists

- Abjure the indiscriminate and deliberate killing of journalists.
- Guarantee the safety of all journalists, including allowing the delivery of newsgathering equipment and safety gear to reporters in Gaza and the West Bank.
- Allow all journalists seeking to evacuate from Gaza to do so.

Ensure accountability and end impunity

- Transparently reform its investigation procedures to ensure that all investigations into alleged war crimes, criminal conduct, or violations of human rights are swift, thorough, effective, transparent, independent, and in line with internationally accepted practices. Investigations into abuses against journalists must then be promptly conducted in accordance with these procedures.
- Allow international investigators and human rights organizations, including United Nations (UN) special rapporteurs, investigators for the International Criminal Court, and the UN [Independent International Commission of Inquiry](#) on the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, unrestricted access to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory to investigate suspected violations of international law by all parties.

Thank you for the consideration of our requests.

Signed:

1. Association of European Journalists (AEJ-Bulgaria)
2. Association of Journalists of Albania (AJA, Albania)
3. Association of Polish Journalists (SDP, Poland)
4. Association of Professional Journalists of Albania (APJA, Albania)
5. BH Journalists Association (BHJA, Bosnia and Herzegovina)
6. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
7. CFDT-Journalistes (France)
8. Committee to Protect Journalists
9. Community Media Forum Europe
10. Croatian Journalists' Association (CJA, Croatia)
11. Danish Union of Journalists (DJ, Denmark)
12. (The) Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation
13. DISK Press Labour Union (DİSK Basın-İş, Turkey)
14. Dutch Association of Journalists (NVJ, The Netherlands)
15. Estonian Association of Journalists
16. Ethical Journalism Network (EJN)
17. EuroMed Rights
18. European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)
19. European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)
20. Federation of Associations of Journalists of Spain (Federación de Asociaciones de Periodistas de España, FAPE, Spain)

21. Free Press Unlimited (FPU)
22. General Association of Professional Journalists in Belgium (AGJPB/AVBB, Belgium)
23. Human Rights Watch (HRW)
24. Hungarian Press Union (HPU, Hungary)
25. IFEX
26. Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS, Serbia)
27. Independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers (SSNM, North Macedonia)
28. Index on Censorship
29. Institute of Maltese Journalists (IGM)
30. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
31. International Media Support (IMS)
32. International Press Institute (IPI)
33. Journalists' Union of Athens Daily Newspapers (JUADN, Greece)
34. Journalists' Union of Turkey (Türkiye Gazeteciler Sendikası, TGS, Turkey)
35. Luxembourg Association of Professional Journalists (Association luxembourgeoise des journalistes professionnels, ALJP, Luxembourg)
36. Media Diversity Institute
37. National Federation of the Italian Press (Federazione Nazionale della Stampa Italiana, FNSI, Italy)
38. National Union of Journalists - General Confederation of Labor (Syndicat National des Journalistes - Confédération Générale du Travail, SNJ-CGT, France)
39. National Union of Journalists of Ukraine
40. Norwegian Union of Journalists (Norsk Journalistlag, Norway)
41. OBC Transeuropa (OBCT)
42. Ossigeno.info
43. Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF)
44. Periodical & Electronic Press Union (PEPU, Greece)
45. Portuguese Union of Journalists (SinJor)
46. Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
47. Rory Peck Trust
48. Serbian Journalists' Union (Sinos, Serbia)
49. Slovenian Association of Journalists (Društvo Novinarjev Slovenije, DNS, Slovenia)
50. Slovenian Union of Journalists (SNS, Slovenia)
51. South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)
52. Spanish Federation of Journalists' Unions (Federación de Sindicatos de Periodistas, FeSP, Spain)
53. Swedish Union of Journalists (Sweden)
54. Trade Union for Culture, Art and Media (UGS-Nezavisnost, Serbia)
55. Trade Union of Croatian Journalists (TUCJ, Croatia)
56. Trade Union of Media of Montenegro (TUMM, Montenegro)
57. Turkish Journalists' Association (Gazeteciler Cemiyeti Dernegi, GCD, Turkey)
58. Union of Bulgarian Journalists (SBJ, Bulgaria)
59. Union of Journalists in Finland (Suomen Journalistiliitto, Finland)
60. Union of Journalists of Andalusia (SPA-FeSP, Spain)