

October 27, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write to you as Churches and church-based organizations to express our significant concerns about the recent Israeli decision to label key Palestinian human rights and civil society organizations as “terrorist organizations.” Our shock and anger echoes the concerns raised by groups like [Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch](#), and over [twenty Israeli human rights and peace organizations](#).

We ask that you publicly oppose this move and also intervene with your Israeli counterparts by calling for the immediate reversal of this action which runs directly counter to President Biden’s stated prioritization of human rights in the conduct of US foreign policy.

The Israeli Ministry of Defense’s October 19 declaration that key Palestinian human rights groups are “terrorist organizations” effectively outlaws and criminalizes the named groups: Defense for Children International – Palestine, Al-Haq, Addameer, Bisan, the Union of Agricultural Working Committees, and the Union of Palestinian Women’s Committees.

The targeted organizations are among the most respected Palestinian human rights organizations, organizations that many of us rely on for information and with which we have long established relationships. All of these organizations work closely with the United Nations, international NGO partners, and activist communities and advocate to European and U.S. government officials. They also provide vital information about and services to Palestinians whose human rights have been violated.

The Israeli government and groups supported by the Israeli government have targeted these organizations for decades because of their human rights activism by making similar accusations to their donors, arresting and detaining staff, and raiding organizations’ offices. Past politicized accusations that these groups are linked to terrorist groups have been thoroughly investigated and rejected by UN, EU, and U.S. officials. This new attack on the work of key Palestinian civil society groups must be viewed in the context of decades of failed attempts to delegitimize and stop the work of these groups. Understanding this context, we ask that you make it clear that the U.S. rejects these new accusations.

We are very concerned that if this decision remains in effect, the Israeli government can close these organizations’ offices, seize their assets, and arrest and jail their staff.

This is a dangerous escalation of Israel’s ongoing attacks on civil society and human rights defenders. An attack on these organizations is an attack on those most dedicated to realizing a just and lasting peace and if this action is allowed to stand, it will make peace harder to realize.

As Churches and church-based organizations we unequivocally reject this move and call on you to both demand its immediate reversal and to insist on protection for Palestinian civil society and human rights defenders.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee
Churches for Middle East Peace
Church World Service
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
The Episcopal Church
The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ
Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Inc.
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Pax Christi USA
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Reformed Church in America
United Church of Christ Justice and Local Church Ministries
Unitarian Universalist Association