



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
8 June 2022

English only

---

## Human Rights Council

Fiftieth session

13 June–8 July 2022

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 May 2022]

---

\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



## **The Unlawful Killing of Palestinian-American Journalist - Shireen Abu Akleh**

On the morning of the 11th May 2022, Israeli forces shot and killed Palestinian-American Journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh whilst she was wearing a press vest, reporting on an Israeli raid of a Palestinian refugee camp in Jenin, in the Occupied West Bank.<sup>1</sup>

Abu Akleh, a journalist with the International News Network - Al Jazeera, was wearing a press vest and was standing with other journalists when she was killed. Another Al Jazeera journalist, Ali Al-Samoudi, was also wounded by a bullet in the back at the scene. Shatha Hanaysha, a local journalist who was standing next to Abu Akleh when she was shot, also told Al Jazeera that there had been no confrontations between Palestinian fighters and the Israeli army, as previously claimed by an Israeli forces spokesperson. She said the group of journalists had been directly targeted. "We were four journalists, we were all wearing vests, all wearing helmets," Hanaysha said. "The [Israeli] occupation army did not stop firing even after she collapsed. I couldn't even extend my arm to pull her because of the shots being fired. The army was adamant on shooting to kill."<sup>1</sup>

From both eyewitness testimonies as well as the placement of the bullet wound to Abu Akleh, which was beside her ear whilst she was wearing a press helmet, suggests it was a shot taken with extreme precision, it is clear to see that the attack on Palestinian journalists on the morning of May 11th in Occupied Jenin, by Israeli forces was premeditated and executed to the last precise detail.

The deliberate targeting of journalists, like the murder of Shireen Abu Akleh by Israeli forces, categorically constitute as both an international law violation and a war crime.<sup>2</sup> Journalists are protected under international humanitarian law against such direct attacks. Violations of this rule constitute a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I. Additionally, journalists are categorized as civilians and intentionally directing an attack against a civilian – whether in an international or in a non-international armed conflict – also amounts to a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.<sup>2</sup>

UN Special Rapporteur on occupied Palestinian territories, Francesca Albanese has recently stated in a public interview that the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh, is a "potential war crime" and expanded further to add that it is a "serious violation of international humanitarian law and is potentially a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court." Albanese also insists that the killing of Abu Akleh "must be thoroughly investigated in a transparent, rigorous and independent manner."<sup>3</sup>

### **Brutal Crackdown on Israeli Forces On Shireen Abu Akleh's Funeral**

On Friday 13th of May, Thousands of Palestinians mourners came to attend Abu Akleh's funeral in Occupied Jerusalem. As her body left St Joseph Hospital to proceed to her funeral, Israeli police attacked the funeral procession – nearly forcing pallbearers to drop Abu Akleh's coffin. Israeli forces seized Palestinian flags from mourners and later smashed the window of the hearse carrying Abu Akleh's body and removed a Palestinian flag. The Jerusalem Red Crescent said 33 people were injured in the attacks and six were hospitalized.<sup>4</sup>

The violent scenes of Israeli forces attacking Palestinian mourners at Abu Akleh's funeral sparked global outcry and condemnation. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was "deeply disturbed" by the violence, according to a spokesman. The European Union said it was "appalled by the violence in the St Joseph Hospital compound and the level of unnecessary force exercised by Israeli police throughout the funeral procession". The foundation of late South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, said scenes of Israeli police attacking the pallbearers were "chillingly reminiscent" of what happened during the funerals of anti-apartheid activists.<sup>4</sup>

The world was a witness to the violent scenes of Israeli forces attacking Palestinian mourners at Abu Akleh's funeral, where it was clear that Palestinians' freedom of opinion, freedom of expression and to peaceful assembly, were all violated.

## Israel's Has Killed Over 50 Journalists Since 2000

Abu Akleh was killed just days after the International Federation of Journalists, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate (PJS) and the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP) filed a formal complaint at The Hague for “systematic targeting of Palestinian journalists.” An estimated 50 Palestinian journalists have been killed since 2000, according to the PJS.<sup>5</sup>

Israeli forces have a “track record of employing lethal force and systematically targeting Palestinian journalists with complete lack of accountability,” said the ICJP.<sup>5</sup> Four years ago, Haaretz journalist Amira Hass uncovered court files that revealed that in 2012 Israeli soldiers beat Palestinian journalists with batons and arrested them, on their commanders’ orders, with the declared intention of disrupting their coverage of a Palestinian demonstration.<sup>5</sup> This emphasizes how the killing of Abu Akleh is not an isolated incident, but is part of a wider, premeditated and systematic attack by Israeli forces on journalism that it does not agree with. It is a fundamental pillar of a free and fair society, to have a free press, not only a press who report what you want them to report.

## Conclusion

The Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) is deeply concerned with the seeming impunity Israel is repeatedly dealt after countless killings of Palestinian journalists, and unequivocally condemns the callous killing of journalists in occupied Palestinian territories, and around the world.

The Palestinian Return Centre calls on the international community to not only open and both transparently and independently investigate the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh but we also call on the world’s governments and leading human rights institutions to take the necessary measures towards Israel, in order to ensure not a single Palestinian journalist more is killed for merely fulfilling their job.

---

1 Al Jazeera, Shireen Abu Akleh: Al Jazeera Reporter Killed by Israeli Forces. Aljazeera.com. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/11/shireen-abu-akleh-israeli-forces-kill-al-jazeera-journalist>

2 International Committee of the Red Cross: How Does International Law protect journalists in armed-conflict situations?. Icrc.org. Available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/interview/protection-journalists-interview-270710.htm>

3 Middle East Monitor: Shireen Abu Akleh’s Killing is a ‘Possible War Crime’, Says UN Rapporteur on Palestine. Middleeastmonitor.com. Available at: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220512-shireen-abu-aklehs-killing-is-a-possible-war-crime-says-un-rapporteur-on-palestine/>

4 Al Jazeera: Israeli Police Attack on Shireen Abu Akleh Mourners Spark Outcry. Aljazeera.com. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/14/israeli-police-attack-on-shireen-abu-akleh-mourners-sparks-outcry>

5 TIME: The Problems With Israel’s Version of the Killing of Reporter Shireen Abu Akleh. Time.com. Available at: <https://time.com/6176045/israel-response-shireen-abu-akleh-killing/>