



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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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.

[1 February 2021]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## Crackdowns and human rights violations against Palestinians following the terror attack in Austria, November 9, 2020

The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd (PRC) is deeply concerned about the human rights violations perpetrated by the Austrian police on November 9, 2020 and which culminated in the arrests and investigating dozens of Palestinians activists.

These violations are a manifestation of a clear disregard for basic human rights principles and rules of law in Austria. They also make part of an ad hominem campaign carried out under the pretext of fighting 'political terrorism'.

PRC believes, just as many international human rights watchdogs do, that the arbitrary manhunts and broad raids committed by the Austrian security authorities are "politically-motivated" and make part of a preplanned conspiracy against the Palestinian community.<sup>1</sup>

A Palestinian refugee has lost his job while his child has caught breastfeeding problems as she has gone traumatized after 20 policemen broke into their house on November 9 under the pretext of an anti-terror manhunt.<sup>2</sup>

The father told news outlets: "We woke up at the crack of dawn to the clutter of heavily-armed policemen escorted by sniffer dogs and pointing their rifle butts towards our heads".

The family was shocked. The wife went speechless while the mother and her child kept crying hysterically.

The husband who was immediately summoned to questioning said interrogators asked him about his religious beliefs, his wife's veil-wearing, and, ironically, whether he would allow his eight-month daughter to eat all kinds of meat in Austria when she grows up.

Police further asked him about his political orientations, including his standpoint regarding the Egyptian government and the former Palestinian president Yasser Arafat. Police denied him the right to his lawyer's company and kept interrogating him for 18 hours in order to force confession.

The raids were carried out in four of Austria's nine provinces: Styria, of which Graz is the capital, Carinthia, Vienna and Lower Austria.

The Styria region prosecutors' office said investigations have proved that "the operation has no connection to the terror attack in Vienna of November 2" but was rather the result of "intensive and comprehensive investigations carried out for more than a year."

This raises doubts not only about the motives of the manhunt, but also about the timing of the manhunt, which had been launched just a few days following the terror attack that hit Vienna.

This was confirmed by Austrian Interior Minister Karl Nihamer who said that "the security operation launched by the police aims to 'cut off the roots of political Islam.'" His statement is a clear indication that the matter is related to a campaign linked to a political position or religious orientation, and not related to specific legal violations.<sup>3</sup>

Such politically/religiously-motivated security operations are flagrant breaches of the right to the personal freedoms of belief and expression, which are part and parcel of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/austria-palestine-ngo-crackdown-islamophobia-tyranny>.

<sup>2</sup> A testimony provided by a family affected by the police raids:  
[https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D8%A8%D8%B0%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9/?fbclid=IwAR2k3mJjwNMjnvuNxQMXsB3HQNPbkz\\_jNjwsY39uDIryTHG6qjPlyQeGVy4](https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D8%A8%D8%B0%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9/?fbclid=IwAR2k3mJjwNMjnvuNxQMXsB3HQNPbkz_jNjwsY39uDIryTHG6qjPlyQeGVy4).

<sup>3</sup> <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/austrian-police-raid-more-than-60-addresses-allegedly-linked-to-radical-islamist-targets/articleshow/79128998.cms>.

The fact that the arrestees and the inhabitants were questioned about their position of the State of Palestine and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a further indication of the politically-motivated nature of the raid campaign, which was violently carried out with total disregard for children, women, and vulnerable persons.

These violations are another facet of the terror campaign targeting Palestinian human rights and anti-occupation activists, several among whom have not been naturalized in Austria after over a 20-year stay in the country.

It is unacceptable that innocent people be targeted by security forces as if they were extremely dangerous terrorists.<sup>4</sup>

The questions posed during the investigations regarding the Palestinian cause raise many doubts about the motivations of this campaign. It was revealed that a number of humanitarian activists who were of Palestinian origin were interrogated about their ideological standpoints regarding the Palestinian national liberation struggle. The interrogation was clearly oriented towards specific findings that serve to criminalise resistance to the occupation as well as criticism of Israel and the normalisation agreements. Investigations of the sort certainly breach people's individual freedoms and basic rights in a country that they have lived in for years and for which they have given much.

PRC strongly condemns the terrorist attacks and expresses its heartfelt solidarity with the victims. But, by the same token, we denounce any attempt to manipulate this incident in favor of a racist discourse and discriminatory measures carried out under the security guise.

The Austrian government should immediately reverse its smear campaign and take legal action against those involved in such violations and discriminatory policies. Any collective punishment tactics targeting the Palestinian activists and human rights organisations should be immediately brought to a halt.

Such an anti-Palestine campaign is shocking and dreadful as it has taken place in a country that has always prioritized people's personal freedoms. We are at a very critical stage in human history where all countries, governments, and peoples, regardless of their race, religion, and nationality, should combine forces in order to fight humanity's most horrific enemy — coronavirus.

The Palestinians have seen it all. They have been displaced from their homeland and turned into refugees, torn from the nourishment of their home and warmth of their families. The Palestinians, just like every people on earth, should be able to freely exercise their right to speak up for their cause and defend themselves against the illegitimate occupation of their motherland.

Last but not least, we hope that an urgent response be made by the world's governmental and non-governmental bodies in the face of such immoral, illegal, and inhumane practices.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/austrian-muslim-family-cannot-forget-terror-operation-/2087758>.