

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

ISRAEL/OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY: Escalation of the campaign of attacks against prominent Palestinian human rights organisations

Geneva-Paris, August 22, 2016 – The credible death threats against a member of the Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights evidence a serious escalation in the ongoing smearing, intimidation, and threats campaign against several prominent Palestinian human rights organisations. The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders urges the international community to ensure that a genuine investigation takes place.

On August 10, 2016, an Al Mezan¹'s staff member received an email sent both to his personal and work email addresses, with the following death threat: "you deserve to see your loved ones suffer and die. but maybe you would be hurt before them...". Six photos of the house where he resides were attached to this e-mail that follows two other threatening messages addressed to him on August 2 and 6.

Following the escalation in the level of the attacks against Al Mezan, the Observatory has been informed about numerous incidents that have taken place in recent months and that illustrate the scale of the ongoing campaign of threats and attacks against Al Mezan and its staff members. These attacks have included threats to Al Mezan staff members both directly and through friends and donors, baseless accusations of affiliation with political and terrorist groups or groundless claims of mismanagement of their funds and of involvement in 'sexual crimes', just to mention some of the most worrying incidents. The smear campaign seems to attempt to discredit the organisation in the eyes of its donors and its international partners.

The nature and the content of the attacks seem to indicate the existence of close surveillance using advanced technologies to track phone numbers, email addresses, and to get the content of the communications of Al Mezan's staff members, not only in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) but also in Europe.

The Observatory strongly condemns the coordinated attacks against Al Mezan and recalls that similar attacks have recently taken place against Al-Haq². These attacks aim at intimidating the organisations that pressured the Palestinian Authority (PA) to join the ICC and that submitted together with Al Dameer and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) communications to the International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor's Office urging it to open an investigation.

In light of the continued attacks endured by prominent Palestinian human rights organisations, the Observatory urges all relevant stakeholders, including the United Nations (UN) and the European Union, to take action to ensure that an immediate, exhaustive and independent investigation into the situation is carried out. Moreover, they must contribute to create an environment where human rights defenders, including those critical of the relevant duty-bearers' human rights record, can operate freely, in compliance with the relevant international norms and standards, including the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

¹ Al Mezan, a human rights organisation based in Gaza and member of OMCT's SOS-Torture Network, has declared its mission to be 'to promote respect and protection for all human rights; particularly economic, social and cultural rights, in the Gaza Strip as part of the OPT throughout research, legal intervention, advocacy and awareness with a sound combination of professionalism and community participation'.

² See Observatory's Urgent Appeal ISR 001 / 0816 / OBS 071 issued on August 11, 2016, and the Press Release of March 4, 2016, "ISRAEL-PALESTINE: Al-Haq human rights lawyer based in The Hague receives death threats, as attacks against the organisation escalate"



The Observatory
for the Protection
of Human Rights Defenders

2

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Observatory) was created in 1997 by the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and FIDH. The objective of this programme is to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders. OMCT and FIDH are both members of [ProtectDefenders.eu](https://www.protectdefenders.eu), the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism implemented by international civil society.

For more information, please contact:

OMCT: Miguel Martín / Delphine Reculeau: +41 22 809 49 39

FIDH: Arthur Manet / Audrey Couprie: + 33 143 55 25 18