

**Item 3: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of  
human rights defenders**

**55th Session Human Rights Council, 21 February 2024**

**Agenda Item 3, Promotion and protection of human rights, civil, political,  
economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development.**

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Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) is a not-for-profit campaign, research and advocacy organisation founded and based in the United Kingdom. It was set up in 1997 and works for redress of human rights violations and a better understanding of rights and norms across confessional, ethnic, national, political and other boundaries.

IHRC has consultative status with the UN – ECOSOC.

202 Preston Road

Wembley

HA9 8PA

United Kingdom

Tel: +44 2089044222

Email: [info@ihrc.org](mailto:info@ihrc.org)

Web: <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/ihrc-at-un/>

For direct communication about this report, please contact Jawad Husain [jawad@ihrc.org](mailto:jawad@ihrc.org)

**Speaker: Jawad Husain**

Since the escalation of hostilities between Palestine and Israel on the 7th of October 2023, the governments of United Kingdom, France and Germany have reached an alarming level of repression, with the indiscriminate targeting and demonization of legitimate activities of political opposition, critics, dissidents, civil society, religious and other minorities as well as lawyers, religious clerics, bloggers, artists, musicians and others. People who support justice for the Palestinians, people who opposed the Iraq war, those protesting refugee deportations, even people who protested against domestic policies on austerity have been arrested and threatened.

IHRC recalls the fundamental principles set forth in the so-called UN Human Rights Defenders Declaration, adopted by the General Assembly in 1999, especially when: stating that “everyone has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels” (art.1); “to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms” (art. 2); calling for states to “take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights” (art. 12).

In France, the two civil society groups, the “Party of the Indigenous of the Republic” and “Palestine will conquer” collective have been dissolved as a result of “anti-Semitic acts”. In November, the women’s rights activist in Gaza and member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine Mariam Abudaqa was served with an “absolute emergency” expulsion order in Marseille, because of her “widely publicized participation” in Pro-Palestine events and demonstrations that “is likely to stir up hatred and violence between communities”. In Germany, the pro-Palestinian group Samidoun, the Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network, has been banned and is now monitored by Berlin’s domestic intelligence agency. Various pro-Palestine artists, journalist, have seen their exhibitions, workshops, conferences or other performance of any kind, cancelled and been facing unjust treatment. To mention a few: Adnia Shibli’s award ceremony for her novel “Minor Detail” at Frankfurt Book Fair; Yaeli Ronen’s play “The Situation” at Gorki theatre; the Documenta Exhibition, the most important international exhibition of contemporary art in Hassel, Germany; the Artforum editor-in-chief David Velasco, who has been fired after his open letter calling for the ceasefire in Gaza. In the UK, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology urged the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Director to open an urgent investigation upon two academics from the University College of London, by accusing them of criticising UK-anti-terrorism legislation, and retweeting posts condemning violence on both sides and referencing Israel’s “genocide and apartheid. Not surprisingly, in few days more than 1,300 artists and cultural figures have signed a statement accusing arts institutions in Western countries of censoring Palestinian voices and solidarity. More and more universities have banned speakers on the basis of their (non-violent) views, by prohibiting discussion of political and social issues.

Against this backdrop, IHRC is alarmed about the impact that such measures and legislation have on citizens. First of all, resulting in shrinking CSOs’ and HRDs’ political space and inhibiting and/or criminalizing HRD’s expression of views that are perfectly legitimate, but which may be perceived by the authorities as skirting too close to or falling foul of the new definition of terrorism or extremism.