

Arab League, OIC welcome Amnesty's report on Israel's 'apartheid' against Palestinians

Author:

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LONDON: The Arab League on Thursday welcomed a report by human rights organization Amnesty International, which called for Israeli authorities to be "held accountable for committing the crime of apartheid against Palestinians."

Dr. Saeed Abu Ali, the Arab League's assistant secretary-general for Palestine and the Occupied Arab Territories, praised the report, and said it represents an important international legal document.

He added that it comes at an urgent and critical time, "in light of the war crimes and crimes against humanity that Palestine is being subjected to, the frequency of which has escalated dangerously during the past year compared to the previous year."

He was speaking during a press briefing in Cairo to shed light on the most prominent violations committed by Israeli authorities against the Palestinian people in the last year.

The Amnesty report, entitled "Israel's apartheid against Palestinians: a cruel system of domination and a crime against humanity," details how Israel enforces a system of oppression and domination against the Palestinian people wherever it has control over their rights, Amnesty said. The 278-page report was compiled over a period of four years.

Abu Ali called on the international community to follow up on the report's important findings, focus on accountability, and identify those responsible for violations and crimes committed daily against the Palestinian people. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation also issued a similar statement, welcoming the report and calling on the international community "to take the necessary measures to ensure accountability of Israel for its violations, crimes and racist policies against the Palestinian people."



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Amnesty International report brands Israel an apartheid stateIsraeli treatment of Palestinians termed study in the mechanics of apartheid

[Palestine Liberation Organization to choose top negotiator after death of Erekat](#)

Fri, 2022-02-04 00:25

RAMALLAH, West Bank: The Palestine Liberation Organization meets on Sunday to elect key leadership figures tasked with keeping up the struggle for

statehood, at a gathering which may hint at a potential successor for President Mahmoud Abbas.

The most important post up for grabs is that of the late chief negotiator Saeb Erekat, who was PLO secretary-general and had been deeply involved for decades in the now moribund peace talks with Israel. He died in 2020 from coronavirus complications.

Once the undisputed champion of the Palestinian cause, the PLO has lost much of its relevance since the 1994 establishment of the Palestinian Authority.

PLO Chairman Abbas, who is also the PA president, is 86 years old and has seen support dive to historic lows in opinion polls, accused of autocracy in rare West Bank street protests last year.

Palestinians have not been to the ballot box for 16 years, and their aspirations for a two-state solution are strongly rejected by Israel's right-wing nationalist Prime Minister Naftali Bennett.

Violence flares almost daily in the occupied West Bank, and the coastal enclave of Gaza is still recovering from another devastating war with Israel last year.

Against this backdrop, the PLO meeting in Ramallah will seek to fill key posts in the movement that was founded in 1964 and bills itself as the sole representative of all Palestinians.

Also open is the position of high-profile official Hanan Ashrawi, who resigned more than a year ago from the 18-member executive committee, the PLO's top decision-making body.

Abbas confidante Hussein Al-Sheikh, the PA's civil affairs minister, is widely tipped to take over Erekat's seat and chief negotiator role.

He is also among those seen as Abbas's possible successors.

Other contenders are Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh and Marwan Barghouti, who is currently in an Israeli prison over his role in planning attacks and whom supporters describe as the Palestinian Nelson Mandela.

"Sheikh is a person that Israelis seem to hold in high regard. Certainly the Americans do," said Khaled Elgindy, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute.

"Others feel that he's the kind of guy that they can work with. So in the near term, it seems like it makes a lot of sense."

A veteran of Abbas's Fatah movement, Sheikh has cultivated ties with foreign diplomats and with Israel, and met with Foreign Minister Yair Lapid last month.

Bennett's coalition government has ruled out formal peace talks with the Palestinians but has said it wants to deepen economic cooperation with the PA

to improve livelihoods in the West Bank.

“It does look like Abu Mazen (Abbas) is sort of preparing the ground for a future succession process,” said Elgindy.

“I’m just not sure that the actual succession process is going to unfold according to his wishes.”



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[Calls to break silence on Lokman Slim assassination anniversary](#)

Fri, 2022-02-04 00:12

BEIRUT: Friday marks the first anniversary of the assassination of Lebanese researcher and publisher Lokman Slim, but his family is yet to receive any new information regarding the course of the judicial investigation to uncover

the circumstances of the crime.

Slim, 58, was shot dead on Feb. 3, 2021.

His body was found in his car in the village of Aaddousiyyeh in southern Lebanon, the day after his family reported that they had lost contact with him while he was returning from visiting a friend in the area where Hezbollah has great influence.

Slim, who was known for his outspoken opposition to Hezbollah, had been threatened before his death.

Slogans accusing Slim of treason had been written on the walls of his home in the southern suburb of Beirut, with taglines glorifying "gun silencers" and expressions such as "Hezbollah is the honor of the nation."

The Lokman Slim Foundation launched a campaign coinciding with the anniversary of his assassination calling for "breaking the silence surrounding political assassinations and opposing the culture of murder and impunity."

The primary task of the foundation set up in Slim's name is to document "political assassinations in the Middle East and North Africa."

Activists and analysts say Lebanon's modern history is replete with assassinations and assassination attempts against politicians, journalists, academics, clerics and activists, whose perpetrators remain unknown.

The latest of these crimes is the Beirut port explosion on Aug. 4, 2020, which killed 220 people, injured 6,500 others and destroyed part of the capital.

The Beirut port probe is still suspended by a political decision and obstructed especially by Hezbollah.

As no suspect has been arrested for Slim's assassination, Human Rights Watch in a statement on Thursday criticized "the flawed investigations into politically sensitive murders."

It called on donors to review the aid provided to the Internal Security Forces and the judiciary in Lebanon.

Aya Majzoub, Lebanon researcher at HRW, said: "The unsolved murders and shoddy homicide investigations are a reminder of the dangerous weakness of Lebanon's rule of law in the face of unaccountable elites and armed groups.

"The security forces and judiciary, often generously funded and trained by donor countries, have the technical capacities to investigate murders, but have failed to identify any suspects in these sensitive cases or to follow obvious avenues of investigation."

The cases HRW examined are: Slim, a longtime Hezbollah critic; Joe Bejjani, a telecommunications worker and amateur military photographer shot on Dec. 21,

2020; Col. Mounir bou Rjeily, a retired customs officer found dead in his home on Dec. 2, 2020 from being struck with a sharp object on his head; and Antoine Dagher, the head of Byblos Bank's ethics and anti-fraud department and former head of its compliance unit, who was stabbed to death on June 4, 2020.

On the first anniversary of Slim's assassination, many officials denounced his killing and the failure to hold the killers accountable.

"We will never forget," former Prime Minister Saad Hariri wrote on Twitter, captioning a picture of Slim.

Former Justice Minister Ashraf Rifi tweeted: "Investigating the crime is forbidden and the killers are not held accountable.

"In the tutelage state, Lebanon's best are treacherously killed, at the hands of Iran's tools, but Lebanon remains stronger than them, and justice will prevail sooner or later."

The lawyers of the National Council to End the Iranian Occupation of Lebanon called on the security and judicial authorities to "publish the findings of the investigations to uncover the killer, who we believe is Hezbollah."

They added: "The martyr, comrade Slim, was assassinated in Hezbollah's area of influence. Either Hezbollah is the killer or it must come forward with information to expose the killers. The question remains: Does the state fear the truth, or does it fear Hezbollah?"

In this context, the Lebanon Debate news website published an article about what it considered the "fake achievement" of the ISF's Information Branch by recently busting 17 Israeli spy rings in Lebanon.

"After Hezbollah arrested an agent who was recruiting people in Lebanon by tempting them to work for an association and get paid in US dollars, and following in-depth investigations, the party believed the case was too complex and thus referred it to an officer with whom it was previously cooperating," the article read.

"This Information Branch officer then looked further into the case and discovered new leads, which allowed the arrest of the members of these spy rings.

"The fact that the Information Branch kept its investigations secret and did not leak any information about it, prompted the party that leaked the information to leak the investigations to the media," Lebanon Debate pointed out.



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[Scraping a living: Salt offers women lifeline in Yemen](#)

Author:

Thu, 2022-02-03 23:59

Al-MUKALLA: Scooping up handfuls of white crystals from coastal pools, a group of women in Yemen harvest salt – a traditional industry proving to be a lifeline after seven years of war.

Zakiya Obeid is one among nearly 500 women who work in the industry in a village overlooking the Gulf of Aden, on Yemen's southern coast.

"We cooperate and take shifts because it is a sisterhood and we know each others' difficult circumstances," said Obeid said.

Employment is so scarce that the women work in rotation to allow more people to benefit.

She said the women are divided into two groups, with each working for 15 days while the others rest.

In bare feet and mud-spattered abaya robes, the women dig basins at low tide and return when the seawater has evaporated to dredge up the salt for packaging and selling.

The time-honored livelihood has been passed down from generation to generation.

It is now a means of survival, providing many families with their only source of income.

The women earn about \$100 per month for harvesting the salt and packing it in plastic containers.

Since the formation of the Al-Hassi Association for Sea Salt Production in 2020, the women are able to transport the salt to be ground, packaged and sold across Yemen.

"Before then, we used to do the same work but could only sell the salt raw," Obeid said.

"But that is no longer the case, with the association providing us with bags and transport."

The head of the Al-Hassi Association, Khamis Bahtroush, said the women, who produce between 20-30 tons of salt every three months, have come to rely on this industry.

"Production is lower in winter than in summer," he said.

"Each bag is sold for approximately 3,000 Yemeni rials (\$12) ... but we are struggling with inflation and do not have liquidity to give them raises.

"This is their only source of income ... they have nothing else. No farms, no livestock."

The UN Population Fund has said the loss of male breadwinners in the conflict has added to the difficulties faced by women.

"The pressure is even more severe where women or girls suddenly find themselves responsible for providing for their families when they themselves have been deprived of basic education or vocational training," it said.



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[Morocco rescuers dig for boy trapped in well](#)

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Thu, 2022-02-03 23:44

BAB BERRED, Morocco: Moroccans waited anxiously Thursday as authorities said a dramatic operation to rescue a young boy trapped in a deep well for over two days was nearing its end.

The five-year-old, named as Rayan, fell down the narrow 32-meter (100-foot) deep well on Tuesday evening in his home village near Bab Berred in the rural northern province of Chefchaouen, local media said.

"The child's rescue is approaching," government spokesman Mustapha Baitas said Thursday. "Our hearts are with the family, and we are praying that he will back with them as soon as possible."

The shaft was too narrow for rescuers to reach the bottom, so heavy diggers were dispatched to dig a hole alongside it.

Relief operations intensified as darkness fell for a third night with the boy deep down in the well, with diggers clawing out dirt under floodlights. Rescuers reported they had dug down some 24 meters, but that around six meters still remained to reach the child.

The MAP news agency said rescuers had been able to send him oxygen and water via pipes.

Rayan's father told Le360 news website he had been repairing the well when the boy fell into it.

Lead rescuer Abdelhabi Temrani told Al Oula television that the diameter of the well was less than 45 centimeters.

Baitas said the nature of the soil meant it was too dangerous to try to widen the hole, meaning major excavations around it were the only solution.

The drama has sparked an outpouring of sympathy online, with the Arabic hashtag #SaveRayan going viral across the North African region, including in neighboring Algeria.

Moroccan footballer and PSG star Achraf Hakimi mentioned the rescue efforts on social media, alongside emojis of a broken heart and hands together in prayer.

The boy's fate has also attracted crowds of people to the site of the operation, putting pressure on rescuers operating in "difficult conditions," Baitas said.

"We call on citizens to let the rescuers do their job and save this child," he said.

Authorities have also prepared a helicopter to take the child to hospital once he is extracted, national news channel 2M said.



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