

UN experts denounce Israeli branding of Palestinian rights groups as terrorists

Author:

Tue, 2021-10-26 02:26

NEW YORK: UN human rights experts on Monday “strongly and unequivocally” condemned the decision by Israeli authorities to designate six Palestinian human rights groups as terrorist organizations.

“This designation is a frontal attack on the Palestinian human rights movement and on human rights everywhere,” the special rapporteurs said. “Silencing their voices is not what a democracy adhering to well-accepted human rights and humanitarian standards would do.”

They called on the international community to “defend the defenders” and added: “These civil society organizations are the canaries in the human rights coalmine, alerting us to the patterns of violations, reminding the international community of its obligations to ensure accountability, and providing voices for those who have none.”

Special rapporteurs are independent experts who serve in individual capacities, and on a voluntary basis, on the UN’s Human Rights Council. They are not members of UN staff and are not paid for their work.

They include Martin Lynk, special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, and Fionnuala Ni Aolain, special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism.

The experts said that antiterrorism laws must not be used as a tool to undermine freedoms, and reminded Israeli authorities that the Security Council and all other UN bodies “have all been clear about the requirement to apply counter-terrorism measures in a manner which is consistent with international law and does not violate states’ international obligations.” Such “egregious misuse” of counterterrorism measures by Israel, the experts added, undermines the security of all.

Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz on Friday designated as terrorist groups the Palestinian organizations Addameer, which provides legal support for prisoners and collects data on arrests and detentions; Al-Haq, which documents rights violations; Defense for Children International Palestine; the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, the Bisan Center for Research and Development, and the Union of Palestinian Women Committees.

“These organizations speak the language of universal human rights (and document abuses in Palestine),” the experts said.

They added that the decision to designate them as terrorist organizations effectively bans their work and gives the Israeli military free rein to arrest employees, close offices and confiscate assets.

The experts expressed concern that in the case of one of the organizations, the decision might be a reprisal for cooperation with UN groups.

“The Israeli military has frequently targeted human rights defenders in recent years as its occupation has deepened, its defiance of international

law has continued and its record of human rights violations has worsened," the experts said.

"While international and Israeli human rights organizations have faced heavy criticism, legislative restrictions and even deportations, Palestinian human rights defenders have always encountered the severest constraints."

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said that the UN office in Jerusalem, in addressing the issue, continues to engage with the Israeli authorities and the concerned parties.

"The secretary-general has repeatedly expressed concern about the shrinking space for civil society in many places around the world, including in Israel," he added.



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Jordan's King Abdullah urges world to work together to resolve Palestine-Israel conflict Israel slammed over 'vicious' attacks on Palestinian civil society

Prince Charles to visit Jordan and Egypt to follow up on COP26 commitments

Author:

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Tue, 2021-10-26 01:56

LONDON: Britain's Prince Charles will travel to the Middle East next month on a trip that aims to showcase strong bilateral relationships and address the climate crisis.

The prince and his wife, Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall, will visit Jordan and Egypt from Nov. 16 to 19, as part of his autumn tour, at the request of the British government, his office announced on Monday. During his last autumn tour, in 2019, he visited India, New Zealand and the Solomon Islands.

Prince Charles "will explore how leaders, the private sector and wider society can implement commitments" following the World Leaders' Summit that will take place in Glasgow, Scotland, on Nov. 1, during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26).

During his visit to Jordan, which coincides with the nation's centenary celebrations this year and 100 years of the UK-Jordan bilateral relationship, the royal couple will meet King Abdullah II and Queen Rania at Al-Husseiniya Palace.

They will also tour cultural and religious sites in Jordan and meet representatives of humanitarian organizations, including the UN Refugee Agency and the International Rescue Committee, the latter of which he became patron in January last year.

Charles will use his visit to focus on environmental issues, heritage preservation, and the creation of jobs and opportunities for young people. He will also participate in an interfaith discussion that "will acknowledge the diverse, tolerant and integrated nature of Jordanian society, highlighting the importance placed on religious freedom," the prince's office said. Camilla will focus on supporting education for women and girls and will discuss with Queen Rania her efforts in this area.

"Their royal highnesses' return to Jordan underlines the importance that Her Majesty's Government places on its close ties with Jordan, which is underpinned by the countries' deep security cooperation and the long-standing relationship between the two royal families," according to the prince's office.

It added that Charles, who last visited Jordan in February 2015, will

highlight the nation's generosity in hosting refugees forced to flee conflicts in neighboring countries.

During their visit to Egypt, the royal couple will meet President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and First Lady Entissar Amer at Al-Ittihadiya Palace. They will also meet the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar to discuss "religious harmony and the role of faith in preserving the environment, (which) will serve to further strengthen religious ties between the UK and Egypt," the prince's office said.

Egypt will assume the presidency of COP27 in 2022, so the talks will also focus on efforts to combat climate change, it added.

"Their visit to Egypt will highlight the country's close relationship with the UK, and will provide an opportunity to demonstrate Egypt's growing commitment to protecting the environment," the prince's office said.

Charles and Camilla last visited the North African country in 2006. The trip will conclude with a reception in the shadow of the pyramids in Giza to celebrate the bond between the nations, and a visit to the ancient city of Alexandria.



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Prince Charles: Saudi Arabia has 'critical role' in fighting climate change
UK PM Johnson's umbrella mishap amuses Prince Charles

Officials: Iran behind drone attack on US base in Syria

Author:

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and ROBERT BURNS | AP

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Mon, 2021-10-25 20:16

WASHINGTON: US officials say they believe Iran was behind the drone attack last week at the military outpost in southern Syria where American troops are based.

Officials said Monday the US believes that Iran resourced and encouraged the attack, but that the drones were not launched from Iran. They were Iranian drones, and Iran appears to have facilitated their use, officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss details that have not been made public.

Officials said they believe the attacks involved as many as five drones laden with explosive charges, and that they hit both the US side of Al-Tanf garrison and the side where Syrian opposition forces stay.

There were no reported injuries or deaths as a result of the attack.

US and coalition troops are based at Al-Tanf to train Syrian forces on patrols to counter Daesh militants. The base is also located on a road serving as a vital link for Iranian-backed forces from Tehran all the way to southern Lebanon and Israel.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby declined to provide details when asked about the report during a news conference Monday. He called it a “complex, coordinated and deliberate attack” and said the US has seen similar ones before from Shia militia groups that are backed by Iran. But he would not go into specifics and said he had no update on the munitions used in the attack. Kirby also declined to say if troops were warned ahead of time or whether the US intends to make a military response.

“The protection and security of our troops overseas remains a paramount concern for the secretary,” Kirby said, referring to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, “and that if there is to be a response, it will be at a time and a place and a manner of our choosing, and we certainly won’t get ahead of those kinds of decisions.”

Pro-Iran media outlets have been saying that the attack on Tanf was carried out by “Syria’s allies” – an apparent reference to Iran-backed groups – in retaliation for an attack days earlier near the historic Syrian town of Palmyra. Israel has been blamed for the attack, but US officials say America was not involved with it.

The Al-Tanf attack came in a period of rising tensions with Iran. The Biden administration this week said international diplomatic efforts to get Iran back into negotiations to return to a 2015 nuclear deal were at a “critical place” and that patience is wearing thin.

The last major Iranian attack on US forces was in January 2020, when Tehran

launched a barrage of ballistic missiles on Al-Asad air base in Iraq. US and coalition troops were warned of the incoming missiles and were able to take cover, but more than 100 US service members received traumatic brain injuries as a result of the blasts.

The Iran attack was in response to the US drone strike earlier that month near the Baghdad airport that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis.

Two months after the Al-Asad assault, US fighter jets struck five sites in retaliation, targeting Iranian-backed Shiite militia members believed responsible for the January rocket attack.



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US outpost in Syria targeted in suspected drone attack Why drone war by proxy is Iran's favored form of asymmetric warfare

[Egypt's President El-Sisi ends state of emergency after more than four years](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-10-25 23:28

CAIRO: Egypt's president said Monday he will not extend the state of emergency that had been imposed across the country for the first time in years.

President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi announced his decision in a Facebook post. He said the move came because "Egypt has become an oasis of security and stability in the region."

Egypt first imposed a state of emergency in April 2017 and has extended it at three-month intervals since.

It was imposed following deadly church bombings and attacks on Coptic Christians that have killed more than 100 people and wounded scores. The government extended the order every three months after that.

The state of emergency allows for arrests without warrants, the swift prosecution of suspects and the establishment of special courts.

The emergency measure technically ended over the weekend.

(With AP and Reuters)



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[Gaza fish restaurants thrive far from the foodie trail](#)

Tue, 2021-10-26 00:30

GAZA CITY: The Gaza Strip might be off-limits for foreign foodies but the coastal Palestinian enclave is brimming with seafood restaurants, many owned by one local family whose culinary hook is their matriarch's spicy fish tajine.

Munir Abu Hasira arrives at the Gaza port's fish market at daybreak, but holds back as traders snatch up sardines and other fish caught during the night.

He is angling for more discerning catches like grouper, sea bream and large shrimp, which can go for around 70 shekels (\$22) a kilo – a small fortune in the impoverished enclave, under Israeli blockade since 2007.

"It's expensive because of the economic situation, but we buy the fish to supply restaurants and to export" to the occupied West Bank, he says, as workers pile fresh fish into a van.

For decades, the Abu Hasira family were fishermen, but since opening their first restaurant in the 1970s, they have gradually traded their fishing kit for chef's tools.

Gaza fishermen say they struggle to eke out a living, snared by Israeli restrictions on the enclave's fishing zone and on importing equipment into the enclave, from boat motors to sonar devices for finding shoals.

Problems like overfishing and pollution blight the local industry.

Some 4,200 tons of fish and seafood were netted from Gaza's waters last year, according to the Israeli authorities. Just 300 tons were exported to the West Bank.

Sitting on a chair in a Gaza courtyard, Eid Abu Hasira, in his 80s, said he was the last of the family's fishermen.

"I sold everything in 2013," said the head of the family, sporting a white

moustache and wearing a traditional robe and headdress.

"Today, we are in the fish trade, and have 13 Abu Hasira restaurants," he said, clutching Muslim prayer beads as he leaned on a wooden cane.

One of his ancestors was a prominent Jewish Moroccan rabbi, who died during a trip to Egypt in the 19th century.

A descendent in Egypt had a vision that "they had to go to Gaza," Eid Abu Hasira said.

"So we came here. My grandfather chose to live off the sea," he said, adding that a Jewish branch of the family lives in Israel, while those in Gaza are Muslim.

As a young boy, his mother would cook up a seafood tajine that has become the Abu Hasira family chain's signature dish.

Moeen Abu Hasira, 56, paid homage to his family's culinary heritage, from their signature shrimp and tomato tajine, known as "zibdiyit," to a fish tajine made with tahini, herbs and pine nuts, to grilled grouper.

"The secret of Gaza cuisine is strong chili," he said from the kitchen of his restaurant, which he opened earlier this year.

The Abu Hasira family's clientele has changed over time.

"Until the start of the first intifada, our restaurants were packed. Israelis came to eat here and so did tourists," Moeen Abu Hasira said, referring to the first Palestinian uprising in 1987.

Since the Israeli blockade began in 2007 after the Islamist group Hamas took control of the enclave, few international tourists, foodies or gastronomic guide writers have visited.

Now, the family's restaurants cater to a well-off Palestinian clientele, but Moeen Abu Hasira said times were hard as unemployment in Gaza hovers around 50 percent.

"Nobody will give you a star" in recognition of your restaurant, said the chef, who trained in French cuisine in a restaurant in the Israeli city of Jaffa.

"We did not learn in cooking schools or universities. There is none of that in Gaza," he said. "We all learn from each other."



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Under Israel's blockade, Gaza fishermen struggle for a catch
Optimism in Gaza amid indications of reconstruction acceleration