

Israel: Security services arrest 15 leaders of Islamic Movement

David Cohen
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Thirteen leaders of the northern branch of Israel's Islamic Movement were arrested in an overnight raid on Tuesday, May 13. The head of the movement, Sheikh Ra'ad Salah, was among those detained in the raid involving dozens of police officers and personnel from the General Security Service. They swooped down on the northern city of Umm al-Fahm at around 1:00 am, entering the offices of the Al-Aqsa Association, where they confiscated documents and equipment. Another two suspects were arrested later.

A spokesman for the Islamic Movement rejected accusations that the leaders had been involved in collecting funds for Hamas in the Occupied Territories. Israel's Interior Security minister, Tzahi Hanegbi, told the *Haaretz* daily that "the suspects" had been "engaged in the illegal transfer of millions of shekels from abroad, from illegal NGOs and companies, to activities of the Hamas in Judea and Samaria and also in the Gaza Strip."

He added, "The transfer of these monies was camouflaged in the framework of charity funds and humanitarian aid, but its practical significance was in oiling the wheels of murderous terrorism that has killed more than 640 innocent Israelis in the last two-and-a-half years."

The General Security Service had targeted the Islamic Movement in Israel, particularly its more extreme northern branch under the leadership of Sheikh Ra'ad Salah, for some time. The northern branch boycotts elections to Israel's parliament and stands for an Islamic Palestine.

Two years ago senior leaders within the GSS proposed to outlaw the Islamic Movement, which would prevent the organisation rallying its supporters, organising demonstrations and publishing its propaganda. Although the movement boycotts the

national elections, it supports local candidates to regional municipal councils of Arab towns and cities, so a ban would mean the disqualification of every candidate identified with it.

For the last three years, since the outbreak of the latest *intifada*, the state has arrested a number of Palestinian Arabs with Israeli citizenship as suspects in "terror activities", including several members of the Islamic Movement.

In September 1999, three of four members of the Islamic Movement were killed while allegedly carrying out military operations aboard buses in Haifa and Tiberias orchestrated by Hamas activists. Two years later, according to the security services and reported in *Haaretz*, "a number of Umm al-Fahm residents were arrested after they were recruited into the Hamas branch in Nablus to conduct suicide bombings. That same month, a member of the Islamic Movement from Abu Snan in the Galilee conducted a suicide attack on the Nahariya train station, killing three people."

Islamic Movement spokesman Tawfik Mahmeed denied any connection with Islamic militant factions in the West Bank. "There is no connection of any kind between the Islamic Movement, either the northern or the southern branches, and any organisation of any kind in the territories," he insisted.

In a statement produced by the political bureau of Hamas, the group defined the arrests as a "new escalation against Muslims and Arabs in occupied Palestine."

The Islamic Movement has called on the Palestinian masses to hold protest marches and demonstrations. According to the movement, a mass protest rally would be held in the Arab town of Umm al-Fahm on May 17. The mayor is a member of the movement's leadership and the town was the site of confrontations with the

Israeli Defence Forces in October 2000 that resulted in 13 Arab deaths and scores of injuries. The massacre produced a lurch to the left among the Palestinian Arabs in Israel, who boycotted the elections to the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, in February 2001.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Nabil, 27, a member in the Islamic Movement branch in Jaffa city. He said, “The arrests reflect the fact that the Israeli rule is more confident than ever in its ability to crush any genuine national opposition to Zionism. The Israeli rulers enjoy the support of George Bush and they know that after Iraq, when imperialism occupied a country whose most powerful weapon was a Soviet tank, no one will raise his voice against a violation of human and civil rights, even inside Israel’s borders.”

He added, “This is the very first step on the road to smashing the patriotic Muslim opposition to Zionism. They want Abu-Mazens, not Yasser Arafats. We are worse than Arafat because our opposition is principled and not opportunistic. Although we don’t have political agreement, I urge your movement to campaign for the release of our leaders. This is a vital democratic need.”



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