

Israel deepens crackdown on human rights advocates, opponents of government's policies

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The Israeli government is deepening its crackdown on human rights activists and academics critical of the criminal policy being carried out by Tel Aviv in Gaza and the occupied West Bank.

It has initiated unprecedented proceedings to deport Human Rights Watch (HRW)'s Israel and Palestine Director Omar Shakir from Israel, while carrying out similar actions against other human rights advocates.

While a Jerusalem District Court issued an interim injunction on May 23 pausing the deportation, court proceedings on the deportation order are set for next month. Shakir had his work permit revoked and was given a 14-day notice to leave Israel on May 7.

The Interior Ministry ordered Shakir's deportation after compiling an extensive dossier on his activities stretching back over a decade to his time as a student at Stanford University. The dossier includes tweets and petitions Shakir has signed and alleges that he is a supporter of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. Neither HRW nor Shakir actively promote BDS, and HRW has noted that only a handful of other countries, including North Korea and Sudan, have restricted their activities.

The injunction was based on the fact that the information used by the Interior Ministry to order Shakir's deportation—alleged support for BDS—was known before his work permit was granted in the first place.

The mere existence of the dossier will have a chilling effect, as it indicates that other human rights activists and academics in Israel, or who merely publish writing on Israel, have had their political activities monitored by the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs.

A May 25 piece by Shakir in *Haaretz* notes that "Israel claims to be the region's only democracy, yet it is deporting a rights defender over his peaceful

expression," and that HRW "has offices in Lebanon, Jordan and Tunisia" and other countries in the region.

Shakir has previously been expelled or blocked from entering other countries due to his activities. "In 2009, Syria denied me a visa after an official said that my writing 'reflected poorly on the Syrian government,'" he notes. "In 2014, I was forced to leave Egypt after I wrote a report for Human Rights Watch documenting the Rab'a Massacre, one of the world's largest single-day killings of protesters. A year ago, Bahrain held me for 18 hours and denied me entry after I identified myself as working for Human Rights Watch."

The temporarily delayed deportation of Shakir is in line with Israel's other recent actions aimed at restricting the movement of human rights activists and even elected officials.

Israeli authorities denied entry to Katherine Franke, a human rights activist and professor at Columbia University, on April 29 due to her political views. An anonymous spokesman for the Strategic Affairs Ministry confirmed to *Haaretz* that she was prevented from entering the country because of her alleged "prominent role" with Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), which supports BDS.

Franke was one of four human rights activists detained for 14 hours by Israeli immigration authorities before being deported. The four were part of the "Justice Delegation," consisting mostly of American activists who went to visit Israel and Palestine and speak to organizations and activists. Franke, who is the chair of the board of the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), was to lead the delegation along with Vincent Warren, CCR's executive director.

The other two deported activists asked not to be identified.

Franke is the Sulzbacher Professor of Law, Gender

and Sexuality Studies at Columbia University in New York City, and is also a member of the Executive Committee of Columbia's Center for Palestine Studies. Her faculty page notes that "she works regularly in Palestine, most recently serving as an academic mentor for the human rights faculty at Al Quds University in East Jerusalem."

Warren, formerly an attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, said: "The Israeli government denied us entry, apparently because it feared letting in people who might challenge its policies. This is something that we should neither accept nor condone from a country that calls itself a democracy."

During her interrogation, Franke was presented with supposed "proof" of her ties to BDS-supporting organizations, in the form of what she believes were articles taken from right-wing Zionist websites that post information about critics of Israel. Franke told *Democracy Now!* that "the security personnel of the Israeli government have assigned to private, right-wing, unreliable trolls the job of deciding who is a security risk and who isn't."

She was also told that she was going to Palestine to promote BDS, which she pointed out was false—they were there to witness human rights violations—and illogical—promoting BDS in Palestine does not make sense, as "BDS takes place elsewhere."

After being harshly interrogated and fingerprinted, Franke was told that she has been banned from Israel for five years, although her deportation order does not mention a ban. Warren told the press that he was told that he would be deported even before his interrogation. The Israeli government absurdly claims that Warren left voluntarily.

Franke has previously supported Steven Salaita, whose appointment as a professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign was revoked because of his tweets protesting the Israeli slaughter of Palestinians during the 2014 war against Gaza.

Less than two weeks after Franke was deported, Israel launched air strikes against Iranian positions in Syria, highlighting the acute risk of a regional war involving at least Israel and Iran, and potentially Saudi Arabia and the United States. The ultimate aim of Tel Aviv, backed to the hilt and encouraged by Washington, is regime change in Tehran.

Moreover, Franke's deportation came only weeks

before the expected culmination of weeks of protests by Palestinians in Gaza. Palestinians are protesting the apartheid-like conditions under which they live, including the debilitating blockade by Israel and Egypt. The Israeli response has been to kill over 100 protesters and injure thousands more. Notorious videos depict unarmed protesters shot by Israeli sniper fire.

In April, Israeli authorities denied Patrice Leclerc, the mayor of Gennevilliers, France, entry to the West Bank due to his support for BDS. The same month, they attempted to deny Dublin Lord Mayor Mícheál Mac Donncha entry, but due to a clerical error he was let through. Before returning to Ireland, Mac Donncha signed a document saying he would not reenter the country without permission.

The crackdown by the Zionist state on its critics, including BDS proponents and human rights officials, is symptomatic of the growing crisis of the Israeli ruling class as it attempts to divert growing social contradictions outward in the form of war.



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