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Independent access of the international press to Gaza: emergency motion to the Israeli High Court of Justice

Joint Statement by FPA, CPJ, RSF and UJI

The FPA, together with its amicus partners Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the Union of Journalists in Israel (UJI) and Reporters without Borders (RSF), filed, on Monday, April 13, an emergency motion to the Israeli Supreme Court asking the justices to expedite a decision on allowing the international media to enter Gaza. The Gaza Strip has been closed to foreign press coverage since October 7th 2023.

The four organisations took the rare step this week in response to the court's decision to agree to the Israeli government's latest request to delay the case, until May 24.

The government has requested numerous delays since the FPA filed its current petition on September 10, 2024. Following the U.S.-brokered ceasefire in October, the three-member panel of justices gave the state 30 days to present a position on allowing reporters to enter Gaza. The state only responded with further requests for delays.

A hearing was finally held in January. But the government was allowed to submit classified material that was withheld from the FPA. This led to two more delays in proceedings.

The reasons given for these delays are no longer relevant. There are no more hostages in Gaza. There is a longstanding ceasefire in place. There are no substantiated or specific threats against journalists, and journalists pose no threat to Israeli troops. The most recent excuse – the war in Iran – never was relevant.

Israel closed its border with Gaza on Oct. 7, 2023 and has barred the international media from entering independently since then. This 2.5 year closure is unprecedented and sets a dangerous precedent for reporting from other conflict areas.

Palestinian journalists have reported under extremely harsh and dangerous conditions from inside Gaza throughout the war, and had to endure hunger, displacement, arbitrary detentions, the loss of loved ones and attacks by the Israeli military. CPJ and RSF say over 220 Palestinian journalists have been killed during the war, including at least 70 who were targeted by the Israeli army because of their work. Two Palestinian journalists from Gaza are also missing since October 7, 2023.

Palestinian journalists should not bear this burden alone, and six months into a ceasefire, we should not be locked out.

FPA, UJI, CPJ, RSF

> Additional quotes for use:

Tania Kraemer, FPA Chairperson

"This indefinite ban must end. The never-ending delays have made a mockery of the legal process. It is time for the justices to put an end to this once and for all. Let us into Gaza independently and immediately and work there alongside our Palestinian colleagues."

Jodie Ginsburg, CPJ CEO

"For more than 900 days, Israel has prohibited any independent media access to Gaza. This repressive tactic is now being replicated throughout the region at the peril of the public's right to know. By failing to issue a ruling for over 18 months, the Court is abrogating its duty of upholding Israel's stipulated commitment to press freedom."

Thibaut Bruttin, RSF Director general

"The lengthy processing of the FPA's petition before the Supreme Court has discouraged many journalists and citizens who believed this procedure was a viable path for the international press to be granted independent access to the Gaza Strip. With these repeated requests for delays, the Israeli government is attempting to postpone the entry of foreign reporters and correspondents into the Palestinian territory, as it is well aware of the decisive influence their work will have on leaders and public opinion. It's high time for the Supreme Court justices to stop yielding to the executive branch's wishes and rule on the merits of the case. The public's right to reliable information, in Israel and everywhere in the world, is at stake."

Anat Saragusti, UJI, Head of press freedom

"The Union of Journalists in Israel has joined the petition, out of concern for freedom of the press and because reporting by foreign journalists is an important and professional source of information that is also used by the media in Israel. Preventing the entry of foreign journalists into Gaza for more than two and a half years, and denying the ability to report on what is happening in the Gaza Strip in a professional and independent manner, is deeply unacceptable."

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