

Audit of CPJ's Review of Media Killings in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Audit carried out between July 15 and August 17, 2026)

1. Context

On June 9, 2026, CPJ launched an internal [review](#) of its published and internal datasets of journalists and media workers killed in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (IOPT). CPJ regularly examines its data as new information surfaces and had already removed journalists from its IOPT killed list in previous years as part of this process. But since a ceasefire in Gaza in October 2025 a number of obituaries were published by Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Hamas praising as fighters some whom CPJ had classified as journalists or media workers. The Israeli military and security services also alleged that a number of those classified as journalists were armed militants.

Some pro-Israel outlets and media monitoring groups alleged that the CPJ list included combatants. Some pro-Palestinian groups made the opposite allegation, claiming that CPJ was removing journalists from the list under pressure from supporters of Israel. CPJ publicly denied that any name had been removed as a result of pressure.

The CPJ review examined the new information and allegations and presented findings in a confidential internal report on July 7. In line with one of the review's recommendations, CPJ commissioned an auditor to assess the internal review's process and findings. The auditor had previously worked for CPJ and as a journalist in Gaza. This is a summary of that external review. The auditor had unrestricted access to all source materials that CPJ's Middle East and North Africa (MENA) team used to compile the review. No limits were placed on what the auditor could examine or publish. However, to avoid causing harm to individuals who could face security risks, the auditor agreed to a CPJ request not to publish names of three case determinations.

2. Methodology

The auditor

Examined: CPJ's internal review documentation, its underlying verification data covering 229 journalists and media workers, and the individual case files for every case where a determination was changed. This review involved tracing the evidence and reasoning across those documents and checking the revised determinations against the underlying case documentation. CPJ provided the auditor with the full list of names removed, reinstated and reclassified, together with the recorded reason in each case. The auditor reconciled that list against the underlying case files.

Focused on: 75 case determinations among the 229 that the review identified as requiring a change or leaving a question open: 42 removals, 21 retentions and 12 reclassifications.

Flagged: 38 of the review's 75 case determinations to the MENA team; 12 as a gap in process, where the determination was reasonable but the record did not fully show the basis for it; nine as an internal contradiction, where CPJ's own documents disagreed; nine as a consistency risk, where comparable cases produced different outcomes; five as unresolved; and three as consistent where the determination held but supporting detail needed confirming. The team responded promptly to each inquiry and made changes where necessary.

Assessed: whether CPJ adhered to its published criteria of who qualifies as a journalist or media worker.

Interviewed: the MENA regional director and regional researcher who oversaw the internal review and wrote the July 7 internal report.

3. Process

CPJ investigators could not conduct on-the-ground research in Gaza because Israel bars foreign journalists and researchers from entering the Gaza Strip independently. In each case where new evidence emerged CPJ researchers based outside of Gaza sought to speak with at least two new people who had known the deceased and were able to say:

- a) Whether the person worked as a journalist or media worker.
- b) Whether they had engaged in combat or activities that would exclude them as a journalist under CPJ's criteria.

When necessary, CPJ researchers interviewed or re-interviewed family members. Because of security concerns, sources were not identified publicly.

The MENA team reviewed the published work, social media posts, photographs, videos and statements of deceased journalists and any other published materials that could link them to activities incompatible with their status as a journalist. The team also searched militant websites and Telegram channels for new information. It found, for example, that the Al-Quds Brigades, the military wing of PIJ, [published](#) a list of 85 commanders on March 19, 2026. As a result, CPJ removed two names from its killed list, Mohamed Nabil Al-Zaq and Hassan Farajallah. Similarly, it removed Mohammed Bassam Al Jamal and Mostafa Bakeer after Hamas profiled them as members of its Izz ad-Din al-Qassam military wing.

4. Findings

The July 7 internal review

Removed: 22 cases, 19 for actively participating in combat or belonging to the militant wing of a non-state armed actor; three because their roles as journalist or media worker could not be established. Twenty of the 42 removals in the audit sample had been made earlier, between 2024 and 2026: eight for participation in combat and 12 for other reasons. The review took the number removed since October 7, 2023, for participating in combat or belonging to the militant wing of a non-state armed actor to 27, and the net total removed for all reasons to 36.

Reinstated: six cases found to have been wrongly removed, among them two Israeli journalists killed on October 7, 2023.

Reclassified: 12 cases, nine from journalist to media worker and three from media worker to journalist, after CPJ found that its own definitions had been inconsistently applied.

Concluded: that Israel was responsible for the deaths of 191 journalists and media workers in IOPT since October 7, 2023. Once the review's changes are applied, the database will hold 196 cases. Of those, one is a Palestinian killed in Gaza by a Palestinian militia. Four are Israelis killed by Hamas, two of whom fell outside of the review while two were reinstated by it. The public database stood at 212 before the review's changes were applied.

Acknowledged: the need to improve its data handling and presentation and increase the searchability of its website CPJ.org.

On August 28, 2026, after the audit period ended, CPJ removed a name from its list of killed journalists following the publication online of a video that CPJ determined substantiated

allegations that the individual participated in combat. The figures in this audit have been updated to reflect that new determination and are current as of August 28, 2026. CPJ's data is under continuous review, and figures may change after this audit is published as new information becomes available.

5. Sourcing

For each case the review set itself the goal of interviewing two people who were not members of the deceased's family. This was a higher sourcing requirement than CPJ's published methodology, which requires two "credible" sources that can include family members. CPJ met the internal goal in 209 of 229 cases and exceeded it in nine of them, interviewing three or more people. Twenty cases fell short. In 11 of those a family member was interviewed as the second person, satisfying CPJ's published two-credible-source rule. Each of the remaining nine rested on one new person interviewed and on documentary evidence.

CPJ told the auditor that only one of the 20 cases resulted in a removal. In that case a family member said that the deceased relative was not a journalist, and no journalist the team spoke to had known the individual. In the remaining 19 cases the MENA team was unable to find a second new person to interview who was not a direct family member, despite repeated attempts, and the determination was to retain.

6. Military Media Units

The auditor asked CPJ how it classified journalists whom PIJ and Hamas claimed as militants and whom later research found had been members of military media units. CPJ says all were included because it knew them to be journalists, and that evidence of their membership of military media units emerged later.

CPJ's criteria do not set out in writing how units that do not fight are treated, and the review exposed a lack of clarity over what CPJ means by "engaging in combat" and "participation in hostilities." The July 7 review determined that membership of a military media unit alone did not amount to participating in combat and therefore did not warrant removal. CPJ says that treatment was provisional, pending clarification. CPJ then discussed the question in meetings of senior leadership, advocacy and MENA staff, which examined its historic practice and considered international law standards. An internal memorandum was shared with the auditor. On August 7, 2026, CPJ determined that its practice is to exclude from its mandate anyone with active membership of any military arm of a state or non-state actor. This settled, on the basis of membership, a question the July 7 review had answered by reference to participation in hostilities.

As a result, of the nine military media unit cases CPJ had documented it removed five: Ahmed Abu Eisha, Hussam al-Dabbaka, Hilmi al-Faqawi, Mohammed Al-Sakani, and Salem Abu Toyour. They are included in the 19 combat removals referenced above. A sixth, Mohamed Naser Abu Huwaidi, had been removed in April 2026; his case was initially considered for reinstatement in the July review, but the August 7 determination ended that consideration. CPJ retained the remaining three names because it could not determine whether the individuals were engaged in military media activities that would disqualify them as journalists at the time of their deaths.

Overall, the August 7 determination took combat removals to 18 from 13 and reinstatements to six from seven. The August 28 removal took the combat total to 19.

The July 7 internal report used the following standard for assessing whether a member of a military media unit stayed on the list.

“Membership in or service within a military media unit does not, by itself, establish that an individual performed a continuous combat function or directly participated in hostilities. Accordingly, absent sufficient evidence that their role involved combat functions or direct participation in hostilities, they should be considered civilian journalists under international humanitarian law. In some cases, research was able to establish that a journalist or media worker may have previously participated in combat, but that they were civilian journalists during the war.”

This paragraph was removed from CPJ’s internal review documentation on August 10, three days after the August 7 determination, and no replacement has yet been written. The distinction it drew between affiliation that predated October 7, 2023, and that had ceased, and affiliation continuing during the war, was applied consistently in the cases the auditor examined. It is not set out in any current CPJ document, published or internal.

7. Auditor Assessment

The auditor found no evidence that CPJ had removed or retained journalists in violation of its stated criteria. Names were removed based on information collected after extensive new research including claims published by the Palestinian armed groups themselves. The MENA team applied the same rigor to allegations of militant ties made by the Israel Defense Forces, Israeli security services, Israeli media and pro-Israel civil society groups, and reached its own independent assessment in each case.

The auditor noted CPJ’s May 2024 explanation of how it documents deaths in Gaza. CPJ says it defaults to classifying all Gazan journalists whose deaths and journalistic credentials it can verify as killed in connection to their work and includes them in its database unless definitively proven otherwise. This applies whether they were at home or in the field, on the stated assumption that technological advances allow journalists to work from anywhere. Separately, because journalists in Gaza are effectively trapped inside the Strip, CPJ applies what it calls a presumption of duty when classifying a killing, presuming that any journalist killed was engaged in trying to provide some sort of coverage. The audit found that CPJ applies the inclusion default to media workers as well as journalists. That extension is not stated in the [FAQ](#) and differs from the methodology page, which says: “Media workers are included in CPJ’s public data only when they are determined to have been killed in direct connection to their work.”

The auditor identified three cases where sources told CPJ that the individuals had militant ties. For example, PIJ briefly listed one of the deceased as a commander and a photograph circulated by his family showed him holding a weapon with PIJ markings. CPJ could not verify the PIJ listing, which was deleted shortly after it appeared, or the date of the photograph. CPJ could not independently verify any of the sources’ claims of militant connections, so at the conclusion of the audit all three names remained on its killed list pending further research.

The auditor also noted that among the 229 cases examined are two [Palestinians](#) who died in prison inside Israel and where the cause of death is not publicly known. These are Gazan journalist [Ihab Diab](#) and West Bank television technician [Marwan Harzallah](#). The Israeli authorities have refused to release the bodies to the families.

8. Auditor Recommendations

1. Publish the names of all 22 journalists and media workers removed from the datasets as a result of the review together with the reason for each removal.
2. Similarly, publish the names of those individuals who were reinstated, or reclassified.
3. Publish the standard CPJ applies to journalists found to have worked in military media units and set out in its written methodology what it means by “engaging in combat” and “participation in hostilities.”
4. Reconcile that standard with CPJ's published positions. The board [statement](#) of July 1, 2026, the methodology [page](#), the Gaza [FAQ](#) and the Israel-Gaza casualties [page](#) all turn on participation in hostilities rather than membership of a military media unit.
5. As CPJ’s August 7 internal memorandum recommended, commission an outside International Humanitarian Law expert to review CPJ’s criteria on work in military media units and publish the findings.
6. Spell out the Gaza evidentiary presumption on the main cpj.org methodology page in text not just as a hyperlink to the separate Gaza FAQs page, and state whether the presumption extends to media workers.
7. Amend the Gaza FAQ page which currently says that in every case in the database CPJ has determined there is no evidence of militant activity. At the conclusion of the audit, three cases remained in which sources alleged militant ties that CPJ could not verify.
8. Ensure source material such as Arabic-language articles, photographs and social media posts is archived.