

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/palestine-israeli-army-issues-raid-threat-to-19-05-2014,46296.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Israel

Broadcaster under pressure

Israeli army issues raid threat to Palestinian TV station

21 May 2014

Reporters Without Borders is dismayed and alarmed to learn that Michael Sfard and Noa Amrami, lawyers for the Ramallah-based Palestinian TV station *Wattan TV*, have been served with a notice by the Israeli army threatening the station with another raid unless it stops broadcasting.

In a letter dated 24 April, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) legal department said the station's new frequency was allocated illegally, was in breach of an interim agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and jeopardized security in the area.

"The letter is the umpteenth threat couched in violent language from the Israeli army against *Wattan TV*, even though the station has complied with a request from the High Court of Justice last December to obtain a new broadcasting frequency from the Palestinian telecommunications ministry," said Lucie Morillon, Reporters Without Borders head of research.

"It seems clear that whatever steps the station takes, the Israeli army will do everything it can to put it off the air. Will they go as far as carrying out another raid, like the one in February 2012?"

Moammar Orabi, the station's director, told Reporters Without Borders that it was another form of pressure by the Israeli army against the station. "But we are not going down that road," he said. "The Israeli army's order is illegal since the station has a permit to broadcast issued by the Palestinian telecommunications ministry."

He added: "Furthermore, we have filed a complaint against the Israeli army over the threatened raid."

Interviewed on the website [Amad](#), Orabi said he had "consulted several experts in the field of frequencies and they all told us the station *was causing no interference or jamming and there was no danger to security as they have claimed. These allegations are false and are designed to interfere with the work of Palestinian news organizations, which amounts to an attack on freedom of expression.*"

Reporters Without Borders notes that *Wattan TV* has been the [target of harassment](#) by the Israeli military authorities for several years. The army [stormed the station's offices](#) in February 2012, seizing all its transmission equipment and administrative files dating back to 2002.

[The Israeli High Court of Justice](#) decided last December not to overturn the army's decision to seize *Wattan TV's* transmission equipment. The court postponed a final decision in the matter until *Wattan TV* tried to obtain a new frequency from the Palestinian Authority which did not interfere with IDF communications systems. This was done, according to Orabi: "*We obtained a new frequency about a month ago.*"

Despite repeated requests by press freedom organizations and the station's lawyers, the court accepted, after an ex parte review of secret material, that the broadcasts interfered with some security communications and the seizure of the transmitters was thus legal.

Wattan TV asked the court to allow time for it to try to obtain a licence using a different frequency. The army objected as it wanted to make the seizure permanent and take over ownership of the transmitters. The court granted extra time, which has since been further extended.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority has allocated a new frequency to *Wattan TV* but the Israelis have refused to give their consent, although they should have done so under the

interim agreement.

In light of this, *Wattan TV* has asked the court to order the army to hand over the transmitters and it has promised not use them until the new frequency is authorized. *Wattan TV* is awaiting a final decision by the High Court.

The Israeli authorities also ordered the management of the station *Al-Sheraa Al-Mahalli TV* in Tulkarem to [suspend broadcasting temporarily in February](#) this year or face the seizure of all its equipment. They used the same excuse, namely that the station's signal was disrupting Ben Gurion airport and communications inside Israel.

According to the station's director **Mohamed Zaydan**, quoted in the newspaper *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*: "*We brought in a committee of experts from the telecommunications ministry as well engineers from Al-Najah university. After checking all devices and equipment belonging to Al-Sheraa Al-Mahalli, the experts concluded that the station was operating in accordance with official standards.*"
