



For immediate release – 14 May 2010

PRESS RELEASE

Israel: End Detention of Activist and Stop Gagging Media

ARTICLE 19 is deeply concerned about the extension of the incommunicado detention of activist Ameer Makhoul, a Palestinian citizen of Israel, arrested in Haifa on “security charges” a few days ago. ARTICLE 19 believes that his arrest and detention amounts to censoring and muzzling voices critical of the Israel authorities and to hamper the free flow of information on pressing issues of public interest.

Ameer Makhoul is general director of *Ittijah*, the Union of Arab Community-Based Associations, and chair of the *Popular Committee for the Defence of Political Freedoms* in the framework of the *High Follow-up Committee for the Arab Citizens of Israel*. Makhoul was arrested on 6 May 2010 by the Israeli police and the Israeli Security Agency. International and national human rights organisations report that the security forces refused to identify themselves but that the warrant stipulated the arrest was carried out for “security reasons”. On 12 May 2009 the Petah Tikva First Instance Court approved his detention, extending the term for a further six days.

While in detention, Makhoul has been denied access to his legal representation. His appeal to overturn the ban on access to legal representation was also rejected by the court.

Makhoul’s arrest fails to meet international standards on deprivation of liberty and fair trial. The circumstances of the arrest and subsequent proceedings also strongly indicate that Makhoul is being targeted because of his civic activism. Makhoul’s arrest came shortly after an administrative order of 21 April 2010 by the Israeli Ministry of Interior prohibiting him from exiting the country for a two-month period. The administrative order, based on Article 6 of the 1948 Emergency Regulations, also asserted that his exit from the country constituted a “security threat” to the country.

Makhoul’s detention takes place within broader arbitrary restrictions placed by Israeli authorities against human rights defenders and political activists from amongst the Palestinian citizens of Israel. On 24 April 2010, Dr Omar Saeed, a political activist with *Balad* political party, was also arrested while trying to leave Israel. Saeed’s detention was extended and he was only allowed to see his lawyer after sixteen days into his detention.

The Israeli Government had initially prohibited the Israeli media from reporting Makhoul’s arrest or its circumstances. The Petakh Tikva Magistrates’ Court

eventually lifted this “gag order” on 10 May 2010, following appeals by human rights groups.

ARTICLE 19 believes that Makhoul is targeted because of his work and role as a human rights defender. His arbitrary detention and his inability to consult with his legal representation violates international human rights standards, including his right to fair trial. The arrest and travel ban also fall short of the standards set by the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly on 9 December 1998. ARTICLE 19 also condemns the “gag order” imposed on the reporting of detention of political activists, as a serious violation of the right to freedom of expression and freedom of information. Such restrictions should not take place in a democratic society such as Israel.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Government of Israel to release immediately Makhoul and lift the travel ban against him. We also urge the Government of Israel to stop harassment of human rights defenders in the country and cease all media censorship, and to respect the right to freedom of expression. Israel must fully adhere to and respect its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.