

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

Israel-Palestine: Controversial bill targeting international funding for NGOs passes the first reading in Parliament

Paris-Geneva, February 15, 2016 – The “Transparency Bill”, a cabinet-sponsored legislation that would require Israeli NGOs to publicly state the funding they receive from abroad was recently adopted in first reading at the Israeli Parliament. The Knesset must immediately suspend the vote to prevent violation to the rights to freedom of association, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (a joint FIDH-OMCT programme) declared today.

On February 8, 2016, the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) approved a bill in first reading, that would require non-governmental organisations that receive 50% or more of their funding from foreign governments to publicly detail those sources. Two more readings of the bill by the Parliament are required for it to become law. If passed, the legislation introduced by Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked and supported by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will severely undermine the work of many Israeli organisations which monitor, among other issues, human rights violations against Palestinians. Under the pretext of increasing transparency, this law would also require Israeli NGOs receiving international funding to indicate it in all official letters and publications.

“This NGO Bill clearly targets peaceful dissent groups. If passed, the new legislation would severely restrict the legitimate activities of civil society and human rights defenders in Israel. We call on the Knesset not to approve the Transparency Bill into law, as it clearly violates international human rights standards of freedom of association enshrined in the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Israel”, said Karim Lahidji, FIDH President.

Israeli NGOs have become over the last decades vital in denouncing the detrimental human rights impact of the occupation of the Palestinian Territories and in promoting the respect of the human rights of the Palestinians. They conduct advocacy activities towards the Knesset, undertake legal initiatives before the Supreme Court aiming at overturning detrimental government policies, and denounce human rights violations in the media.

“This bill is not about financial transparency. Israeli human rights organisations do already publish their accounts in a transparent and accountable manner for anybody to see. This law is about stigmatizing people who represent the voices of victims of violations of international and Israeli law”, added Gerald Staberock, Secretary General of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). **“One would wish that the energy going into passing legislation that would be expected from repressive regimes would rather go into investigating and preventing human rights violations”.**

The motion, which has sparked international criticism, especially from the European Parliament, comes during a time of heightened tensions between Israelis and Palestinians, and amid repression against Israeli organisations denouncing the occupation.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OBS) was created in 1997 by FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The objective of this programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy to situations of repression against human rights defenders.

For more information, please contact:

- FIDH: Audrey Couprie - Tel: +33 6 48 05 91 57 / Arthur Manet - Tel: +33 6 72 28 42 94 (Paris)
- OMCT: Chiara Cosentino - Tel: +32 2 218 37 19 (Brussels) / Delphine Reculeau - Tel: +41 22 809 49 39 (Geneva)