

Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel | Amnesty International Israel
Bimkom – Planners for Planning Rights | Akevot Institute for Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Research
B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories | Combatants for Peace
Emek Shaveh | Gisha – Legal Center for Freedom of Movement | HaMoked – Center for the Defence of the Individual
Haqel – In Defense of Human Rights | Human Rights Defenders Fund (HRDF) | Ir Amim – For an Equitable and
Stable Jerusalem with an Agreed Political Future | Physicians for Human Rights Israel | Rabbis for Human Rights
The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) | The Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI)
Torat Tzedek – Torah of Justice | Yesh Din – Volunteers for Human Rights

30 August 2021

Mr. Yair Lapid
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Dear Mr. Lapid,

**Re: Continued denial of entry of
United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights staff**

We, human rights organizations in Israel, are appealing to you regarding your office's decision to "sever ties" with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). As part of this decision, it appears that the work visas of OHCHR personnel have not been approved or renewed for almost a year now. As a result, the office's international staff whose visas have expired were forced to leave, and new personnel cannot arrive.

About ten months ago (20 October 2020), we wrote to your predecessor, Mr. Gabi Ashkenazi, on the matter. We did not receive a response, and the policy has not changed. Therefore, we are writing again in the hope that the resumption of the OHCHR's work here, without interruption or disruption, will be made possible soon.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has operated [in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)] – the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip – since 1996. OHCHR staff must obtain visas from Israel, due to the fact that Israel, and Israel alone,

decides who may enter the oPt. Visas to this effect have been issued to OHCHR staff for decades. However, since 2020, in an unprecedented move, the ministry of which you are in charge has decided to stop issuing visas for OHCHR personnel altogether. As a result, OHCHR was forced to continue to function without an international team present on the ground.

In your meeting with the EU Foreign Affairs Council about a month ago, you stated: “Israel has shared interests with the European Union – but more than that, we have shared values: human rights, LGBTQI+ community rights, a commitment to the basic tenets of democracy: a free press, an independent judiciary, a strong civil society, freedom of religion. We are committed to fighting together the climate crisis, international terrorism, racism, and extremism.”

Yet, these values are inconsistent with the efforts of successive Israeli governments to silence justified criticism of their policies in the oPt, which inherently involve grave, ongoing and far-reaching violations of the human rights of millions of Palestinians. Such values are also inconsistent with the defamation and expulsion of Palestinian, Israeli, and international organizations and activists while using false allegations of anti-Semitism, aiding terrorism, and a host of other lies to silence criticism and enable Israel’s continued occupation, oppression, and dispossession of Palestinians without being held accountable for its actions.

We call on you to rescind the measures taken against OHCHR staff, to renew their visas as required, to issue new visas, and to allow OHCHR to properly continue its work.

Signatories:

The organizations indicated above

* As required by law, it is noted that most of the funding for the activities of some of the organizations undersigned in this letter derives from “foreign state entities.”