

January 25, 2015

To:

Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister and Acting Minister of Justice

Mr. Avigdor Lieberman
Foreign Minister

The Public Council

Dear Sirs,

Dan Bavly
Orna Ben-Naftali
Michael Ben-Yair
Naomi Chazan

I am writing to you on behalf of Israeli human rights organizations working to promote the respect for the rights of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, following the decision of the Government of Israel not to grant an entry visa to the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women.

Ruth Cheshin
Akiva Eldar
Dani Karavan
Yehudit Karp
Paul Kedar

The United Nations Special Rapporteurs are experts from various fields who work on a voluntary basis to improve the human rights situation in the UN member states. Rashida Manjoo, the Special Rapporteur on the prevention of violence against women, is a Professor of Law and a Human Rights and an expert of international repute who has served as a Special Rapporteur since 2009.

Yair Rotlevy - Chairman
Uzy Smilansky
Joshua Sobol
Zeev Sternhell

The purpose of Prof. Manjoo's visit was to meet women survivors of violence, senior officials in the Palestinian government including law enforcement personnel, and civil society organizations. The meetings were intended to strengthen their work to promote women's rights in accordance with the international undertakings the Palestinian government assumed by signing various human rights conventions.

According to the spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry, as quoted in the Jerusalem Post, the decision was based on the wording of the Rapporteur's visa application, in which she requested to visit Palestine in order to examine the human rights situation there first hand. The spokesperson added that had the Rapporteur asked to visit the Palestinian Authority areas (as distinct from visiting "Palestine,") as part of a broader visit to Israel, the visit would have been approved.

Violence against women is a scourge on the international level that is also present in Israel, and efforts must be made to eradicate it. Moreover, studies suggest that women living under occupation and in areas of conflict are particularly exposed to gender-based acts of violence.

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The denial of an entry visa for Prof. Manjoo and the members of her delegation on these grounds places a deliberate obstacle in the path of action to promote the status of women in the Occupied Territories due to an argument concerning the definition of the Palestinian government. The decision to prohibit the visit unless the Rapporteur also visits Israel reflects the cynical abuse of Israel's power as the occupier, and is contrary to article 55 of the UN Charter, which establishes that all member states in the organization must act to promote respect for, and observance of, human rights.

We urge you to reconsider this unfortunate decision and to permit the Special Rapporteur to enter the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

This request is signed by the following human rights organizations: Amnesty International Israel, B'Tselem, Bimkom, Gisha, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel, HaMoked – Center for the Defence of the Individual, Yesh Din, Adalah, Breaking Silence, Shomrei Mishpat – Rabbis for Human Rights, and Physicians for Human Rights - Israel.

Atty. Neta Patrick
Executive Director
Yesh Din – Volunteers for Human Rights