

URGENT ACTION

TWO PALESTINIAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ON TRIAL

Palestinian human rights defenders Farid al-Atrash and Issa Amro face charges in an Israeli military court relating to their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. Both face time in prison if found guilty. At a hearing on 23 November their lawyer asked for a number of the charges to be dropped and the hearing was adjourned until 21 December.

Palestinian residents and activists in the city of Hebron, in the occupied West Bank, organized a peaceful protest march on 26 February to mark 22 years since the Israeli authorities first closed al-Shuhada Street in the Old City and to call for the removal of discriminatory restrictions on movement placed on Palestinians in the city.

During the protest, Israeli forces threw sound bombs and fired tear gas at the protesters, and arrested lawyer **Farid al-Atrash**. They later presented him to a military court in Ofer military base near Ramallah with charges including participating in an illegal demonstration and attacking soldiers. Video footage of the arrest corroborates Farid al-Atrash's account that he was standing and holding a poster peacefully in front of Israeli soldiers when he was pushed and dragged and then violently arrested by a number of soldiers.

Issa Amro, coordinator of the Youth Against Settlements group, was arrested on 29 February by the Israeli police from the centre he runs in Hebron. Initially arrested for his role in the protest on 26 February, on 7 June he was presented with 18 charges, ranging from "insulting a soldier" to "assault". Some of the charges date back to 2010. Issa Amro denies all the charges, and alleges that he was beaten by the Israeli police while in custody on two occasions. He has also faced threats and harassment from the Israeli army, police and settlers.

At a hearing on 23 November at Ofer military court, the lawyer for both Issa Amro and Farid al-Atrash asked for a number of the charges to be dropped against Issa Amro because of the age of the charges, and because some of them were from closed police files. The charges against Farid al-Atrash were not discussed. The prosecution asked for time to respond, and the hearing was adjourned until 21 December. Amnesty International believes that the charges against both men are baseless, and are solely related to their work as human rights defenders.

Please write immediately in Hebrew, English or your own language:

- Calling on the Israeli authorities to immediately drop all the charges against Issa Amro and Farid al-Atrash;
- Calling on them to put an immediate end to harassment of Issa Amro and other human rights defenders in the Occupied Palestinian Territories;
- Calling on them to immediately investigate Issa Amro's claims of beatings by the Israeli police, and prosecute those responsible if sufficient evidence is discovered.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 JANUARY 2017 TO:

Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu
Office of the Prime Minister
3 Kaplan St, PO Box 187
Kiryat Ben-Gurion
Jerusalem 91950, Israel
Email: pm_eng@pmo.gov.il

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Military Judge Advocate General

Brigadier General Sharon Afek
6 David Elazar Street
Hakiryia
Tel Aviv,
Israel
Fax: +972 3 569 4526
Email: Mag@idf.gov.il

Salutation: Dear Brigadier General

And copies to:

Minister of Defence
Avigdor Liberman
Ministry of Defence
37 Kaplan Street
Hakiryia
Tel Aviv 61909, Israel
Fax: +972 73 323 3300
Email: minister@mod.gov.il

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY Deputy Ambassador Eitan Na'eh, Embassy of Israel, 2 Palace Green Kensington W8 4QB, 020 7957 9500

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Issa Amro is a Palestinian human rights defender who runs the Youth Against Settlements group in Hebron. He and his group are committed to non-violent activism against the illegal settlements in Hebron and the discriminatory restrictions placed on Palestinians by the Israeli authorities in the city. Issa Amro documents human rights violations in the city, organizes peaceful protests and distributes information about the settlements and the Israeli military occupation to visitors, journalists and diplomats. Farid al-Atrash is a Palestinian lawyer, human rights defender, and the head of the Hebron office of the Independent Commission for Human Rights, a Palestinian human rights organization that scrutinises the Palestinian authorities. The video footage of his arrest during the protest on 26 February 2016 is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCeeS2C6kWY>

Hebron is the only Palestinian city in the West Bank, apart from East Jerusalem, where Israeli settlers live inside the city centre. About 800 settlers live in four settlement enclaves inside and adjacent to Hebron's Old City. In addition, more than 7,000 settlers live in two settlements on the edge of Hebron, and regularly enter the city. On 25 February 1994, an Israeli settler shot dead 29 Palestinians praying at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Cave of the Patriarchs, a holy site for Muslims and Jews, and wounded scores of others. Following the killings, the Israeli authorities imposed a series of severe and discriminatory restrictions on movement on the city's Palestinian residents, closing many parts of al-Shuhada Street – formerly the city's commercial centre – completely to Palestinians while allowing Israeli settlers and those visiting them free access.

Restrictions on movement have remained in place over the years, with the Israeli army periodically imposing additional curfews or closures, sometimes for long periods of time, including when Palestinians have attacked Israeli soldiers or civilians. Palestinians are forbidden even to walk on some streets of the Old City, including al-Shuhada Street. None of the restrictions are applied to the Israeli settlers or those visiting them. Since October 2015, as violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel has surged, the Israeli authorities have drastically increased the arbitrary and discriminatory restrictions on movement imposed on Palestinians in and around Hebron's Old City, declaring parts of it a "closed military zone".

Human rights defenders in the city have long faced a campaign of harassment from the Israeli army, police and settlers. Issa Amro has frequently been threatened and sometimes attacked physically by Israeli settlers, often in the presence of Israeli soldiers or police (see: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/11/israel-opt-drop-baseless-charges-against-palestinian-human-rights-defender/>). Issa Amro alleges that he has been arrested on many occasions by the Israeli army, handcuffed, blindfolded, and detained for a few hours before being released, but not officially registered as arrested. He alleges that the Israeli army does this as a show of force intended to appease the Israeli settlers in the city.

Some of the charges Issa Amro is facing, such as "participating in a march without a permit", are not recognizable criminal offences under international standards. One of the charges of assault refers to an incident in a protest on 20 March 2013 that took place after he had already been arrested and was therefore not present. A video from the scene clearly shows another man was responsible for the incident, in which a settler's camera was broken (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVGaQGnM2Bw>). The protest was a peaceful one that coincided with US President Barack Obama's visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Protesters wore masks of Obama's face, wore T-shirts with "I have a dream" written on them, and waved the Palestinian flag – actions that the authorities considered political, and therefore criminal.