

**Independent International Commission of Inquiry
on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel**

**Public hearings on the shrinking space for civil society in the Occupied Palestinian
Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel**

Geneva – 20-24 March 2023

Closing remarks

This concludes the public hearings of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel.

We have focused in this second round of hearings, as in the first round in November, on the shrinking civic space in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel.

The Commission is very grateful to all those who appeared before us, the human rights defenders and activists, women human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, cultural activists, and others.

During the course of this week, we have heard from twenty-one (21) witnesses. Nine (9) appeared in public sessions, and they were willing to give their evidence before the broader community. Their evidence was televised live by UN web TV and is also archived by UN TV for later access. Another twelve (12) gave their evidence in confidential hearings. For them, after discussion with the Commission, it was felt that safety and security required that their identity and their evidence be held confidential by the Commission itself. Of course, we will take all account of what they have said to us in analyzing the evidence and preparing our reports.

During the course of this hearing, we heard testimonies on the targeting and attacks against both Israeli and Palestinian journalists. We heard from civil society actors from various parts of Israel and the Occupied [Palestinian] Territory, testifying about the increased restrictions and harassment that they have experienced intended to silence civil society actors. We also heard about violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

We heard about restrictions of freedoms of expression and association by the Palestinian Authority and de facto authority in Gaza, designed to discourage civil society actors from pursuing their work.

We heard testimonies from women human rights defenders about being intentionally targeted by State and non-State actors, and the particular risk they face as women.

We heard testimonies about the lack of accountability for attacks against civil society actors and the authorities failing to investigate violence against civil society actors perpetrated by Israeli settlers and other non-state actors.

We heard testimonies about the impact and repercussions of the targeted attacks on the family members of civil society actors, in particular on children.

We heard about the killing of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and the killing of the Palestinian political and human rights activist Nizar Banat and efforts to hold perpetrators to account.

We called in the past on members states to submit information and evidence on topics covered in these hearings, including on the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh and Nizar Banat. We again invite any who have information on these killings or any information about the matters covered by the Commission to provide that information to the Commission. We are particularly concerned about ensuring accountability.

We have just heard this week from these twenty-one (21) witnesses, and so we are not making any findings or recommendations today about the information we received. Our job is to review and analyze the testimonies carefully, to consider them in the light of our mandate, to weigh up the evidentiary standards that we have to apply, and to make sure that we act consistently with our methods of work.

Information received during these hearings will be included in our reports to the Human Rights Council in June, and to the UN General Assembly in October [2023]. We will be focusing on the attacks, restrictions, and harassment of civil society actors by all duty bearers and on key developments limiting civic space.

We again express our appreciation to [those] who appeared before us during the course of this week. We could not do this work entrusted to us by the Human rights Council without this kind of assistance from so many people and we are grateful for all those who appeared both publicly and in confidence.

This round of hearings is closed. The Commission will now set about the task of preparing its reports.

Thank you very much.

(Check against delivery)
