

May 31, 2021

Minister of Internal Security Attorney General MK Amir Ohana  
Attorney General Dr. Avichai Mandelblit  
Re: "Operation Law and Order"

Greetings,

Ten days ago, a period of difficult days all over Israel ended. During that time we witnessed an outburst of rage among the communities living here. The government's response to these incidents, through the Israel Police, has been reflected in "Operation Law and Order" and includes large-scale, discriminatory arrests. This tactic of mass arrests has been harsh and even violent, and has been directed exclusively against Arab citizens and residents and adds to a growing sense of frustration and mistrust.

One of the police's stated goals of the operation is "restoring deterrence and increasing governability." The goals of the operation did not include the removal of illegal weapons from Arab society, despite repeated requests from Arab public leaders to do so. It also appears that the operation is taking place unequally. From official statements and results on the ground, it appears that the operation is intended for enforcement only in Arab society, and does not address the vigilante violence by Jews against Arab citizens and residents.

**The nature of the arrests in "Operation Law and Order" raises suspicions that its real purpose has been to prevent the political participation of Palestinian citizens of Israel.** To date, more than 340 Arab citizens have been detained in the operation, though the vast majority were released without charges. This assumption is reinforced by the fact that veteran social activists, leaders of recent (mostly non-violent) protests, artists, and elected officials were among the many detainees. As mentioned, the vast majority were released quickly, but under restrictive conditions that were apparently intended to prevent their continued participation in the protest. The violent way in which the arrests were carried out also indicates an attempt at intimidation.

**For the most part, arrests associated with this operation have not been based on acts which violate the law, but on social media posts and random home searches.** Combined with the use of administrative detentions and the denial of social and medical rights without any legal basis, this establishes a reasonable suspicion that the operation itself amounts to collective punishment, an attempt to intimidate an entire public and thus prevent Arab citizens from legitimately exercising their freedom of expression and right to protest.

**Among the detainees are dozens of minors and even children who are on the cusp of the age of criminal responsibility.** According to attorneys, a large proportion of the arrests involved violating the rights of minors in the detention process, and many reports indicate the use of physical and verbal violence during and after detention.

**For years, Palestinian citizens of Israel have been suffering from an epidemic of violence that has claimed too many lives.** Illegal weapons, rampant crime, and insecurity on the streets of cities and villages have led the Arab public to widespread protest in an attempt to urge the authorities to deal meaningfully with the severe violence in their communities. 96 Arab citizens were murdered in 2020; yet, only 24 of these murders led to an indictment. Despite the large-scale operation the police embarked on last week, three more homicides were added to the horrific statistics of 2021 just last week. Given the overriding context of discriminatory policing, alongside the nature of the arrests in the current operation, there is grave doubt regarding the willingness of the police to properly investigate and prosecute those responsible for these murders.

While Arab society suffers from clear under-policing and neglect by authorities of the problem of violence, when it comes to exercising the democratic right to protest, we see extreme measures of over-policing. One can only conclude that there is a reasonable suspicion that the whole purpose of this operation is likely *not* to equitably ensure public security but for its deterrent effect thereby preventing Arab citizens from exercising their basic political right to free expression.

We, civil society organizations that work to protect human rights and promote equality and partnership, call on you to instruct the Israel Police and its leadership to immediately stop the arbitrary arrests that are intended to collectively punish Arab society in its entirety. In addition, we call for an investigation into police violence in the past month, alongside a firm and determined treatment of the epidemic of crime and violence afflicting Arab society, to be carried out in cooperation and dialogue with this community's representative leadership.

Signed,

AJEEC-NISPED: Arab-Jewish Center for Equality  
Empowerment and Cooperation  
Amnesty International -- Israel  
Bimkom -- Planners for Planning Rights  
Givat Haviva  
Gisha -- the Legal Center for Freedom of  
Movement  
Public Committee Against Torture in Israel  
Parents Against Child Detention  
HaMoked -- The Center for Individual Rights  
Zazim: Community Action

Abraham Initiatives  
Yesh Din: Volunteers for Human Rights  
Combatants for Peace  
Machsom Watch  
Ir Amim  
Emek Shaveh  
Negev Coexistence Forum  
Rabbis for Human Rights  
Torat Tzedek  
Shatil - Initiative for Social Change at  
the New Israel Fund