

# “Freedom of Expression in Gaza and the West Bank is a JOKE.”

– Journalist in the Gaza Strip



## Freedom of Expression and the Press

*“There is no independent media under the Palestinian Authority. Their independence can only be financial, [by] avoiding being funded by the government.”*

– Journalist, Gaza Strip

The governing authorities in both the West Bank and Gaza possess complete control over the granting of TV and radio licenses, which is in direct violation of international standards on freedoms of press.



## Media Control TV, Radio, Newspapers

- Mahmoud Abbas has sole control over the four most popular Palestinian media channels in the West Bank: Palestinian TV, Voice of Palestine, Palestine News and Information Agency, and the newspaper Al-Hayat Al-Jadida.
- Hamas owns and controls several of the main media outlets in Gaza: newspapers Al-Resala and Felesteen, Al-Aqsa TV, Al-Quds TV, and Voice of Al-Aqsa.
- Many Palestinian journalists in the West Bank are paid by the Palestinian Authority and thus do not act independently.
- Control of media is indirect: If a journalism student criticizes the government, he will have trouble finding a job. If a private media company publishes something against the government, the company is harassed until the journalist is fired.
- There is no autonomy for foreign journalists. They often need a Palestinian fixer for protection, translation and guidance on how the information should be reported.
- In Gaza, Hamas press abuses compel journalists to leave Gaza before reporting the news, for fear of capture or detention by the authorities.
- Local and foreign journalists in Gaza are constantly under surveillance and frequently fear arrest and intimidation.
- Individuals can create new political parties and are free to express themselves so long as they do not criticize the current authority.
- Palestinian Basic Law protects the welfare of families of martyrs and prisoners of war. “Martyrs” are considered those who attack Israelis.
- Incitement towards hatred and violence against the Jews is present in multiple media outlets across the West Bank and Gaza, in children’s programs and on the internet.
- Palestinian leaders frequently make anti-Semitic remarks in the media, and face no legal repercussions. This directly contravenes the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.



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## Criticism of the Authorities

- **In February 2013**, 26-year-old Anas Awwad was sentenced to one year in prison in absentia for publicizing a prank on President Abbas.
- **In February 2014**, dozens of members of a political party, the Islamic Liberation Party, were arrested after they published a statement criticizing President Abbas.
- **In March 2014**, Ayman Ghazi al-'Aloul was detained for several hours for publishing a video on Facebook in which he criticized a festival organized by Hamas.
- **In May 2014**, police officers beat radio journalist Yousef Hammad while interviewing civilians who were protesting against the quality of life in Gaza.
- **In April 2015**, media student Bara Alqadi was kidnapped and beaten for posting a satiric criticism about President Mahmoud Abbas.
- **In June 2015**, a Palestinian journalist, Youssef Al-Shayeb, was prosecuted for conducting and publishing some research concerning a case of corruption in the Palestinian embassy in France three years earlier.



## Self - Censorship

- **In July 2014**, Italian journalist Gabriele Barbati left Gaza before reporting on a Hamas misfire that killed nine children at the Shati camp. He wrote on Twitter: “Out of #Gaza far from #Hamas retaliation: misfired rocket killed children yday [yesterday] in Shati. Witness: militants rushed and cleared debris.”
- **In July 2014**, Tamer El-Ghobashy, a Middle East correspondent for the Wall Street Journal based in Cairo, tweeted a photo of rubble with the explanation: “An outside wall on the campus of Gaza’s main hospital was hit by a strike. Low level damage suggests Hamas misfire.” It was later deleted and replaced with the same photo and the text: “The outer wall of Gaza City’s main hospital was struck. Unclear what the origin of the projectile is.” The Jerusalem Post reported that El-Ghobashy modified his tweet because it was speculative.
- A Spanish journalist in Gaza remarked from his experience why some journalists do not report on the situation from inside Gaza “It’s very simple, we did see Hamas people there launching rockets, they were close to our hotel, but if ever we dare pointing our camera on them they would simply shoot at us and kill us.”



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