



**ACAT-France, APRODEV, Broederlijk Delen, CCFD-Terre solidaire
the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network and Front Line denounce
the decision of the Israeli Knesset to investigate human rights NGOs in Israel**

Brussels, Copenhagen, Paris, 11 January 2011: ACAT-France, APRODEV, Broederlijk Delen, CCFD-Terre solidaire, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network and Front Line are deeply concerned about the decision of the Israeli Knesset (by a majority of 41 to 15) to establish a parliamentary committee of inquiry to investigate Israeli human rights organisations that provided information to the UN Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza conflict led by Justice Goldstone or who have been monitoring human rights violations by Israeli security forces. This committee will be mandated to “examine the activities of Israeli organisations involved with the collection of information about soldiers and to follow their funding sources.”¹

We believe that this decision constitutes a deplorable attempt to silence and severely restrict the activities of human rights organisations in Israel, and forms part of an ongoing campaign which seeks to characterise any form of criticism, and legal action against the military for human rights violations, as a delegitimisation of the State of Israel.² These attacks violate international human rights standards binding upon the State of Israel, in particular the rights to freedom of association, information and expression and victims' legitimate rights to an effective remedy; and stand in stark conflict with the fundamental principles of democracy. We also fear that these Knesset investigations may be used by the Israeli government to prevent Israeli human rights NGOs from accessing funding provided by foreign governments and agencies, in violation of Article 13 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders stating that “everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to solicit, receive and utilise resources for the express purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms through peaceful means”.³

For these reasons, the abovementioned organisations express their solidarity and full support to the sixteen NGOs in Israel that jointly signed a letter against the establishment of the parliamentary committee affirming that “in a democracy, criticising government policy is not only legitimate – it is essential.”⁴

We call on EU institutions, and particularly on the EU High Representative/Commission Vice-President Ashton, the European Council's President Van Rompuy and the European Parliament's President Buzek to:

¹ See B'tselem's Press Release “B'Tselem proud of its activities and completely transparent. The Knesset's decision is what harms Israel's international status”, 5 January 2011. See also PCATI's Press Release “The Public Committee Against Torture In Israel Condemns The Knesset Vote To Establish A Parliamentary Committee Of Inquiry To Investigate Human Rights NGOs”, 8 January 2010

² For further information please see EMHRN briefing in view of the Inter-parliamentary meeting EP-Israel Brussels, 8-9 December 2010, available at http://en.euromedrights.org/index.php/news/emhrn_releases/67/4806.html

³ This situation occurred last year when the Israeli NGO Breaking the Silence was depicted as a traitorous organization by the Ministry of Defence after it released testimonies of soldiers who participated in the fighting in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead and demanded accountability the military abuses which occurred there. For further details, see EMHRN 2010 Freedom of Association Report available at http://en.euromedrights.org/files.php?force&file=emhrn-statements-2008/FOA2010_EN_FINAL_267726910.pdf

⁴ See Press Release “Israeli NGOs Sign Joint Statement: We have Nothing to Hide”, 5 January 2011, signed by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, Assaf, Bimkom - Planners for Planning Rights, B'tselem, Gisha, Public Committee against Torture in Israel, Hamoked, Public Hotline for Migrant Workers, Machsom Watch, Mossawa, Adalah, Ir Amim, Women's Coalition for Peace, Kav LaOved, Physicians for Human Rights - Israel, Shovrim Shtika (Breaking the Silence).

- publicly raise concern about the Knesset's decision to establish a committee to investigate the activities of Israeli human rights organisations;
- urge the Israeli government and the Knesset to refrain from supporting any attempt to limit the activities of human rights organisations and human rights defenders in Israel, including the bills on foreign funding, universal jurisdiction and boycott, divestment and sanction;
- use all means at their disposal, and in accordance with EU guidelines on human rights defenders and on human rights dialogues, to ensure the full enjoyment of human rights defenders' and organisations' rights and freedoms in Israel.

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