

Statement by Human Rights Institutions and Civil Society Organizations

Towards Strengthening the Independence of the Judiciary

The human rights and civil society organizations, undersigned, are extremely concerned about the resignation of the Head of the High Judicial Council, Judge Sami Sarsour, on 13/10/2016. According to information from reliable sources, Sami Sarsour was requested to sign the resignation prior to taking the oath on 20/1/2016.

The organizations, undersigned, find this very shocking and they express their absolute rejection for all forms of interference in the judiciary, by any party whatsoever. The organizations confirm the following:

- Asking the Head of the High Judicial Council to submit his resignation letter upon appointment or at a later time clearly indicates that there is a dangerous intention by influential parties in the Executive Authority to interfere in the work of the judiciary. This prejudices the independence of the judiciary and that of the Head of the High Judicial Council.
- Accepting to sign the resignation letter reflects a submission to the Executive Authority and a prior approval to interfere in judicial affairs.
- It is highly important to hold the individuals who asked the Head of the High Judicial Council to submit his resignation at the moment of appointment accountable, in order to confirm that this is an individual incident and not an official policy.
- Any individual within the Judicial Authority who contributed to prejudicing the independence of the judiciary should be excluded from judicial work.
- Establishing a neutral investigation committee whose primary task is to look into the issue of beforehand-resignations, forced by the Executive Authority on those who occupy independent and inviolable positions.
- Efforts should be united as soon as possible by holding a national conference to repair and unify the Judicial Authority; to ensure the professionalism and independence of the judiciary, and to show respect for and maintain the human rights of the Palestinian people.

The end.

The organizations, undersigned, are:

- The Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council (PHROC), including:
 - 1- Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center (JLAC)
 - 2- Al Mezan Center For Human Rights
 - 3- Al-Haq
 - 4- The Palestinian Center for Human Rights
 - 5- Defense for Children International – Palestine
 - 6- The Center for Defense of Liberties and Civil Rights “Hurriyat”
 - 7- Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies
 - 8- Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association “Addameer”
 - 9- BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights
 - 10- Al-Dameer Association for Human Rights
 - 11- Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC)
 - 12- ENSAN Center for Democracy and Human Rights
- The Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR)
- The Coalition for Accountability and Integrity “AMAN”
- The Civil Commission for the Independence of Judiciary and Rule of Law “Istiqlal”
- MUSAWA – The Palestinian Center for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession