

Urgent Action Office 3-1992 Yonge Street Toronto ON M4S 1Z7 Phone: (416) 363-9933 Fax: (416) 363-3103 urgentaction@amnesty.ca
First UA: 25/24 Index: MDE 15/7856/2024 Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories of March 21, 2024

ISRAEL/OPT DROP ALL CHARGES AGAINST AHMAD KHALEFA

Ahmad Khalefa, a Palestinian citizen of Israel, is a lawyer, human rights defender, community organizer and newly elected city council member. On October 19, 2023, Israeli police violently arrested him along with 10 other demonstrators from a peaceful protest in his native town of Umm al-Fahm in northern Israel. He was subsequently charged with “*incitement to terrorism*” and “*identification with a terrorist group*,” for chanting slogans against the war in Gaza. After nearly four months in prison, Ahmad Khalefa was put under house arrest under strict terms, including electronic tagging. His next hearing will be held before the Haifa Magistrate’s court on April 8, 2024.

Write to the State Attorney urging him to:

- Act swiftly to drop all charges against Ahmad Khalefa and to immediately and unconditionally release him from house arrest and lift all associated restrictions of his rights.
- Allow him to resume his vital work and activism without reprisals or intimidation.

Write to:

Adv. Amit Aisman
State Attorney
The Office of the State Attorney
Email: State-attorney@justice.gov.il
Salutation: *Dear Amit Aisman,*

And copy:

His Excellency Iddo Moed
Ambassador
Embassy of the State of Israel
50 O'Connor Street, Suite 1005
Ottawa, ON K1P 6L2
Tel: (613) 750-7500 Fax: (613) 750-7555
Email: info@ottawa.mfa.gov.il

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ahmad Khalefa, 42, is a Palestinian citizen of Israel and human rights defender from Umm al-Fahm, a Palestinian city in northern Israel. As a human rights lawyer, he has been tirelessly defending the rights of Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories, including administrative detainees, communities at risk of displacement in the Negev/Naqab and students facing criminalization over issues related to freedom of expression. Newly elected to the Umm al-Fahm city council, Ahmad Khalefa is also a prominent community organizer and a founding member of al-Herak al-Fahmawi, a local grassroots movement that campaigns against organized crime and gender-based violence within Palestinian communities in Israel.

In November 2023, Ahmad Khalefa was charged with "incitement to terrorism" and "identifying with a terrorist organization" under Article 24 of Israel's 2016 Counter-Terrorism Law, a law that contains numerous repressive and draconian measures designed to stifle dissent and consolidate Israel's apartheid system against Palestinians. The indictment is based on slogans that Ahmad Khalefa chanted in a peaceful protest and which have been commonly chanted by Palestinians for decades, including in protests after October 7. These include: *"Gaza shall not surrender; to the tank or to the gun"; "There can be no other solution, except for an end to occupation."*

Ahmad Khalefa spent nearly four months in prison. In one of the court hearings, he testified to the cruel and inhumane prison conditions inside Megiddo prison, describing systematic food deprivation, lack of clothing, and degrading abuse at the hands of prison wardens. Following that testimony, Ahmad Khalefa was subjected to reprisal, including physical violence, and transferred to another prison. On January 15, 2024, the Haifa District Court decided to detain Ahmad Khalefa until the conclusion of all proceedings, deeming him *"too ideologically dangerous"* to be released from prison in light of the security situation.

On February 8, following a joint appeal submitted by Ahmad Khalefa's legal team, the Israeli Supreme Court overturned the Haifa District Court's decision and put him under house arrest, citing his clean criminal record. His wife Lina was assigned as his guarantor, tasked with ensuring his compliance with the conditions of the house arrest, which also include ban from using the internet, electronic tagging, and residing outside their hometown. The couple were forced to rent a house in Haifa, separating them from their three children and forcing Lina to take an open-ended leave from her job as a teacher.

Following Ahmad Khalefa's indictment, the disciplinary committee in Israel's bar association-initiated procedures to revoke his license. The arrest and indictment of Ahmad Khalefa and the procedures to disbar him are part of a severe and unprecedented crackdown on the right to freedom of expression of Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians from occupied East Jerusalem. Since the beginning of the war, the state of Israel has filed hundreds of indictments against Palestinians for expression-related offenses under the Counter-Terrorism Law. Most of the cases involve expressions made on social media. Additionally, a recent report to the Knesset's Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee on February 5, 2024 notes that 394 investigations based on allegations of incitement to terror have been initiated since October 7, 2023, the vast majority of them against Palestinian citizens or residents.

If the case against Ahmad Khalefa ends in a criminal conviction, this will have chilling and far-reaching effects on the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, particularly for Palestinians.

Protect the protest, take action and join Amnesty International in call on Israel's State Attorney, to drop the baseless charges against Ahmad Khalefa and to immediately and unconditionally release him from house arrest so he can resume his vital work and activism.

Please take action as soon as possible until July 11, 2024! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.