

Beirut, 18th October 2023

Dear Mrs. Irene Khan,

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression,

This letter is related to a very high priority on the agenda of international humanitarian law and human rights. My name is Elsy Moufarrej, the coordinator of the Alternative Press Syndicate, a Union for independent journalists and media workers in Lebanon, which emerged following the October 2019 uprising. The syndicate's goals are to defend freedom of speech, and the rights of journalists, which are increasingly violated. In the past three years, we dedicated our mission mainly to support journalists, especially those who were obstructed while reporting, those arbitrarily dismissed by their organizations, those who are facing malicious trials, intimidating interrogations, and insightful online campaigns. We organized protests, sent letters, participated in organizing groups and coalitions, and reached out to local and global organizations to join forces in acting to protect freedom of speech and freedom of expression.

In this context, and in line with Syndicate's objectives, we had the honor of meeting you during your visit to Lebanon just this year, on May 13, 2023.

Therefore, we are sending this email to inform you that on Friday, 13 October 2013, Mr. Issam Abdallah, a journalist affiliated with Reuters, was killed. Six other journalists were injured: Ms. Karman Joukhadar, Mr. Elie barkhya (Al-Jazeera tv), Ms. Krisitna Assie, Mr. Dilan Kolenz (AFP), Mr. Thaer Soudani, and Maher Nazih (Reuters). The killing of Mr. Abdallah and the injuries to the six journalists occurred while they were on duty, reporting on the aftermath of the escalation in the South of Lebanon. They were wearing their protective vests with the word "PRESS" in large white letters across their chests and backs; they were clearly identified as press/journalists.

According to witnesses and the victims themselves (firsthand accounts), including videos and various statements (open sources), this attack was committed by the Israeli army who fired and struck journalists with two missiles.

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This act is considered a war crime committed by the Israeli army, which violates International Humanitarian Law and the International Human Rights Law and all the principles and charts that protect journalists and media workers operating in areas of armed conflicts: "Under Article 4 of the third Geneva convention and article 79 of Additional Protocol of the Geneva Conventions, which codifies a customary rule, journalists in war zones must be treated as civilians and protected as such, provided they play no part in the hostilities."

Therefore, and in conclusion, as they were deliberately targeted, this amounts to a war crime, a violation of International Humanitarian Law.

To this end, and to establish facts and have all parties meet their obligations under International Humanitarian Law, and to ensure to prevent future crimes against journalists, we ask for your good Offices, from human rights experts, to undertake the work necessary to establish these facts. With parties held accountable by international law, we believe that the targeting of civilians and journalists will decrease. Impunity will only encourage such attacks and war crimes.

As a Syndicate, and a Union, we call for conducting an international and independent investigation, through an independent human rights expert, to reveal the facts around this attack, publish a report that determines responsibilities and holds perpetrators accountable.

We are ready to provide all the information you need to determine the facts, including arranging-hybrid or in person- meetings with all the victims and witnesses with their testimonies, what they witnessed and experienced on 13 October 2023.

For all the above reasons,

We at this moment ask you to condemn this crime and support us on our call to the High Commissionaire for Human Rights to conduct a transparent and impartial investigation into this attack to issue a report determining those responsible for this attack.

Elsy Moufarrej

Coordinator of the Alternative Press Syndicate