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Shockwaves of the war in Gaza: Rights to speech, protest and information must be guaranteed globally to fight antisemitism and islamophobia

The endorsing INCLIO member organizations come together to express grave concern about civil liberties infringements occurring in various countries across the world in connection with the war in Gaza.

While deeply concerned about instances of islamophobia, antisemitism and other forms of bigotry increasing worldwide, **we remind states everywhere of their obligation to guarantee freedom of expression, access to information and protest rights without repercussion to all within their borders.** Now more than ever, upholding these rights and safeguarding the exchange of information and expression about this conflict is vital, if there is to be any hope of a peaceful resolution through necessary and meaningful dialogue.

Protest, expression and information to combat discrimination

As the UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk said, the war between Israel and Hamas “has sent shockwaves across every region, dehumanizing both Palestinians and Jews.”

We deplore this dehumanization and condemn the spiralling increase in hate speech, violence and discrimination. These violations must not be tolerated, and governments and civil society must condemn discrimination in all its forms while states guarantee access to fair information, freedom of expression and safe protest for all.

The rights to peaceful protest and expression are fundamental to any democratic society. The bans and restrictions placed on pro-Palestinian protests, events and activities in countries such as Australia, the USA, and several European countries including Germany, the UK, Ireland and Hungary, are a clear violation of these rights. We believe that by prohibiting manifestations of solidarity, states are contributing to building tensions and hatred around this conflict. Governments must uphold their duty to protect these rights and ensure that protests are not met with violence or undue restrictions.

We warn in particular against:

-Discrimination and violence against individuals perceived to be Arab, Palestinian, or Muslim by immigration and law enforcement authorities. It is essential to ensure that immigration and law enforcement actions and policies adhere to equality, non-discrimination, and due process principles. No individual should be subjected to profiling or discrimination based on their ethnicity, nationality, or religion.

-The use of counter-terrorism laws to stifle speech, media and criminalize activism. This illegitimate tactic which became widespread in Western countries after the September 11 attacks in the USA was seen again in university settings against pro-Palestinian student groups, academics and teachers in the US, but also in Europe. Universities and schools in general are spaces where free speech, open debate, and peaceful dissent should be encouraged.

-The repression of protest. The protection of civil liberties and the promotion of peaceful dialogue and understanding are crucial steps towards resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict and ensuring a just and lasting peace for all. Despite this, we continue to observe the intimidation of dissenting voices, content-based restrictions on demonstrations, and arrests of protesters using their democratic right to collectively express their opinions about the conflict.

-Digital censorship. We are deeply troubled by [instances of censorship and suppression of content related to Israel and Palestine on social media platforms](#). The right to freedom of information and expression must be respected in the digital age, and any restrictions must be strictly necessary, proportionate, transparent, and subject to oversight. Social media platforms must not [demote, disable, ban, overmoderate or suspend content arbitrarily, without explanation, and without a means for users to appeal and seek a remedy](#). The politically biased suppression of facts and opinions hampers the public's ability to engage in informed and critical debate. All acts of censorship, online or offline, contribute to disinformation and to creating a severe and lasting chilling effect on public discourse which can seriously jeopardize any hope of lasting –or even temporary–peace.

We echo Volker Türk in calling on States to “ensure a safe and enabling space for participation and debate” which includes ensuring access to reliable information. We insist that governments cannot unduly restrict participation, debate or critical commentary about the conflict, be it in

solidarity with Israelis or Palestinians. In moments of grave social crisis, outlets for people to express their emotions are key. Protest is therefore a vital safety valve giving people an outlet to express their concerns. By oppressing and discriminating, states only increase hostility and hinder the resolution of religious, ethnic and other social conflicts.

The war in Gaza is a matter of primary concern to all. **It is of vital importance that governments everywhere live up to their obligations and guarantee the rights of people to stand in solidarity with those trapped in a humanitarian crisis.**

Agora International Human Rights Group (Russia)

Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales- CELS (Argentina)

Dejusticia (Colombia)

Human Rights Law Centre - HRLC (Australia)

Human Rights Law Network (India)

Hungarian Civil Liberties Union - HCLU

Irish Council for Civil Liberties - ICCL

Kenya Human Rights Commission - KHRC

The Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence - KontraS (Indonesia)

Legal Resources Centre - LRC (South Africa)

Liberty (UK)