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Call for Action

Discriminatory Security Check at Ben Gurion Airport

Israeli Policy of 'Racial Profiling' Continues

Twice in one week, Ittijah's General Director, Mr. Ameer Makhoul, was subjected to harassment by security staff at Ben Gurion Airport. Mr. Makhoul was traveling to Paris to participate in the Board meeting of the EuroMed NGO platform and to Geneva to take part in the 5th Session of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

The Facts:

Ben Gurion Airport, Saturday, 3 March 2007

After the 'regular' security inspection and check-in process at Ben Gurion Airport and upon arrival to the border crossing, Mr. Makhoul was shocked to discover that his magnetic passing card (used instead of passport stamping to facilitate procedures for Israeli passengers at Ben Gurion Airport) was void. Immediately after that, security personnel called him for a private inspection at the airport's security section.

Mr. Makhoul was physically checked, and all his belongings including, money, documents and luggage were manually searched.

The security staff, headed by Eyal Levi, confiscated Mr. Makhoul's cell phone and prohibited him from taking his laptop on board. Mr. Makhoul protested this exaggerated inspection and requested to talk with the chief of security head of staff. However, the staff stated that this check was part of the 'Shabak' (the Israeli intelligence and internal security) - procedures.

The security check was resumed after an hour and a half and Mr. Makhoul was accompanied through the departure gate by security staff until he actually boarded the plane.

Ben Gurion Airport, Thursday, 8 March 2007

Upon his arrival at Ben Gurion Airport from France, Mr. Makhoul was called for a security inspection again. He was surrounded by six security staff who confiscated his laptop and mobile phone again. He was then asked to accompany them to the security section of the airport.

Mr. Makhoul was questioned in detail about the reasons for his travel to France but he refused to answer stating that the inquiries constituted a political interrogation and were not related to normal security procedures.

He was asked to empty his laptop bag, but he refused to do so. Security staff then wanted to examine his laptop outside of his presence. Mr. Makhoul warned them against causing any damage to his laptop or to its contents, and stated that he would hold them responsible for any damages they caused in this regard.

Mr. Makhoul endured a long wearisome check of all his belongings including, money, documents and luggage. He was physically checked and was asked to even take off his clothes, which he refused to do, stating that this was part of the political intimidation and policy of fear and insult that Israel is trying impose on the Arabs.

Mr. Makhoul warned security staff, Steve Amar and Adi Shmoul, against causing any damage to the work of Ittijah: The Union of Arab Community Based Associations by monitoring its performance, and to his reputation as a public figure.

Mr. Makhoul was released at 2:00 a.m. after two hours of inspection.

The EuroMed Platform sent a letter of protest to the European Commission in Brussels, and to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs urging Israel to stop its policy of political intimidation and mistreatment of Arab passengers at Ben Gurion Airport.

Ittijah will issue a letter of complaint to Israeli officials stating that this discriminatory approach by security staff at Ben Gurion Airport intimidates the work of civil society organizations, and represents an escalation in the Shabak's discriminatory and vengeful policy against Arabs. The media reported on Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's recent statements to ease the security inspections that Arab citizens are forced to undergo at Ben Gurion Airport and other border crossings throughout the country. The media also highlighted the Israeli authorities' declarations that they stopped using such insulting practices against Palestinian citizens of Israel. However, these words total contradicts the facts on the ground at Ben Gurion Airport.

Mr. Makhoul stated that these political checks aimed at intimidating Arabs must be stopped. He also affirmed that Ittijah will be following up on this issue locally and internationally. The Arab Association for Human Rights' (HRA) and the Centre Against Racism recently issued a report on the violations of Arab passengers' rights at Ben Gurion Airport, which comprehensively documents Israel's policy of discrimination.

By racially profiling Arab passengers, Israel violates their rights to dignity and liberty, as protected by the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, and their right of freedom of movement. These actions also breach article 2 of EU-Israel Association Agreement, and the articles of the new EU Neighborhood Policy (ENP) related to Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel. It is also noteworthy to mention that such racial profiling continues despite, the Israeli delegation's declaration to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination that "there is no discrimination in Israel" in reporting on Israel's implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

Ittijah urges all individuals, NGOs, partners and solidarity movements around the world to campaign against Israel's ongoing discriminatory policy against Arab passengers at Ben Gurion Airport, while taking all necessary steps to disclose its 'racial profiling' policy in order to prevent the recurrence of such violations of human rights, liberty and dignity.