

25 September 2020

Israeli: Sentence handed down to indigenous human rights defenders from the Bedouin community

On 21 September 2020, the Beersheba Magistrate's Court handed down suspended sentences and a 5 000 EUR fine to human rights defenders **Aziz Abu Madhi'm**, **Saleem Abu Madhi'm** and **Sheikh Sayah Abu Madhi'm**. The human rights defenders were convicted of “trespassing with intent to commit an offence”, “breaching legal orders” and “unlawful entry into public land”.

[Aziz](#), [Saleem](#) and [Sheikh Sayah Abu Madhi'm](#) are indigenous human rights defenders from the Bedouin minority in Israel. They are among the few who remained in Al-Aragib, a village that is not recognised by the Israeli authorities despite its establishment preceding that of the State of Israel. The authorities, which consider it to be built on state land, demolished the village for the first time in 2010. The human rights defenders' work primarily focuses on Bedouin land rights. They organise weekly peaceful demonstrations to protest against state policies which undermine Bedouin rights, particularly in relation to land.

On 21 September 2020, the Beersheba Magistrate's Court sentenced human rights defender Aziz Abu Mahi'm to six months imprisonment, and human rights defender Saleem Abu Madhi'm to three months. Their father, human rights defender Sheikh Sayah Abu Madhi'm, who suffers from poor health, was sentenced to three months of community service. The human rights defenders were convicted of “trespassing with intent to commit an offence”, “breaching legal orders” and “unlawful entry onto public land” for continuing to reside at the village. The Court accepted their lawyer's request to suspend the execution of the sentence upon the payment of a guarantee to the court equivalent to 5 000 EUR. The court banned the human rights defenders from returning to their village. They are currently living in an area with no shelter, a few kilometres away from the village.

Human rights defenders from the unrecognised Bedouin village of Al-Aragib have been frequently harassed by the Israeli police. The village, which has been rebuilt and demolished on a number of occasions since 2010, has also been the subject of multiple police raids. Bedouin human rights defenders have been detained and interrogated several times during the past few years, and several cases have been opened against them challenging their presence in their village and their peaceful defence of land rights. In addition, police have facilitated the entry of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) into the village, who have been surveying the area and uprooting Palestinian olive trees and replacing them with Israeli saplings. JNF is a Zionist organisation that promotes the construction of Israeli settlements in the Negev region in the south of Israel.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the continued harassment of indigenous human rights defenders from the Bedouin community. It believes that Aziz Abu Madhi'm, Saleem Abu Madhi'm and Sheikh Sayah Abu Madhi'm are being criminalised solely for their peaceful and legitimate human rights work.

Front Line Defenders urges the Israeli authorities to:

1. Immediately quash the conviction against Aziz Abu Madhi'm and Saleem Abu Madhi'm as Front Line Defenders believes that they have been targeted solely as a result of their legitimate human rights work;

2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Israel are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

Front Line Defenders Board of Directors

Denis O'Brien, Mary Lawlor, Jim Conway, Maria Mulcahy, Kieran Mulvey, Mary Jane Real (Philippines), David Sykes, Arnold Tsunga (Zimbabwe), Verónica Vidal (Uruguay)

Front Line Defenders International Advisory Council

James L. Cavallaro, Maryam Elahi, Michel Forst, Hina Jilani

Front Line, The International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders trading as Front Line Defenders, is registered in Ireland as a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital. Registered Office: Second Floor, Grattan House, Temple Road, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, A94 FA39, Ireland.

Company No. 593190; Registered Charity No. 20204494; CHY 22404