

February 23, 2024

**Attn: Her Excellency, Ms. Audrey Azoulay
UNESCO Director-General.**

**The undersigned,
Family of the Victim Issam Abdallah,
Victims/survivors,
Media outlets,
The National Human Rights Commission - Lebanon,
Local and International Non-Governmental Organizations,
Members of the Lebanese Parliament,**

Excellency,

We welcome your actions and calls to defend the rights of journalists all over the world, and your [statement](#) on the death of Lebanese journalist, Issam Abdallah, dated October 16, 2023.

Following up on this case, we are writing to provide further information on the attack of October 13, 2023, that killed him and injured the following six other journalists: Ms. Carmen Joukhadar, Mr. Elie Barkhia (Al-Jazeera TV), Ms. Christina Assi, Mr. Dylan Collins (AFP), Mr. Maher Nazih and Mr. Thaer Al-Sudani (Reuters).

Mr. Abdallah was killed and the six above-mentioned journalists injured while they were reporting on the escalation of hostilities in [south Lebanon](#). At the time, they were wearing protective vests with the word "PRESS" printed in large white letters across their chests and backs; as such, they were clearly identifiable as members of the press.

According to witnesses, as well as the firsthand accounts of the victims themselves, and five separate investigations by [Agence France Presse \(AFP\)](#), [Amnesty International](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\)](#) and [Reuters](#), the Israeli army launched the attack striking the journalists' position twice in a matter of 37 seconds. According to Amnesty International's, Human Rights Watch's and RSF's findings, the two strikes against the [journalists](#) were apparently a deliberate direct attack against members of the press. [Under Article 79 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, journalists in war zones must be treated as civilians and protected as such, provided they take no part in the hostilities.](#)

Consequently, the attack was an apparent war crime committed by the Israeli army, in violation of international humanitarian law and, a fortiori, of international human rights law, and the principles that protect journalists and media workers operating in areas of armed conflicts.

[On January 12, 2024](#), the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders published a [communication dated November 13, 2023](#) and addressed to the Israeli government, citing their concern over the attack. They stated that the journalists

could not have been mistaken for combatants, given their clear press insignia and that they were standing outside in the open for almost an hour prior to the attack. The Israeli government was given 60 days to respond. Thus far, the Rapporteurs have not received a response from the Israeli authorities.

On February 1, 2024, a number of UN Special Rapporteurs issued a [joint statement](#) qualifying Israel's ongoing military operation in Gaza as "the deadliest, most dangerous conflict for journalists in recent history." The experts said that, "according to UN reports, since 7 October, over 122 journalists and media workers have been killed in Gaza, and many have been injured" and that, "In addition three journalists in Lebanon were killed" They were: Issam Abdallah, as well as [Farah Omar](#) and [Rabih Al-Maamari](#) from Al-Mayadeen TV, who were both killed in a separate Israeli strike on Tayr Harfa, south Lebanon, on November 21, 2023, while doing their jobs. You also issued a [statement](#) on November 27, 2023 condemning the killings of Farah Omar and Rabih Al-Maamari and calling "for a full and transparent investigation into the circumstances of their deaths".

According to the [Committee to Protect Journalists \(CPJ\)](#), as of February 21, 2024, [88 journalists and media workers have been killed](#) in Israel, Gaza and Lebanon since October 7, 2023. Over 22 years, CPJ has documented the killing of at least 20 journalists by the Israeli army for which there has been no accountability. Recently, it has issued a report titled "[Deadly Pattern](#)" that uncovered how impunity in these cases has severely undermined the freedom of the press. CPJ has stated that the first month of the hostilities in Israel and Gaza was "the deadliest month for journalists" since it began documenting journalist fatalities in 1992.

In order to establish facts independently, with a view to ensuring accountability, deterrence and compliance by all parties to the armed conflict with their obligations under international humanitarian law, we are calling on the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to undertake an investigation into this attack. Impunity will only encourage such attacks and apparent war crimes to reoccur over and over again.

In light of UNESCO's role in promoting the safety of journalists and combating impunity for those who attack them, the undersigned call on your Office to take the following actions:

- 1. Advocate for accountability for the apparent war crimes committed by Israel in south Lebanon against seven journalists on October 13, 2023 and against two journalists on November 21, 2023;**
- 2. Publicly and privately support our call for an OHCHR investigation;**
- 3. Include the cases of Mr. Issam Abdallah, Mrs. Farah Omar and Mr. Rabih Al-Maamari in the UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists.**

We remain available should you require further information.

Yours sincerely,

Signatories:

On behalf of Issam Abdallah's family:

- Wissam Srour, Stepbrother of Issam Abdallah

Victims:

- Carmen Joukhadar (Reporter, Al-Jazeera - Injured)
- Christina Assi (Videographer, Agence France Press - Critically Injured)
- Dylan Collins (Videographer, Agence France Press - Injured)
- Elie Brakhia (Videographer, Al-Jazeera - Critically Injured)

Witnesses:

- Ali Majed (Videographer, Al-Jazeera)
- Ali Rabbah (Reporter, Al-Araby TV)
- Edmond Sassin (Reporter, LBCI)

Local and Regional Syndicates and Journalists' groups

- Alternative Press Syndicate - Lebanon
- Syndicate of workers in audiovisual in Lebanon
- Press Club - Lebanon
- Ali Aloush, Head of the photographers' syndicate in Lebanon
- Aref Yassine, Head of the Engineers' Syndicate in Beirut
- Joe Salloum, President of the Lebanese Order of Pharmacists
- Marie Terez Al-Kawal, Head of the Bar Association in Tripoli
- Egyptian Journalists' Syndicate
- Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate
- Network of Independent Journalists in Jordan
- European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

International Organizations

- Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
- EuroMed Rights
- Human Rights Watch
- International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)
- International Federation for Human Rights
- MENA Rights Group
- Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

Media Outlets

- Al-Anbaa, Lebanon
- Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, pan-Arab
- Al-Jadeed, Lebanon

- Amman Net, Jordan
- Annahar Newspaper, Lebanon
- Awan Media, Lebanon
- Community Media Network, Jordan
- Daraj, Lebanon
- LBCI TV, Lebanon
- Naqd Media, Lebanon
- Nidaa El Watan, Lebanon
- Palestine News Network, PNN, Palestine
- Radio Al-Balad, Jordan
- Raseef22, pan-Arab
- Sawt El Mada, Lebanon
- Voice of Lebanon, Lebanon
- Al Anbaa

Local policymakers

- Charbel Masaad, MP
- Cynthia Zarazir, MP
- Elias Jradi, MP
- Firas Hamdan, MP
- Ghassan Moukheiber, Lawyer - Former MP and Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Human Rights Commission
- Hadi Abou ElHosn, MP
- Halima Kaakour, MP
- Ibrahim Mneimneh, MP
- Mark Daou, MP
- Michel Douaihy, MP
- Najat Aoun Saliba, MP
- Nasser Yassin, Minister
- Paula Yaacoubian, MP
- Simon Abi Ramia, MP
- Yassin Yassin, MP

Local organizations and institutions

- ABAAD - Resource Centre for Gender Equality
- Abnaa Saida association
- Centre for Social Sciences Research & Action
- Collective des ONG a Saida
- Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon (CFKDL)
- Gherbal Initiative
- Helem
- HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
- Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs at the American University of Beirut.
- Justice Without Frontiers (JWF)

- KAFa (enough) Violence & Exploitation
- Kulluna Irada
- Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections- LADE
- Lebanese Center for Human Rights - CLDH
- Lebanese Union for persons with physical disabilities
- Maharat Foundation
- Masar association- Lebanon
- Media Association for Peace (MAP)
- National Human Rights Commission
- Offre Joie
- Proud Lebanon
- Reform Lebanon
- Ruwad al Houkoug (Frontiers)
- Samir Kassir Foundation
- Seeds for Legal Initiatives
- SMEX
- The lebanese women democratic gathering (RDFL)
- The Legal Agenda

Regional Organizations

- Action Society for the Treatment of Heart Patients for Development and Communication
- Arab forum for the rights of persons with disabilities
- Arab NGO Network for Development
- Arab world Democracy and Electoral Monitor (Almarsad)- Palestine
- Association Tunieinne des Femme Democratres
- Bahrain Transparency Society (TI) Chapter
- Bint Al-Ard Egypt Association
- Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ)
- Civil Centre for studies & legal reform- Iraq
- Collective des ONG a Saida
- Communication Pole Association
- Ein network for election monitoring and democracy- Iraq
- Espace Associative – Morocco
- Forum for Democracy and Citizenship- Morocco
- Initiatives Association for the Protection of Women's Rights in Fez
- International Council Supporting fair trial and human rights
- Iraqi Al Amal Association
- Iraqi Women Network
- Jordanian Women's Union
- Justice Without Frontiers (JWF)
- Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme
- Marocain Civic Group for Elections
- Mauritanian Network for Social Work
- Moroccan Civic Group for Elections

- Network for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the South-East, which includes approximately 19 associations - Morocco
- New women research center -Egypt
- Noon Foundation for Family Care - Egypt
- Observers - Tunisia
- Organization for Freedom of Media and Expression (Hatem) from Morocco
- Phoenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies, Jordan
- Salama Foundation - Egypt
- Tammouz Association - Iraq
- The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA)