

Journalists Accused Israel of Targeting Them 2 Weeks Before Killing of Abu Akleh

By [Prof. Marjorie Cohn](#)

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Just two weeks before Israeli forces [assassinated](#) beloved Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, the International Federation of Journalists, the Palestinian Journalists’ Syndicate and the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians had submitted a [formal complaint](#) to the International Criminal Court accusing Israel of systematically targeting Palestinian journalists.

“The targeting of journalists and media organisations in Palestine violates the right to life and freedom of expression,” [said](#) Anthony Bellanger, the general secretary of the International Federation of Journalists.

In a moment when the Israeli government’s propaganda machine is working hard to keep mainstream news organizations mired in [reporting on Israeli efforts to raise questions about who shot the bullet that killed Abu Akleh](#), we must insist on understanding her killing within the broader and ongoing context of Israeli violence against Palestinian journalists.

“It was revealing that the Israeli military spokesperson described Shireen and her colleague, Ali al-Samudi, who was shot in the back, as being ‘armed with cameras, if you will permit me to say that,’” [writes](#) James Zogby in *The Nation*. “That is what good journalists do—they arm themselves with cameras and laptops. They witness events as they happen and tell stories so that readers and viewers can understand the human drama that is unfolding. It appears that Israel finds this profoundly—even existentially—threatening. Why else would they have [killed dozens](#) of Palestinian journalists in the past two decades?”

It was perhaps no accident that Israel targeted Abu Akleh on May 11, four days before Palestinians commemorated the 74-year anniversary of the Nakba (the Arabic word for “catastrophe”). On May 15, Palestinians mourn [the violent founding of Israel](#) on Palestinian land.

For 25 years, Abu Akleh had documented Israeli war crimes in the occupied Palestinian territory for *Al Jazeera*. “Abu Akleh herself embodied Palestinian humanity by [speaking truth to power](#),” *Al Jazeera* [reported](#). She was covering an arrest operation by Israeli forces near the entrance to the Jenin refugee camp when she was assassinated. Although she was wearing a flak vest marked “PRESS,” an Israeli military sniper [shot her below the ear](#) — the only part of her head not covered by her protective helmet — clearly evidencing an intent to kill.

Al Jazeera journalist Shatha Hanaysha, also wearing a helmet and vest labeled as press, tried to reach Abu Akleh, but soldiers “did not stop firing even after she collapsed,” [Hanaysha said](#). “I couldn’t even extend my arm to pull her because of the shots. The army was adamant on shooting to kill.”

Ali al-Samudi, another journalist with *Al Jazeera* who was also wearing a press vest, was shot in the back while covering the same event as Abu Akleh. He survived and is being treated for his wounds.

Thousands of mourners came out to honor Abu Akleh. To add insult to injury, as her casket was being carried through the streets, Israeli occupation [forces attacked them](#), “beating and kicking the mourners,” then “forcing pallbearers to nearly drop the coffin.”

“Now, the occupying power has spoken back by shooting her in the head and attacking her mourners — a response that can only be classified as acute and multitiered state savagery, in keeping with Israel’s modus operandi of refusing to let Palestinians live, die, or be buried in peace,” writes Belen Fernandez at [Al Jazeera](#).

ICC Complaint Filed Over Israeli Killings of Palestinian Journalists

Assassinations (extrajudicial executions) constitute war crimes under the Geneva Conventions.

On March 3, 2021, Fatou Bensouda, the former ICC chief prosecutor, had [announced](#) that the ICC was mounting an investigation into war crimes committed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip since Israel’s 2014 Operation Protective Edge, during which Israeli forces killed 2,251 Palestinians.

Bensouda found a [reasonable basis](#) to believe that Israeli forces committed war crimes — including willful killing, willfully causing serious injury, disproportionate use of force, and the transfer of Israelis into Palestinian territory. Bensouda also determined there was a reasonable basis to investigate possible war crimes by Palestinians, including intentional attacks against civilians, using civilians as human shields, and torture and willful killing.

In October 2021, [Israel designated](#) six leading Palestinian human rights groups as “terrorist” organizations with absolutely no evidence. This was done in retaliation for their support of the ICC investigation and the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement.

The BDS movement was launched by 170 Palestinian civil society organizations in 2005. It [called for](#) boycott, divestment and sanctions, described as “nonviolent punitive measures” that will last until Israel complies fully with international law by 1.) ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling its barrier wall (85 percent of which is on Palestinian land); 2.) recognizing the fundamental rights of Arab Palestinian citizens in Israel to full equality; and 3.) respecting, promoting and protecting the rights of Palestinian

refugees to return to their land as mandated by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194.

Calls for Independent Investigation of Abu Akleh's Killing

The killing of Abu Akleh has led to calls for an independent, impartial investigation and galvanized opposition to Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian territory.

On May 13, UN human rights experts [condemned](#) Abu Akleh's killing, saying it "is part of a continuation of the high rate of attacks against media workers, particularly Palestinian journalists. More than 40 Palestinian journalists have reportedly been killed since 2000, with hundreds injured or targeted for violence."

The UN experts included four special rapporteurs: 1.) [on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967](#); 2.) [on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#); 3.) [on violence against women, its causes and consequences](#); and 4.) [on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression](#). They [said Abu Akleh's killing may amount to a war crime](#) and demanded "a prompt, independent, impartial, effective, thorough and transparent investigation."

"Authorities have an obligation not to harm journalists and to protect them from harm under international humanitarian law and international human rights law," the rapporteurs [noted](#). They added that the targeting of journalists working in the occupied Palestinian territory and the Israeli government's failure to properly investigate killings of media personnel violate the rights to life and to effective remedies. Decrying "the litany of extrajudicial executions," they said the safety of journalists is crucial to guaranteeing the rights to freedom of expression and media freedom.

Noting that 2021 marked the highest number of Palestinian deaths since Israel's 2014 Operation Protective Edge, the experts declared, "The unsustainable situation is inherent to the context of protracted military occupation, in which violence and repression are used to perpetuate a system of Palestinian subjugation." They called for "the dismantlement of the occupation, including the Gaza blockade and the illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem."

More than 6,000 people have signed a [statement initiated by the antiwar and anti-imperialist group CODEPINK](#), calling for a thorough and impartial investigation of Abu Akleh's killing and the immediate suspension of United States military aid to Israel. The U.S. enables Israeli war crimes and its illegal occupation by providing it with \$3.8 billion in unconditional military assistance annually, in spite of the classification of Israel as an apartheid state by leading human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Israeli group B'Tselem.

The Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC) [said](#) Abu Akleh's killing amounts to the war crime of willful killing under the ICC's Rome Statute. BNC called for accountability for the perpetrators, those who gave the orders, "and the entire political leadership of apartheid Israel."

"Though Israel killed Shireen Abu Akleh, her blood is also on the hands of the enablers, funders and defenders of apartheid, primarily the US, EU, UK, Canada and Australia," [BNC noted](#) in a statement. "We call for public BDS pressure to end the West's [colonial](#)

[hypocrisy](#) and shameless complicity in Israeli crimes and ongoing Nakba against Indigenous Palestinians.”

[BNC condemned](#) “the Western indifference to Palestinians, which enables Israel’s impunity, directly contributing to our ongoing Nakba. We reiterate our call for meaningful solidarity with Palestinians facing ethnic cleansing, massacres, colonial dispossession and apartheid.”

Moreover, BNC cited the hypocrisy in the contrasting responses of the West to human rights violations in Ukraine and Palestine. Citing Palestinians’ “empathy with the suffering of Ukrainians,” [BNC stated](#) that, “the West’s blanket boycotts and sanctions against Russia while continuing its complicity in and unconditional support for Israel’s apartheid, military occupation and settler-colonialism against Palestinians is racist, enraging and hypocritical,” adding, “Ironically, these sanctions and boycotts demolish anti-BDS excuses by Israel and anti-Palestinian apologists.”

[BNC recommends](#) that people strategically channel their anger by working with progressive networks to pressure governments and parliaments to end military-security cooperation and trade with apartheid Israel, ban all goods and services in Israel’s illegal settlements, stop material support for pillaged and disputed Israeli fracked gas, and demand a UN investigation of Israeli apartheid.

It is also calling for people outraged at Israeli abuses to mobilize community pressure on churches, unions, student groups and city councils to end all relations with companies complicit in apartheid Israel’s system of oppression and divest from Israeli and international companies and banks complicit in Israeli war crimes and crimes against humanity; to cancel academic, sports, cultural and tourism engagements in Israel; and join local BDS campaigns and solidarity groups.

People can also take concerted action to end U.S. military support to Israel. If the United States continues to fund Israel’s brutal and illegal occupation, journalists like Shireen Abu Akleh who document its war crimes will continue to be assassinated.

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[Marjorie Cohn](#) is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, and a member of the national advisory boards of [Assange Defense](#) and Veterans For Peace, and the bureau of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers. Her books include [Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral and Geopolitical Issues](#). She is co-host of “[Law and Disorder](#)” radio.

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