

Human Rights Defender Issa Amro Facing 18 Charges in Israeli Military Court for Nonviolent Human Rights Work

Issa Amro is an internationally recognized Human Rights Defender from the city of Hebron in the Occupied West Bank. He is currently facing 18 charges in Israeli military court. The charges include such things as organizing an “illegal demonstration” in August 2010, allegedly spitting in the direction of a settler in 2012, insulting a soldier in March 2013, and entering a “closed military zone” in February 2016. Several of the charges against Mr. Amro had previously been investigated and dismissed.

In 2010, Mr. Amro was declared Human Rights Defender of the Year for Palestine by the The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). In 2011, Mr. Amro was a guest of the US State Department as part of their International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). In 2013 he was declared a Human Rights Defender by the European Union. His status as an EU HRD was reaffirmed in 2016. Mr. Amro gave testimony to the United Nations in 2013 and 2014, and in March 2017 when he also met with UN Deputy Secretary General for Human Rights, Kate Gilmore. A US State Department report on human rights in Israel/Palestine for 2016 included his legal case.

Mr. Amro’s case is an example of widespread targeting of human rights activists using old and exaggerated charges in a military court system whose conviction rate for Palestinians is over 99%. In November 2016 Amnesty International called for Israel to drop the “baseless” charges against Mr Amro. Amnesty International has stated that if convicted, Mr. Amro will be considered a Prisoner of Conscience. In December 2016, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Michael Lynks, and United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Michael Forst, expressed serious concern for Mr. Amro’s case:

“This relatively unusual practice of bringing up stale charges, which were not pursued many years ago, strongly suggests that Mr. Amro is being unfairly targeted due to his legitimate and peaceful human rights work,” the experts noted.

“Mr. Amro has been subject to a concerted pattern of harassment and intimidation by the Israeli authorities aimed at inhibiting his work as a human rights defender,” they said recalling previous warnings from United Nations human rights experts. “This trial appears to form part of this same pattern.”

Mr. Amro’s trial began on November 23, 2016. In attendance were Representatives from the embassies and consulates of the US (Michael Lebson of the US embassy in Tel Aviv), UK, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Also in attendance were representatives from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in the OPT, Human Rights Watch, and other international organizations. Mr. Amro’s attorney, Gabby Lasky, asked that 14 of the 18 charges against Mr. Amro be dropped on the basis of being old and in some cases charges that had been previously investigated and closed. In February the court replied. They declined to drop or reduce

any of the charges on the basis that collecting and using old charges to file an indictment against Mr. Amro is acceptable because Mr. Amro continues to repeat his [nonviolent] practices.

On March 26, 2017 Mr. Amro had another court date in Ofer military court where the indictment was read. His next court date will be July 4, 2017 where the first nine of the 38 witnesses against him will testify.

What you can do to support Mr. Amro:

- Sign the Dear Colleague letter initiated by Representative Pocan.