

Your Excellency
Israel's Ambassador,
Avi Nir-Feldklein

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PEN Norway: Concern and demands regarding press freedom in Gaza

PEN Norway condemns the terror attack by Hamas on Israeli civilians on October 7th. We deeply regret the loss of lives, the insecure situation for the hostages still kept by Hamas and the fear the terror has brought upon Israel's population.

Since the war broke out on October 7th, more than 33000 civilians in Gaza have been killed by Israel. The situation in Gaza today is horrific, and the international community has the right to receive independent reports of the situation. Journalists are the eyes and ears of the public and crucial to report and document facts from the ground in Gaza.

However, reporting in Gaza has become one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. According to UN, more than 122 media workers have been killed in Gaza. Reporters have been killed in their offices, in the field, in their homes, in refugee camps, outside hospitals and in their cars, even while wearing press vests and helmets. Nowhere is safe for media workers. In addition, Israel is among the top jailers of journalists worldwide, according to Committee to Protect Journalists.

At the same time Israel has denied access for international media to the war zone. According to international law, journalists shall be protected as civilians and not be attacked, and Israel's government is responsible for guaranteeing human rights in Gaza.

PEN Norway demands that Israel's government uphold the standards of human rights and international humanitarian law, and take immediate action to protect journalists and other civilians, and safeguard independent reporting in Gaza. That includes:

1. **Take immediate action** to stop killing, arresting, and attacking journalists and other civilians in Gaza and the West Bank.
2. **Take responsibility** and instruct Israeli armed forces to protect journalists and press freedom in accordance with international humanitarian law, and inform the public about what measures that will be taken. Defining safe havens to shelter journalists covering the war should be one measure.
3. **Allow for international media**, including Al Jazeera, to operate and report freely in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank, in line with human rights.
4. **Open the borders to** Gaza for international media. Announce measures to respect and protect them while doing their work.

We ask for your response to this letter and the four demands before the UN World Press Freedom Day on May 3rd, 2024.

Best Regards,

Ann-Magrit Austenå, Chair, PEN Norway

Jørgen Watne Frydnes, General Secretary, PEN Norway

Thomas Spence, Chair, PEN Norway's Press Freedom Committee