



The photo is from the Facebook profile of the journalist Firas Tanina

A special series of papers in light of the outbreak of the new Corona pandemic - Covid 19

On World Press Freedom Day: Palestinian journalists in the time of Corona, they emphasized that the public interest is more important than the scoop



مركز إعلام حقوق الإنسان والديمقراطية «شمس»
Human Rights & Democracy Media Center «SHAMS»

Consultative member to the United Nations Economic and Social Council

العضو المراقب لدى اللجنة العربية الدائمة لحقوق الإنسان التابعة لجامعة الدول العربية



World Press Freedom Day was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993 under a recommendation adopted at the 26th session of the UNESCO General Conference. The decision came in response to the invitation of a number of African journalists who issued in 1991 the historic Windhoek Declaration on the pluralism and independence of the media. The declaration states that freedom of the press can only be achieved by ensuring a free, independent and pluralistic work environment, and this is a precondition for ensuring the security of journalists while performing their duties, and for ensuring that crimes against freedom of the press are investigated quickly and accurately.

Introduction

Human Rights and Democracy Media Center "SHAMS" working in the Palestinian territories, issues this paper on May 3: International Press Freedom Day, as part of a series of special papers launched by the Center in light of the outbreak of the new Corona virus pandemic, as this paper deals with the story of the Corona epidemic and the question of the global press by examining the effects of the epidemic on journalists, and then delving into the Palestinian context and highlighting the suffering of 19 journalists imprisoned in the occupation prisons, and looking into the reality of Palestinian journalists in the context of the Coronavirus and the manifestations of responsibility, to conclude with a set of recommendations for all parties.

May 3rd is considered "as the conscience that reminds governments of the need to fulfill their pledges to freedom of the press, and gives media workers the opportunity to address issues of press freedom and professional ethics, and we do not forget



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**"SHAMS" Center
congratulates Palestinian
male and female
journalists on their
International Day, and
praises their professional
and responsible
performance during the
Coronavirus outbreak**

**Palestinian journalists were committed
soldiers, they gave the public interest more
importance than the scoop, and they succeeded remarkably**

that World Press Freedom Day is also an opportunity to stand by the media that are censored and deprived of their rights by freedom of the press and its support. It is also an opportunity to commemorate those journalists who gave their lives in sacrifice to the pen's message, and an annual opportunity to praise the basic principles of press freedom and to monitor the status of press freedom around the world and to defend and protect the media from attacks targeting its exploitation and to educate citizens about the violations that the press is exposed to .

This year, the World Press Freedom Day comes within special and exceptional circumstances that elevated the duties incumbent on journalists. This is caused by the global Coronavirus epidemic, and the measures taken by the world's governments, including the Palestinian government, to limit the spread of the virus and fight it, including the mandatory home quarantine imposed on citizens, limiting movement, restrictions on freedom of movement, and declaring a state of emergency. This has created unprecedented challenges for journalists, as the situation requires them to cover the event and convey the news to the public, and at the same time to beware of falling into rumors in light of the rapid circulation and

transfer of information during the crises, and to maintain their safety when going to the affected areas in a way that protects them and their families. In addition to the ability to move between security checkpoints and governorates in light of closure, to avoid contact with citizens, to implement the policy of social distancing, and to adhere to health security rules in the daily disinfection and cleaning of offices and work tools. In the Palestinian context, this overlaps with the violent Israeli colonial presence that did not stop its violations, but rather took advantage of the pandemic to surprise its implementation, which makes it imperative for journalists to cover more than one front of the event with the required accuracy and objectivity.

Despite this, the Palestinian press succeeded in adapting to the crisis and showed high ability to deal with it, perhaps by benefiting from the experience with the violent context created by the Israeli colonialism in continuing the coverage, the experiences of the city incursions and dismemberment and the targeting of journalists by its forces. A large number of media have resorted to amending their programs and have focused on innovating new tools based on technology and digital applications to communicate with their journalists, guests and the public, as well as transforming the content of the programs into medical and awareness programs that host decision-makers, experts, doctors and specialists, and worked to educate citizens and raise their awareness of public safety measures. This is what journalists did as individuals through their personal pages as well, as they showed cooperation with the official authorities in confronting the pandemic in order to achieve the Palestinian interest and to preserve public health. Journalists fought the idea of the scoop and rumors in order to achieve and uphold the public interest in high discipline and professionalism. They also confronted the Israeli media that practices hate speech and incitement against the Palestinian people and doubts its ability to confront the Coronavirus and worked to expose colonial violations even in the time of the pandemic, and they adhered to protection and prevention

measures during movement, coverage and in offices in general. Journalists formed a tool of monitoring and societal accountability for ministers and official officials during morning and evening press briefings, as they conveyed through their questions the concerns of citizens, defended freedom of expression to their colleagues, and held ministers accountable for their strategies, plans and programs of action .

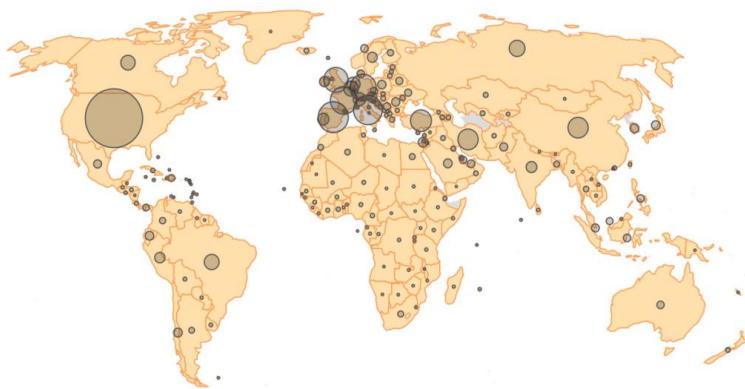
This crisis has united our Palestinian people of all sects in the face of the existential challenge and threat, and the Palestinian press, whether official, partisan, civil or private, had a prominent role in conveying information, reassuring the street and confronting the Israeli narrative based on rumors aiming to destabilize the Palestinian internal front. As a result, journalists have become the primary source of information for Palestinians in all places of their presence, in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the occupied territories in 1948, refugee camps, countries of exile and the diaspora. This resulted in a case that deserves to be commended and highly appreciated by the "SHAMS" Center for the Palestinian press.

The new Corona: The story of the epidemic and the question of the press around the world

In December 2019, in the city of Wuhan, central of China, the emerging disease COVID-19 Corona was discovered, the highly contagious virus quickly turned into a pandemic (), according to what was classified by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020. Palestine announced in early March 2020 that the first 7 injuries were recorded for workers in the Angel Hotel In the city of Bethlehem. Following the Israeli announcement - the occupying Power on February 21, 2020, the first injury was recorded in it, while the number of injured people around the world to

date has reached about three million, and the deaths have exceeded the 207,000 deaths. Locally, the number of injuries in Palestine reached 495, and four deaths, and in Israel - the occupying power, the number of injuries reached 15,466 injured and 202 deaths.

This virus has negatively and greatly affected many sectors of life, and it has also affected the international system, creating economic, social and psychological crises, which are manifold as a consequence of the health crisis. On the fourth of this March, the Palestinian President declared a state of emergency in all Palestinian territories for a month, in efforts to confront the Corona pandemic, based on the basic system of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the amended Basic Law of 2003 and its amendments, especially the provisions of Chapter Seven thereof, according to the decree: The competent authorities take all necessary measures to confront the risks



resulting from the Coronavirus, protect public health, and achieve security and stability, and this state of emergency is for a period of 30 days, and the prime minister is authorized with the powers and competencies

necessary to achieve all the goals of this declaration. Which was later extended for another month ending on 5/5/2020.

Certainly, these tremendous effects of the virus outbreak extended to the journalistic field. It is possible to say that the media today is one of the most areas that witness

a real change, and the manifestations of this change can be monitored through more than one aspect:

1. Increase the follow-up of news media in the digital space: especially those that publish news and periodic reports about the outbreak of the Coronavirus. The percentage of followers of these means increased to unprecedented levels and doubled in most cases and countries, creating a new broad audience for them. Among the factors that played a role in this rise were the policies of isolation, social distancing, closures, and that people spending most of their time at home, and the large access to Internet services, so that digital media, pages and platforms were their primary concern and source of information.
2. Paper journalism is going through its worst times: In contrast to this spread of digital journalism and the expansion of its audience, the paper journalism sector has become unable to withstand without quick government support, especially since this sector suffers from accumulated crises from before the crisis, and suffers from scarcity and limited resources, the tendency of human societies in light of the modern digitized era to platforms, and reluctance to buy and read printed paper. This is what prompted many well-established newspapers to stop printing on paper and electronically shift in line with the age of data and the speed of information flow. On this basis, it was not surprising the tremendous impact of the paper press, which stopped printing in most countries of the world under the closure and restrictions on movement or curfews. The crisis in the print media sector has reached the point of threatening the salaries of its employees.
3. The scoop is no longer the most important and rumors are getting more and more costly: Many governments, especially those that declared a state of emergency, have imposed controls and restrictions on the transmission of information and news about the Coronavirus, which made spreading rumors an expensive and

punishable matter, and spreading information before official bodies may be included in this frame. In this paper, we review a media story from Tunisia.

At the end of March, a television team affiliated with Channel 9 in Tunisia entered a quarantine center, trying to broadcast live from the quarantine headquarters and filming the quarantined, which angered them and led to their feeling that their privacy was violated and clashes with them. The state of panic and chaos that occurred took the journalist off her nerves and uttered in offensive words to persons potentially infected with Coronavirus, which sparked a wide wave of anger at the channel, and many questions about the extent of the channel and its crew's commitment to the ethics of the profession of journalism. As a result, the Tunisian High Independent Authority for Audiovisual Media (HAICA), a constitutional body tasked with monitoring and modifying the media scene, rushed to issue a decision to suspend the program for a period of three months and submit the file to the Commission's Council for consideration, considering that the journalist did not respect human dignity and the right to private life for individuals. She explicitly contradicted the ethics and rules of the profession of journalism, and that the freedom of the media, which is the most important gain of the Tunisian revolution, had to be met with a responsibility that did not seek media excitement. They also distinguished between criticism of the quarantine and its conditions and breaches, which is a guaranteed right and a protected media mission and between infringing on the privacy of individuals or publishing news that spreads chaos, causes fear and threatens public health, in agreement with that the professional ethics committee of the Tunisian Journalists Syndicate considered in an official statement that the journalist did not have "burning news justification" to turn into a field correspondent . They

also mentioned that the goal of the coverage is to create excitement rather than reporting news, stressing the need to respect the confidentiality of persons and taking into account the safety of journalists and the possibility of their exposure to infection. The channel quickly apologized for moral transgressions, stressing that it would take all necessary measures with it .

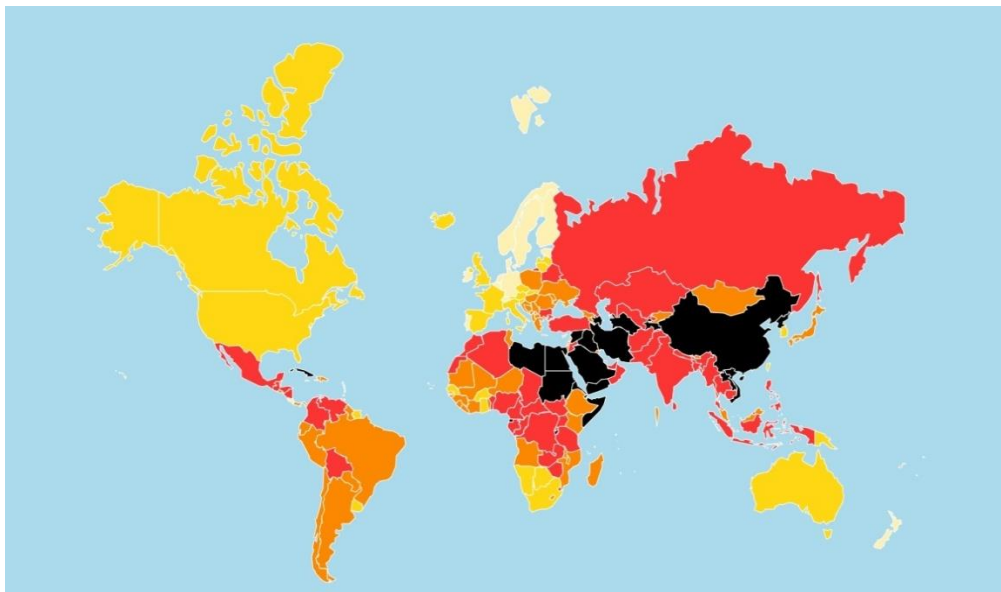
This story from Tunisia corresponds to a story from Palestine, specifically in the Gaza Strip, as a TV report caused widespread controversy after two journalists managed to reach the field hospital where the Coronavirus patients were located in Rafah, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate demanded an investigation, and a local newspaper and channel suspended their work due to the presence of their offices in the same building where the two journalists work. Subsequently, the government media office in Gaza formed an investigation committee and the two journalists were detained. The national agency where the two journalists work responded that it had obtained all the necessary permits to film.

Despite the disparity in the clarity or strictness of the treatment procedures, which appear to be blurry in the Palestinian context versus their clarity in the Tunisian case, the two incidents are indicative that the public is no longer interested in the scoop as much as it is about human dignity and the privacy of individuals. And that the scoop, even if correct information was published before the date of its official announcement, constitutes a reason for accountability.

4. Work from home: The crisis of the spread of the virus has pushed a large number of media , especially at the level of newspapers and magazines, to work remotely from home, which constituted a new and rich experience and at the same time a strong test of the readiness of journalists digitally and equip the media with remote communication techniques, Many media have developed contingency

plans to ensure the safety of their crews and the continuation of performing their duties. The work cycle has changed dramatically, whether in terms of staff or hours of coverage. Many of them have held online training for crews to enable them to work digitally from a distance, and guests have become available through digital technologies from their homes, and this change has made a challenge for managers to learn to manage remotely.

5. Totalitarian countries may exploit the pandemic to restrict media freedom: The data indicate that many countries have exploited the crisis left by the outbreak of the Coronavirus to achieve their political interests and limit the free press, as many of them were subjected to closure or received warnings. Below is the World Press Freedom Index for 2020, with colors ranging from light to dark, light color indicating greater openness and freedom of the press, and dark color indicating deterioration of press freedoms.



6. The decline in the advertising movement: which is related to the suspension of most private sector establishments and the closure of government facilities, and while advertisements constitute the largest part of the revenues of media

companies, these revenues may become non-compensable sources of income in the short or medium term, especially in light of the uncertainty about the possibility of life returning to normal after the end of the virus or not, and the uncertainty of when the crisis will end.

In light of the outbreak of Corona: The intertwining circles of danger and racism of colonialism pursue 19 male and female journalist prisoners in Israeli prisons

Due to the seriousness of the outbreak of the highly contagious virus, many countries rushed to release prisoners in order to avoid the spread of the virus inside the detention centers and allowed them to return to their homes in safety. However, the occupying power, in pursuit of violating international law and upholding its hegemonic, racist and discriminatory desires, has released (500) Israeli criminal prisoners under the pretext of reducing overcrowding in prisons and fearing that prisoners will be infected with the Coronavirus. They have categorically refused to release any Palestinian prisoners, including children prisoners, female prisoners, the elderly, people with disabilities, patients, and journalists. These people continued to be detained in prisons that were more likely for the virus to reach them, especially after reports that a number of interrogators and prisoners were infected with the virus rampant in "Israel" without taking real measures to prevent this or providing adequate quantities of cleaning materials, sterilization and medical protection materials. Many items of food have been withdrawn from prison canteens in identifying with racism and discrimination on a national and religious basis, and adhering to the supreme colonial outlook even in times of existential crises that the world faces collectively.

The occupation prisons have taken a single measure represented in preventing visits to the people under the pretext of limiting the spread of the virus, and it is not clear whether it was a preventive purpose aimed at protecting prisoners and facing the epidemic, or a punitive measure aimed at increasing their isolation and the concern of their families for them in light of not taking other measures that are simpler such as providing Sterilizers! In addition to a procedure that represented the trial of prisoners via video conference technology, which was emptied of its content in achieving social distancing, as a result of the administration gathering prisoners in rooms that accommodate twenty people collectively while waiting to attend their trial sessions remotely according to prisoners' testimonies.

In this fertile focus of the outbreak of the virus, especially given the old and worn out prison buildings, the high level of humidity in them, their lack of proper ventilation, the climate of harsh prison environment and overcrowding, the danger threatens the lives of prisoners, especially journalists and in light of the indifference of the occupation forces, which increased the rate of arrests, as the number of detainees in March 2020 reached (375) detainees, including (48) children and (4) women. Currently, 19 prisoners of war who have been sentenced to actual and administrative sentences or have been detained in interrogation centers and prisons, including two female journalists, who stay in inhumane conditions.

There is also insufficient information available from prisons about confirming or denying that Palestinian prisoners are infected with the Coronavirus, and it is conflicting in other cases, while a number of Israeli jailers and interrogators have been confirmed, and a number of prisoners have been isolated on suspicion of being infected instead of rushing to release them. As World Press Freedom Day appears to be an opportunity to highlight violations against journalists around the world.

Emphasis should be placed on imprisoned journalists who are subjected to various violations and whose detention is a violation of their right to practice the profession and to express themselves.



You conveyed the bright image of Palestine with its positive dimension and banished any trolls in the public national scene in upholding the spirit of citizenship, and the citizen, whether he is a president, prime minister, minister, journalist, or car driver who is proud of that.

Palestinian Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh directed his speech to reporters during a government briefing on the Corona virus. 4/22/2020

The Reality of Palestinian Journalists in the Context of Coronavirus: Manifestations of Responsibility

Despite the threats and challenges that the Corona virus outbreak added to the press and journalists around the world, in the Palestinian context, many of the situations reflected the high awareness, discipline, and professionalism of Palestinian journalists. These data can be condensed into points as follows:

1. **Confronting rumors and abandoning the idea of the scoop in order to preserve the public interest:** It was remarkable in the performance of

Palestinian journalists not only that the vast majority of them refrained from spreading rumors and dealt with them, but at the same time confronting them by publishing denials of the official bodies. In a related context, although many journalists knew information about daily injuries, they made sure not to publish it before it was officially announced through the official press briefing of the government spokesman Ibrahim Melhem. The vast majority of

journalists were not drawn to the idea of achieving a scoop at the expense of the public interest, and this refrainment also contributed to absorbing the state of panic, chaos and anxiety usually caused by existential crises such as the outbreak of a global epidemic of this size and gravity.

2. Education and raising awareness of citizens: The Palestinian media, whether official, party, civil or private, have mostly transformed their programmatic content into talking about the pandemic and dealing with it from health, psychological, economic and social perspectives. Experts, doctors, decision-makers, and officials were hosted and media platforms were made available to them to educate and reassure citizens and raise their awareness of public health and safety measures. This activity was also done through advertisements, short videos, infographics, animation films and radio drama voluntarily from many media outlets. On the individual level, a large part of journalists mixed their pages with the general news nature, the nature of awareness of citizens about mechanisms to confront the virus, maintain personal hygiene and public health, and adhere to official decisions regarding social distancing and restricting movement, taking advantage of the spread of their pages and the high follow-up they obtain. This matter had a great impact in controlling the curve of the virus spread in Palestine at the beginning of the crisis.

3. Intense field presence despite safety risks and adherence to preventive measures: In the hours of the ban, only a doctor, a security officer or a journalist is present in the streets of Palestinian cities. The presence of journalists in the field, especially in the affected areas, undoubtedly threatens their public safety. However, journalists have generally complied with the



The official news agency (WAFA) froze the salaries of journalists Jaafar Sadaqa and Rami Samara abruptly, contenting themselves with talking about their violation of emergency measures, and they received letters from the agency referring them to investigation due to non-compliance with the state of emergency and instructions, what was considered an emergency use outside the scope of the health crisis. The day after the news, a number of journalists took the initiative to express their solidarity with Samara and Sadaqa and asked the official spokesperson about his reading of the punishment in light of the government's enrichment of freedoms. Spokesperson responded to them that he was assigned by the Prime Minister to solve the problem and began contacting the head of the Syndicate of Journalists and the official media official, and the problem was resolved. He also stated that there will not be any punishment against them and their salaries will be regular.

In another context, a problem occurred between the spokesperson and the journalist Amir Abu Aram, against the background of the repetition of the first his question to the latter about the party he is working with during his attendance for the briefing. In the current Palestinian political context, an issue that may harm him, and accordingly and after the citizens' expression of their rejection of this behavior and urgency. Melhem rushed to contact the journalist Abu Aram, assuring him that what had happened was a misunderstanding and that his freedom would not be violated and that he was still at work and invited him to attend the briefing the next day after talking about Abu Aram's intention to boycott the brief.

conditions of prevention, wearing gloves and masks and kept distances between them and others and adhered to the requirements of personal hygiene and sterilization of tools, equipment and offices in order to convey the news and cover the event from the checkpoints, quarantine centers and affected areas. Intense attendance makes the official press briefing of the Palestinian government, whether morning or evening, reach the largest possible number of citizens and information about the virus reaches them first-hand in an intense presence that makes them an effective part of managing the scene and integrating citizens.

4. Development in the positive relationship between journalists and the spokesperson and the defense of freedom of expression:

The relationship between the press and official bodies is usually characterized by convulsion and

tension, but during the time of the pandemic it is dominated by manifestations of friendliness, understanding and even solidarity. In the analysis, part of the causes of this relationship may be the media background of the official spokesperson and being a mentor to many journalists who ask him questions today, or the open policy that the Shtayyeh government is trying to establish. This reassurance brought the relationship to another level represented in the journalists' expression of solidarity with their colleagues who were subjected to harassment or abuse, which was evident in the case of the two journalists working for the official news agency (WAFA) Rami Samara and Jaafar Sadaqa or the case of the journalist Amir Abu Aram. The government and the spokesperson successfully bypassed the two cases smoothly, with high openness and transparency. Many journalists also expressed their solidarity with the spokesperson in several situations, including the vagueness of information and his reluctance to appear for what was said the information was hidden from him at the beginning of the crises.

- 5. Press Briefing is a platform for ministers to be held accountable and to convey citizens' questions:** It was noticeable in the Palestinian press briefing that the ministerial staff of all sectors went out for days to participate in the briefing and clarify their work during the pandemic for the citizens, an experiment that would raise the level of transparency and disclosure policy and allow ministers to be held accountable for what they have made of Later information and statements. Journalists took advantage of this opportunity to convey citizens' questions to ministers and seek answers to them in the health, economic, social, educational, security and technological sectors, which constituted a new case in the Palestinian context that represented a positive

development in the relationship between ministers and citizens, the link in this relationship was journalists.

- 6. Palestinian media in the face of misleading Israeli media and the hate speech it produces:** Since the start of the crisis and the outbreak of the Coronavirus, a number of Israeli media, in particular from the extreme right-wing camp, have raised doubts about Palestinian capabilities in facing the epidemic, given the general context and interconnectedness, this coverage coincided with the Israeli practices that have exploited the crisis to escalate violations against the Palestinians on the one hand, or the attempts to spread the epidemic in the Palestinian territories on the other hand. It is possible to monitor indications on them, including: disposal of polluted settlement waste in the Palestinian territories, the contaminated Israeli medical garbage and its burial, or video clips that have spread to soldiers spitting on lighting poles during incursions that may have been infected with the virus. As well as managing the workers' file and opening ferries for bypassing security points and the Palestinian emergency committees and the aggression by the occupation forces on the emergency committees. In addition to the release of prisoners infected with the virus without informing the official Palestinian health authorities, and other practices that reflect the identification and that the Israeli media system revolves around the orbit of the colonial system and even forms a pawn in it. In this context, the role of the Palestinian media has emerged in covering the Israeli violations, exposing and highlighting these practices, and in confronting the Israeli media narrative and the false reports, rumors and accusations it publishes.

Recommendations of "SHAMS" Center

On World Press Freedom Day, and in this context and its complexities, we put forward a set of recommendations directed at all parties on more than one level:

1. The necessity of releasing civil and political freedoms, foremost of which is freedom of expression and the press in Palestine, and overcoming the destructive effects of division by going to simultaneous general elections in a way that improves public freedoms and the environment for journalistic work.
2. Demanding the international and human rights institutions to take immediate action to stop the systematic Israeli attacks and violations against Palestinian journalists, foremost among which are physical attacks, arrests, and travel bans, confiscation of equipment, content destruction, use of journalists as human shields, and the closure of Palestinian media institutions.
3. Pressing for the release of the imprisoned journalists, whether by communicating with the UN rapporteurs or with international civil society organizations working in following up on prisoners' issues, and calling on the World Health Organization and the International Red Cross to do their work in monitoring their health status in Israeli prisons, and by shedding light on their suffering by the Palestinian media.
4. Calling upon the Palestinian government to provide urgent and sufficient support for paper newspapers in coordination with its departments, in order to enable it to secure the salaries of its employees and continue to work, and to grant them urgent bank loans if they wish to do so under reduced interest conditions, and exempt them from taxes.

5. The necessity for global education institutions to amend their academic plans in the journalistic field so that courses are added on crisis notification by taking advantage of the Corona experience, in a way that avoids students learning by mistake and experiment.
6. Amending and updating local legislation and national legal frameworks regulating media work, in line with international treaties and standards, and making it more responsive to the requirements of media freedom. These legislations obstruct the natural path of development and growth of media institutions, their role and performance, and restrict their freedom.
7. The issuance of the Right to Information Law attached to the National Archives Law, considering that journalists are among the groups that most need sources of information in their work, in order to enhance the role of the Palestinian press and transfer it to a new level of performance.
8. Activating the role of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, in a way that ensures that it performs its duties effectively at this critical and exceptional time, whether in terms of providing means of protection and prevention for journalists, or ensuring that they do not harm them because of their work, or guaranteeing their right to expression within the law.
9. The traditional and digital Palestinian media taking into account the accuracy of terminology and avoiding words that imply "criminal" in covering news related to the movement of Palestinian workers in the occupation state.
10. Emphasizing the commitment of all journalists to the task-performance protocols, which take into account the privacy of those infected with the virus and quarantined, and to avoid showing their personal features or taking pictures of them in a way that harms their dignity, and to avoid

intruding on special moments of sadness in reporting news related to the Coronavirus.

11. Inform the competent official health authorities and the press institution in a rapid manner in the event that a journalist suspects that he / she has been infected or a colleague has symptoms of the Coronavirus, especially in light of the field deployment of journalists and coverage of news from the affected areas, which makes them one of the most vulnerable groups.
12. Avoid entering health quarantines except for necessity and with complete safety conditions and protective clothing, avoiding covering unimportant events, sterilizing all photographic and office equipment, and maintaining clear and responsive communication mechanisms with health authorities to use them when needed, whether in the case of an injury to the journalist, a colleague, or a citizen.
13. Work to ensure that the media environment is more responsive to considerations of equality and more open to spaces for youth, people with disabilities and the rest of marginalized groups, which are groups that have been greatly affected by the outbreak of the Coronavirus and have increased their accumulated suffering.

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