



New Israeli Rules Which Would Require Foreign Passport Holders to Declare Romantic Relationships with Palestinians Draw Justifiable Criticism

Newly proposed Israeli rules which would require foreign passport holders to declare romantic relationships with Palestinians in the West Bank have elicited justifiable backlash. Human rights activists have criticized the controversial regulations as just the latest attempt to hamper and alienate Palestinian society, and as an abhorrent governmental prying into the private lives of citizens. Palestinian and Israeli peace advocacy organizations alike have condemned officials for trying to take restrictions to a new level. The rules have been cited as part of a wider crackdown by Israeli authorities against both foreigners and native Palestinians wanting to live, visit, work, or study in the illegally-occupied West Bank. The inclusion of new restrictions against Palestinian universities, such as a cap at 150 student visas and a limit of only 100 foreign lecturers, also supports the argument that these are blatant efforts to tamp down on the basic rights of Palestinians.

Israeli authorities have a track record of engaging in behavior aimed at repressing facets of Palestinian social fabric, including civil society, and as such the latest set of proposed restrictions came as no surprise. In fact, Palestinian civil society and human rights organizations are routinely subjected to crackdowns against their work to raise awareness regarding egregious Israeli violations. On numerous occasions, the Israeli Defense Ministry has sought to hinder and isolate these types of groups under the guise of labeling them as “terrorist entities” despite reputable Israeli counterparts drawing attention to the same abuses and discriminatory policies. In recent months, Israeli authorities have attempted to stifle Palestinian civil society groups like Addameer, Defense for Children Palestine, Al-Haq, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, Bisan Center for Research and Development, and the Union of Palestinian Women Committees. The “terrorist entity” label is utilized in a clear effort to discredit their humanitarian work; even as more and more non-Palestinian organizations have begun to shed light on the array of Israeli human rights violations.

In addition to this, there are also the mere health work committees that have been separately targeted. Israel’s “terrorist” labeling outlawed these and certain rights organizations from operating and granted authorities the power to close offices, seize assets, and arrest staff members. Furthermore, the suppression prohibits the public from showing support or providing funding for these organizations, and citizens can face possible jail time if caught breaking these rules. Both prominent global groups Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International condemned the behavior, calling it an “appalling and unjust decision that attacks international human rights.” Ultimately, impartial analysts point to this as proof that Israeli authorities have sought to muzzle human rights groups and individuals who criticize their unjust practices against Palestinians.

Like the repression against civil and human rights organizations, the recent regulations on romantic relationships have been criticized as another attempt to isolate Palestinian society from the outside world, and vice versa. The restrictions would make it much more difficult for people to come work, volunteer, teach, invest, or study in Palestine. They are only proposed to be enforced relating to Palestinian residents and would not apply to those visiting Jewish-only settlements in the West Bank, highlighting their discriminatory nature and intent.